



H2C Hammond Hanlon Camp LLC

Leading advisors in healthcare real estate with \$9.5 billion of transactions executed

CONTACT US PJ Camp | 212.257.4505 | pcamp@h2ccllc.com

Related Links

Most Popular Articles of Q313

Key Financial Reports You Should Review Daily, Weekly & Monthly

Best Methods of Communicating Changes to Patients

Managing Practice Revenue in a Post-Reform Environment

5 Smart Ideas to Retain Employees

If coupons are at all practical for most providers, they are for care not covered by insurance or for types of care typically not insured.

MONEY

Are Online Coupons Appropriate for Your Practice?

October 23, 2013

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

Your medical practice may be extremely active online. You might be promoting your services through a well-designed website, connecting with potential new patients via social media, and you may even have a robust email marketing campaign. Many healthcare providers are evaluating yet another online method—online coupons such as those offered by Groupon and Living Social. Here, MOT delves into the pros and cons of online coupons including how to get started and the legal implications that might arise.



Creating a new way to reach patients

Online coupons may or may not be appropriate for your medical practice. A minor concern to some medical practices is the stigma that comes with it.

"It can sometimes seem to cheapen your brand or just the way your audience might perceive you," says Maciej Fita, SEO director for Brandignity in Naples, Fla. "Some people also don't want discounted medical procedures because they might equate with a poor approach which could lead to complications."

But Fita says coupons are becoming standard in every industry because people are looking for deals more now than ever before. "Medical practices are always looking for creating new ways to get new patients through the doors," he says.

Medical coupons can also be utilized to help grow and attract attention to a medical practice's social media channels, notes Rich DeMatteo, co-owner of Bad Rhino, a social media marketing agency in Philadelphia.

"Pages in this industry tend to be harder to grow, being that people typically don't change their doctor based off of social media, but a coupon can be utilized to help reward existing patients and possibly reach potential new patients," he says.

One other note of caution is the potential for fraud. As a principal at Fraud Solutions, a global fraud consultancy based out of the Chicago area, Daniel Draz says to be aware of fraud associated with online coupons. Coupons are often counterfeited and can present increased loss and risk opportunities for the providers. This could mean one more opportunity for you to lose money if you are not careful.

"Coupons are currently being counterfeited and if medical practices were to accept them, it presents but one more opportunity for fraud against the facilities," he says. "Given the complexity and propensity for fraud, providers would almost certainly have to use an outside service—but that would again decrease their profit margins."

Be aware of legal implications

Health care attorney David M. Walsh IV of the Dallas law firm Chamblee, Ryan, Kershaw and Anderson says you should be aware that offering a discount may violate the terms of your insurance programs. And generally, he adds, if coupons are at all practical for most

ADVERTISEMENT

Medical Practices of the Future

READ SERIES NOW

- + Office Design
- + Staffing
- + Sustainability
- + Technology

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

Subscribe Today For Our **Premium Content**

Don't Miss Our Weekly Newsletter

CLICK HERE to receive our free newsletters!

providers, they are for care not covered by insurance or for types of care typically not insured.

In the traditional insurance-based medical practice where the patients have insurance or a government-sponsored program that is like insurance (such as Medicare or Medicaid), Walsh says coupons generally will not work for services or treatments covered by the insurance program. That's because the insurance program's rules and regulations require co-pays or the patient's share be collected by the physician or earnest efforts to make collections occur.

According to Walsh, there are two areas where there is an increasing prevalence of coupons. First, coupons are becoming quite prevalent in areas where health insurance does not provide coverage.

"The classic example is for cosmetic procedures such as lip fillers, microdermabrasion, and laser-hair removal," he says. "Health insurance plays no role in those procedures, so providers charge what they want and are then not restrained by insurance rules and regulations and can offer discounts or coupons."

Second, coupons are becoming prevalent in areas where large segments of the population forgo insurance, like dental or optical care.

"Many people feel that the benefits of insurance are not much better—and in some instances may be worse—than the cost to obtain the insurance, and thus they go without insurance," Walsh states. "Dental and vision practices—again not being constrained by the insurance model—are free to offer discounts and coupons."

The Affordable Care Act, by mandating everyone carry insurance, will not likely have an effect on these examples where coupons are currently prevalent because that law does not really affect those issues, says Walsh.

"But, to the extent that a physician designed a practice where insurance was not accepted and then offered coupons, that practice may suffer because of the universal requirement to carry insurance," he says. "Of course, there still may be a market for that type of physician because some individuals may carry insurance but choose not to use it, preferring the easier access to a physician that does not accept insurance."

Getting started with online coupons

If your practice is interested in using online coupons to help promote your services, Fita says recommends starting with Groupon which has been a popular platform for certain medical procedures to test the waters with promos and coupons. The network is there and if you are in a more heavily populated area you could really see an influx in activity.

"I think Groupon has been a great way to offer coupons," he says. "More and more people are accepting coupons from Groupon which doesn't come off like they are offering a cheap service but rather a good service for a good deal."

Fita says most of the time you can just work on your own coupons even with the deal sites. Whether you create your own online coupons or use a third party vendor, Fita says just don't make your coupon look like a car sales ad.

"Offer the discount but don't come off too salesy with your voice," he says.

In addition, DeMatteo says to try to avoid anything that singles out certain patients. Make it something general that all patients can use if possible.

DeMatteo's firm implemented a coupon for a [Click to Subscribe to Premium Content](#) doctor based in Chicago. One coupon was a "half-off your co-pay" coupon. The other was a coupon that gave a discount off a pair of designer frames or sunglasses.

"The coupon forced people to like the client page in order to view the coupon, which helped the client gain exposure," says DeMatteo.

Does your practice have a staff person with some technical know-how and can understand the ins and outs of an online portal? If so, then DeMatteo says you should be fine to try designing and offering the online coupon on your own.

"If you are looking for guidance, then an agency that handles social media marketing or advertising will be able to walk you through and ensure you are optimizing your reach with the coupon," adds DeMatteo.

Leave a Comment

Name: *

Email: *

Message: *

Post

This is a 'moderated' forum. Your comments will be reviewed before being posted to this page.



Register for Medical Office Today's Premium Content!

[Back to Top ^](#)

- Home
- About Us
 - Our Team
 - Testimonials
 - Contact Us
- Support
 - Help
- Operations
 - ACOs
 - Human Resources
 - Patient Experience
 - Payors
 - Marketing
 - Safety-Security

- People
 - Business Partners
 - Community
 - Patients
 - Staff
- Technology
 - Data Security
 - Mobile Communications
 - EHR/EMR
 - Hardware
 - Social Media
 - Email
- Real Estate
 - Design/Construction
 - Facilities Management
 - Leasing
 - Sustainability

- Money
 - Banking
 - Patient Finance
 - Payor Finance
 - Practice Finance
 - Staff Compensation
- Legal
 - HIPAA
 - HR-Related
 - Malpractice
 - Stark Law/Anti-Kickback
 - Regulatory

- Products
 - Building Products
 - Furniture
 - Green/sustainable
 - Technology
 - Inventory
 - Other
- Market Profiles
 - Mid-Atlantic
 - Midwest
 - Northeast
 - Southeast
 - Southwest
 - West

- Special Series
 - Medical Practices of the Future Series
 - Dissecting the Lease Series
 - Stark Law Series
 - Revenue Reality Check Series
 - EMR: Fact or Fiction? Series
 - Practice of Concierge Medicine

Email Newsletter
 Sign up for our weekly newsletter
 stay updated weekly with new exclusive content

- Follow Us
- Facebook
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn
 - RSS