



MARKETING YOURSELF AND YOUR PROFESSION

A guide for primary care nurses

Foreword



Having worked in general practice for many years, I have been in the position, as many of you have, of being asked to describe to a variety of people what it is I do. Having a 'blurb' that describes the complexity of the role and the value that it brings to consumers, other clinicians and organisations is difficult. The breadth of clinical care, the nature of small business, the understanding of consumers, and the professional and regulatory aspects of nursing in general practice make a succinct description of our work difficult to articulate.

The growing numbers of nurses working in this context, the increasing scope of the role, the larger nursing teams and the increasing advocacy that nurses provide for patients require clarity around the general practice role to ensure that individual nurses and the nursing profession are accurately represented. The recognition of the broader role and the recognition of individual nurses will assist in raising the profile, building the credibility and providing the respect that nurses have indicated is missing for the emerging primary care nursing specialty.

This resource is designed to assist us to think more clearly about, and ultimately describe the value of, nursing in general practice. Being able to think about the role in a different way will encourage us to talk about our role in a different, clearer, more descriptive way – one to which various audiences, including employers, will relate. The idea of self-promotion or marketing ourselves is one that we probably don't embrace and, as with all new ways of thinking, this will require self-reflection and practice. The ability to communicate is fundamental to all nurses, and now is the time to use it for another purpose – to gain recognition and respect.

I encourage you to use this resource and come up with a way of describing your involvement in general practice that accurately reflects your role and that, importantly, can be adapted as your role continues to grow and expand.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Walker'.

Lynne Walker RN

National Principal Advisor, Nursing in General Practice, The Australian Medicare Local Alliance.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AML Alliance Australian Medicare Local Alliance
APNA Australian Practice Nurses Association
GP General practitioner

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Disclaimer

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Introduction

The content contained in this booklet is based on the presentation 'Marketing yourself and your profession – how nurses can project the right image and use the right language to build credibility and receive recognition', delivered in February 2013 as part of an AML Alliance nursing leadership workshop for nurses working in the primary care setting.

The aim of this guide is to extend on the concepts presented in the workshop and introduce primary care nurses to basic marketing principles in order to deepen their understanding of how they, as individuals and as a group, can better promote themselves and their role within general practice – and, in the process, help build the image, credibility and reputation of primary care nursing as a profession.

This guide has been written in three parts, with the intention that they be read sequentially. Part 1 describes the role and image issues currently affecting primary care nursing and explains how marketing can help. Part 2 outlines some basic marketing principles that nurses can use to approach the task of self-promotion, while Part 3 considers how nurses can action these principles in everyday practice through specific communications and activities.



Part 1

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'MARKETING'
AND HOW CAN IT HELP?

What problem are we looking to marketing to solve?

“

Nursing has been called the oldest of arts and the youngest of professions.

”

Patricia Donahue, PhD RN FAAN, *Nursing the finest art – an illustrated history*. Mosby: 1996

While nursing in its broadest sense was a profession by the year 1900, nursing in the primary care setting is a relatively young profession. Despite recent government initiatives, primary care nursing remains an emerging specialty within nursing and, as such, is still in the process of ‘making a name for itself’. Nurses who have moved into the field are still learning how to best assimilate into general practice settings that, in many cases, have long been physician led and owned. Collaborative physician–nurse partnerships delivering integrated patient-centred care have not always blossomed in these environments as quickly as the profession would have hoped. Developing the autonomy, leadership and professional self-esteem of nurses working in general practice is a key priority.

These professional challenges have been perpetuated by historical perceptions of nursing roles. Nursing has traditionally been regarded as subordinate to medicine, with nurses expected to be both submissive and highly deferential to their physician colleagues. This historical context is worth noting, as it is probably a significant contributor to the problem of why nurses today find it so hard to advocate for their own professional

worth. Nurses have never sought to bring attention to themselves or what they do. Indeed, the scenario in which nurses work compliantly and industriously in the background in accordance with ‘doctor’s orders’ is a defining characteristic of the profession. However, the evolving role of the nurse, particularly in general practice, has altered the traditional physician–institution–nurse dynamic.

