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PTPN: Member Survey Sets New Course

How a maturing organization assessed member attitudes and perceptions to set a new direction for the company's future

The Company

PTPN is the oldest and largest specialty network of outpatient rehabilitation therapists in independent practice. It has led the rehabilitation industry in pioneering national contracting, capitation, and quality assurance programs since 1985. The network has more than 1,000 provider offices (including physical, occupational and speech therapists) in 23 states. PTPN contracts with most of the major managed care organizations in the nation including insurers, workers' compensation companies, PPOs, HMOs, medical groups, and IPAs. Only offices that are owned and operated by rehabilitation therapists can be members of the network. PTPN has been a client of Scott Marketing & Public Relations since 1993.

Strategic Issues

Founded in 1985 with the goal of helping physical therapists in private practice to build patient volume through contracts with managed care organizations, PTPN found itself in the enviable position 17 years later of having successfully achieved this goal. Member networks covered 23 states and contracts were in place with most of the managed care organizations in the U.S.

At the same time, rising health care costs were pushing prices down; as reimbursement declined, the value proposition of PTPN was in danger of erosion. The market was also changing. Managed care was no longer the only game in town. Emerging markets such as self-insured employers, workers' compensation carriers, and consumers themselves were growing factors impacting patient volume and referrals. At the same time, HealthSouth - a large corporate competitor - was experiencing serious financial and legal difficulties, physician-operated physical therapy clinics were stealing market share from practitioners in some states, and lawmakers were considering legislation allowing Medicare patients to see PT's without a physician referral, allowing patients "direct access" to their therapist.

PTPN's management - both national and regional - recognized the need for an updated vision and plan suited to today's environment. At the same time, the decentralized communication structure of PTPN led to questions about what members wanted from PTPN today.

The Tactical Solution

Consequently, PTPN engaged Scott Public Relations to develop an opinion survey of its members and of its state and regional managers and board members. The purpose of the survey was to find out how members rated the value of PTPN,

which services were of greatest and least value, what their expectations were of PTPN for the future, and what they needed to grow their practices in today's market.

In January and February of 2003, SPR staff both a telephone survey of regional managers and board members, and a mail survey of members. More than 2/3 of the managers and board members were interviewed by telephone, and nearly half of the members responded with written surveys. This high response rate was encouraging - not only did it provide a robust sample but it indicated PTPN's busy members considered PTPN worthy of their time to respond and that they wanted their opinions heard.

Results of the survey were presented to PTPN National's management in February, 2003. Written reports of the survey were distributed to both regional staff and mailed directly to all members.

Results

As a result of the survey, PTPN developed a new action plan and updated mission for execution beginning in April, 2003. Fortified with validation that PTPN members were committed to the organization, the company identified marketing initiatives that would generate the growth in patient volume that members needed and wanted, updated its messages and positioning, revised marketing materials and its website, and launched a new communication plan to external and internal audiences which included regular updates of PTPN progress sent directly to members. It also renewed its commitment to act as an advocate for the private practitioners in the media and in the legislative arena.

Six months into the new program, state and regional managers and board members were presented with the new messages, "look," and plan at their annual meeting. Attendees gave this meeting the highest ratings ever, indicating their satisfaction with the new directions. In addition to providing concrete guidance for the future of the organization, the survey and action plan helped to include all members and managers in the process of creating PTPN's future.

Scott Public Relations...

"A Step Ahead" is a publication of Scott Public Relations (www.scottpublicrelations.com) a public relations firm specializing in business-to-business communication for firms in health care, insurance and technology. Scott Public Relations helps its clients, ranging from Fortune 100 firms to start-up companies, stay "A Step Ahead" in their marketing programs and in their industries.

For More Information

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Is an Opinion Survey Right for Your Company?

Your company could benefit from an opinion research survey if you want to do the following:

1. Take the temperature of your most important constituencies.
2. Provide new information about attitudes, perceptions and needs.
3. Validate - or invalidate - a course of action.
4. Increase constituents' sense of affiliation and ownership of the organization.
5. Uncover areas in which members or constituents may be dissatisfied so that corrective action can be taken.
6. Discover the needs of your constituents so that you can better plan to meet them.
7. Verify assumptions that "we know what they are thinking."