

## ***NP's-Creating Exceptional Customer Experiences***

Patient-centric strategies have moved from patient satisfaction and brand awareness to patient “affinity” or “attachment”. In today’s marketplace, nurse practitioners (NP’s) understand that differentiation is the direct result of superior patient interactions, which leads to better patient care, enduring patient relationships and loyal patients. What drives patient attachment? The driver is a passion for rising above the competition to Create Exceptional Customer Experiences (CECE).

NP’s have struggled with developing their own identity, reimbursement issues and the ever-shifting landscape of attracting and retaining patients. How can NP’s differentiate themselves from their competitors? NP’s can build their own “brand identity” by developing a long term strategy focused on Creating Exceptional Customer Experiences. Brand awareness and satisfaction are first-surface determinants for attracting new patients to an NP’s practice and the subsequent desire to return for care on a consistent basis. NP’s need to look beyond the traditional marketing methods used to attract and retain patients. Improving profitability rests on developing a patient-centric practice.

NP’s understand that the keys to developing enduring relationships and improved profitability include: a well-defined, differentiated service promise; clearly communicated marketing messages and consistently delivering Exceptional Customer Experiences. Patient loyalty comes through attachment-giving the patient a compelling reason to return for more service. Here are some questions to consider in evaluating your practice.

Service /Product Offering	In your practice-What is original? What is relevant?
Marketing	What are you First at? What are you Best at? What are you Different at?
Service Delivery	What should the patient's first experience say? What is the compelling reason to return to you for care?

Service is invisible and is always consumed within context: Physical-sights, sounds, environmental cues; Emotional-feelings, thoughts, unconscious responses to external cues and internal scripting; Behavioral-actions, activities, process of care. Successful NP's understand the principles of Creating Exceptional Customer Experience attachment: 1) design each experience in detail-nothing left to chance=the Ideal Customer Experience, 2) every transaction is an attachment point that impacts on the relationship 3) communicating differentiation based on meaningful attributes (attach points), 4) unwavering attention to EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE must be embedded in value system of the practice. Linking the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE to one's brand creates a competitive advantage. Experience Ecology frames the delivery of the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE via the physical, behavioral and informational spheres of influence. Four key areas to consider:

- 1) What are the patient's perceptions? Do they see your services as "Value-added" - trustworthy credible and responsive
- 2) How is your practice managed? Are your practices, processes, policies, and problem resolution consistent with a patient-centric philosophy?

- 3) How are patient interactions valued? Is the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE embraced by the practice as an important value?
- 4) What is **your** marketing message? Does it match with your patient's needs?

Successful NP's understand that NP brand differentiation requires delivering the Exceptional Customer Experience at all three levels of attachment: the individual provider, the service line/delivery site and the organization. A patient-centric philosophy must drive your business decisions. The leaders in your organization must have a passion and long term strategy for developing the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE. Patient-centric NP's readily embrace the increased intensity of patient expectations. Patients and referring physicians expect immediate responses to scheduling requests (getting a appointment, setting up further testing or surgery schedules) as well as timely, consistent and accurate communication (Idiagnostic reports, prescription refills, callbacks on information requests). Patients and referring physicians expect access to providers via electronic formats-email, websites, downloading forms and electronic health records.

### **How Can NP's establish the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE Brand?**

By definition, a brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. A brand may identify one item, a family of items or all items of that seller. (Am. Marketing Assn). Branding is a combination of the message sent by the seller and the patient's perceptions and expectations of the products or service

Brand awareness and attachment develop at multiple levels: The provider (NP) level and the practice level. Brand awareness measurements (i.e. estimates of ad exposures for print or billboards) and satisfaction surveys only provide limited information related to traditional marketing strategies and attention to the typical details of a patient encounter. These traditional brand measurements reinforce ineffective marketing in today's competitive healthcare marketplace. What needs to be measured at each level? Measurements: 1) brand awareness-Does the patient know we exist? 2) satisfaction-Are we providing service/products that satisfy our patients' needs/wants/desires/expectations? 3) Attachment-How tightly is the patient tied to the NP provider?

The brand experience is driven by what happens at the point of contact between the patient and the NP and the practice in which the NP is working. If EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE is the differentiating point, then the people, place and personality of the practice must be in alignment with the brand. The most critical factor in delivering the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE is the internalization within the practice of the brand. Everyone in your practice must live the brand-all the time-at every transaction point. In most practices, this requires pushing the boundaries for personal and professional growth. What is behind the brand-makes the brand in Creating Exceptional Customer Experience organizations? Care must be delivered differently. Only radical change is ever visible. Innovations in care delivery must be relevant and valued by patients.

NP brands need to be managed as an instrument for growth and profitability. NP branding is a long-term strategy and needs to be internalized as a driving value in the organizations. Brand equity (the financial value of the NP brand) is built on consistent delivery of a differentiated promise for the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE. The NP must not only provide high quality care but also be a force in determining the environment, staff behaviors and expectations of the practice. Patients

evaluate the NP's practice quality of care based on not only the interaction with the NP but also the physical environment, interactions with practice staff and ease of obtaining services and follow-up reports such as lab results. An EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE practice orchestrates the delivery of services to meet each patient's expectations and also utilizes effective marketing to influence patient attachment at all levels.

The competitive advantage goes to the NP who understands that differentiation is the direct result of superior patient interactions-the EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE. EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE=better patient care outcomes, satisfied patients, and enduring patient relationships. EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE=increased NP brand awareness, increased NP attachment and increased NP brand equity. Increased NP brand equity= increased patient volumes, and increased profitability.