Since 2001, when Australian Government initiatives first began to support the integration of professional nursing into primary care, practice nurses (and their role variants) have taken on increasing levels of autonomy and leadership – and, in many cases, become specialists in their own right. Indeed, the growth in the number and type of nursing roles in community nursing has led to role ambiguity in some practices and conflict with physicians and practice managers when role expectations have not been appropriately discussed and managed.

As a result of these ‘organisational changes’, there is a growing need to educate stakeholders within general practice and, more broadly, the community about the value nurses can and do bring to the primary care setting and to better align stakeholders’

perceptions of primary care nursing with modern-day practice.

An understanding of basic marketing principles, as outlined here, can help nurses devise and implement clear, simple and actionable strategies and tactics for promoting primary care nursing, managing stakeholders’ expectations at a practice and community level and creating a positive image for nurses in their field.

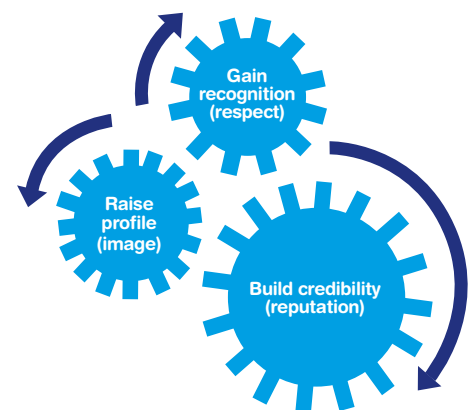


Figure 1: Marketing can help primary care nurses improve the image, profile and reputation of their profession.

Why take a marketing approach?

Broadly, marketing is everything you do that creates a perception within your community of who you are, what you do and what you stand for.

You can help create a particular perception about yourself in the minds of others by engaging in activities specifically aligned with the attributes you want others to associate with you. Your reputation is attached to the work you do, the ideas you promote and the actions you take. For example, if your tendency is to talk a lot about how the practice can improve its care of diabetes patients (or some other patient group), this is what you will become known for. If you would prefer to be known for something else within the practice, you will need to change the 'conversation' you have with others or make sure that they 'see' you engaging in other activities.

On the other hand, if your personality is more introverted and you let others do the talking for you, you may become associated with one or more activities or interests through no plan of your own. Worse still, perhaps, is if no one 'talks' about, up or for you such that others in the practice are left confused as to what does interest or motivate you – a circumstance that forces them to come to their own (possibly inaccurate) conclusions. This can lead to your contributions within the practice being overlooked and undervalued.

Engaging in specific promotional activities that enable you to share your accomplishments with others can help you create the right perceptions in the minds of others.

Generally speaking, a promotional 'campaign' can help you achieve one or more of the following, depending on your specific objectives:

- To get **heard**: to make people listen to you or take more notice of you
- To demonstrate the **unique value** your product or service delivers and show people its true worth
- To make people **want** your product or service (or want more of it)
- To change a want into a **must-have** (make the product or service a necessity)
- To convince people your product or service is worth **paying** for (or worth **paying more** for).

Within this context, the product/service we are referring to, and actively want to promote, is **you, your skills and your capabilities**. Our objective in doing so is to help stakeholders within your professional community (practice manager, GPs, peers, admin staff, patients etc.) understand how your expertise creates value in the practice and delivers clear and measurable benefits.

**“
But marketing
is for big brands
and celebrities,
not nurses!**

”

Marketing as a discipline is not always well understood by the general public. The mass advertising that pervades everyday life – TV commercials, billboards, magazine ads and the like – can perpetuate a number of unhelpful myths about what marketing is (and isn't). The fact is that the kind of advertising that surrounds us every

day represents only a very small part of marketing practice.

Companies like Coca-Cola, Apple, IBM, Nike, Avon etc. have created iconic brands to make their products and services more memorable and desirable than their competitors' offerings. Our aim is similar; we too want to make primary care nursing a valued and desired 'product' but professional services marketing is much more sophisticated in its planning and execution than mass advertising campaigns. Put simply, marketing for the purposes defined here is not about teaching you how to become a celebrity or to become one of the world's best-known brands. Rather, it's about getting you to a place professionally where you are part of a team that values your input, that allows you to have a voice, that seeks your opinion and guidance, that recognises the contribution you have to make and, in many cases, recognises that you may be the only person in the practice with the skills and capabilities to make that contribution.

