

Expert View

Telemarketing Offers Nurse Recruiters an Edge

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By Lisa Saisselin

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With the national nursing shortage, hospital CEO's are turning to hospital marketing directors to lend a hand in nurse recruiting and advertising efforts.

To attract new grads and experienced nurses, hospital human resource departments nationwide are beefing up salaries and benefits, offering bonuses, dollars to relocate flexible hours and hands on training for new graduates.

The George Washington University Hospital provides all of these incentives, as do many hospitals in the Washington metropolitan area. This makes it difficult to differentiate one hospital from another and makes nursing recruitment in Washington DC a very competitive business.

In August 2002, The George Washington University Hospital will open a new hospital moving all services from the current building directly across the street to a brand new 371-bed facility.

Hospital administrators anticipate more patients than ever before. In addition, that means more nurses will be needed. That's when hospital marketing was asked to participate on a task force with representatives from human resources, nursing, and hospital management.

The challenge? Identify new possibilities for nursing recruitment and hire 100 nurses before the new hospital opens.

Targeting Nurses

The same marketing principles apply whether you are targeting patients or staff. You must identify your audience, develop a targeted message, choose the appropriate vehicle to deliver that message, and measure results.

Together, hospital administrators, human resource staff, and marketing staff brainstormed about different marketing vehicles and messages to attract experienced nurses.

Human resource professionals regularly place employment advertisements in newspapers, print ads in nursing publications and host booths at job fairs. However these strategies placed GW directly next to other hospitals delivering similar messages. What's more, print ads and job fairs target those who are actively looking for a job. This meant nurses who were already employed and more likely to be qualified for the position were probably missing the message.

Therefore the GW task force focused on marketing vehicles that would bring the message directly to nurses. Ultimately, the recruitment campaign included a mix of radio, direct mail and telemarketing.

Why Telemarketing?

Telemarketing was a new approach for GW Hospital and there was some concern that nurses may not respond well to calls placed to them at home. However, hospital administration ultimately decided to

include telemarketing in the campaign mix for a number of reasons:

- * Telemarketing reaches the target audience directly (not passive)
- * The message is exclusive (Not next to another recruitment ad)
- * Telemarketing provides an opportunity to test and refine 'messages' providing valuable feedback for use with other advertising vehicles

Paying a telemarketing firm for only those contacted also made telemarketing a very attractive proposition. After an initial two-week test was found to be successful, the campaign was extended. Ultimately, thousands of nurses were contacted over the course of 6 weeks.

Telemarketing overwhelmingly produced the best results. Almost 20 percent of calls placed to licensed nurses in metropolitan DC resulted in a nurse indicating, "Yes, I'm interested in talking with someone about opportunities at GW."

Ensuring Success

Caller scripts are critical to the success of any telemarketing campaign. The initial message may need to be modified several times early on to increase the overall success rate of a telemarketing campaign.

For GW, that meant a script with the right balance of information about job opportunities, benefits, and the new hospital. In addition, callers were provided with a list of anticipated questions and answers scripted by the human resource department.

Following each call, the telemarketing firm immediately mailed out a follow up letter encouraging nurses to visit the hospital's website or call its recruitment line for more information. A separate mailer 2-3 weeks later included a video about the new hospital and nursing opportunities.

A daily file was sent to GW with specific information about each nurse contacted including areas of interest, current employer and number of years of experience.

Human resources staff placed at least two follow-up calls to each nurse that had expressed interest in working at the new hospital. The purpose of the follow up call was twofold. First, recruiters were able identify each nurse's qualifications and provide information about specific vacant positions. Second and more importantly, staff asked each nurse to forward a resume or complete the online job application, which was forwarded to nurse managers for follow-up.

Measurable Results

Just 2 1/2 weeks after the campaign began; the first nurse was hired. After 13 weeks, over 131 nurses had been hired. George Washington University Hospital credits telemarketing for this success.

After starting the campaign, the human resources department noticed an almost immediate doubling of the number of 'walk-in' visitors. At the same time, visitors to the employment pages of the hospital's website increased by 65 percent. Clearly nurses wanted more information about nursing opportunities in the new hospital and wanted it right away.

Industry professionals say a 5-10 percent response rate to telemarketing is considered a good response. GW attributes the almost 20 percent response rate to local interest in the new hospital and the untapped market. This was the first time telemarketing was used for nursing recruitment in Washington, D.C.

When the new hospital opens its doors to the public in just a few months, the new nurses on staff will be ready to go. And when nurses are needed in the future, nurse recruiters will be ready to go with a telemarketing based recruitment campaign.