As such, the kind of marketing we're asking you to engage with and learn more about focuses on acts of self-promotion that help you generate personal visibility within your practice. Unfortunately, accomplishments don't always speak for themselves; a lot of good work can go unnoticed. The antidote to being overlooked or undervalued is self-promotion, along with the related concepts of self-advocacy and personal branding. All provide opportunities for you to:

- Showcase your particular skills and capabilities within your professional environment
- Show others what makes you unique, special, necessary and important
- Change the perception others may have of you and what you do
- Stand out within the practice (or beyond if you desire)
- Get noticed and get recognised.

How self-promotion can benefit you, your practice and your profession



Developing strong, effective self-promotional skills is considered a key component of a leader's effectiveness and long-term success. Even if you do not aspire to a leadership role, self-promotion is a necessary skill for all employees, particularly those individuals who work 'unseen' or autonomously but whose role contributes to the perceived success of a much broader team of professionals, e.g. a team dedicated to the multidisciplinary care of a patient. The truth is, the value of a specific task, role or activity is not always obvious to everyone; it needs to be communicated. This is not about bragging or being obnoxious. It's simply about communicating the positive outcomes your contributions to the practice have delivered.

While self-promotion delivers obvious benefits to the individual, your efforts to promote your particular value to a practice or community can also benefit your profession. Every nurse working in general practice is a direct reflection of the broader community of primary care nurses – you and your peers are 'the face' of the profession. The people you work with will naturally extrapolate to the entire profession whatever impression they have of you. As such, what you do each and every day within your place of practice has an impact beyond you personally. When you promote yourself in a positive light, you also paint a more positive picture of the profession as a whole. This point is particularly important if you are the sole representative of your profession within your practice. The time and effort you invest in building your own profile, credibility and reputation will benefit, albeit indirectly, your profession.

The benefits of self-promotion for you, your practice and your profession are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Benefits of self-promotion

Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aid job acquisition • Command higher pay • Aid job security (retention) • Enable influence within the practice • Acceptance of ideas • Recognition within the practice • Growth of role • Financial and other support for career development/further training
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document measurable benefits delivered by nursing roles • Deliver clarity about the role of individual nurses within the practice • Reduce doctor-nurse-manager conflict • Facilitate productive working relationships • Eliminate misperceptions associated with nursing roles • Create an environment that is open to new ideas and initiatives • Improve quality and standard of integrated patient-centred care • Generate reward and recognition for a deserving individual and/or team
Profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the perception of quality • Attract and retain high-quality talent to the profession • Imbibe professionalism • Influence policy development • Secure funding for initiatives • Deliver clarity about the role of the profession • Invest the profession with credibility • Help the profession to be viewed as an authority in its field

A photograph of a person wearing a red and white checkered button-down shirt with rolled-up sleeves. Another person's hands are visible, holding a white measuring tape around the waist of the person in the shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a clinical or office setting.

The handbag analogy

Consider how you would think about and treat a bag you bought at Kmart (or similar retail store) versus a once-in-a-lifetime bag you might buy from Louis Vuitton. It is reasonable to assume that you will happily pay more for the Louis Vuitton bag, that you will take 'extra special care' of it, that you might even invest in a few other products (leather-care polish etc.) to keep your Louis Vuitton looking its best and, finally, that you will do everything you can to hang on to that bag for a very, very long time.

If you truly understand and appreciate not only the cost but also the value a product delivers, you will go out of your way to take care of it. The same can be said for the product you deliver as a primary care nurse. If the stakeholders within your practice truly understand the value you bring, they will be much more likely to treat you in the ways listed in Table 1, e.g. retain your services, invest in further training, pay you more, ask for your ideas and suggestions, welcome your advice etc.

Barriers to self-promotion

The following six limiting beliefs have been described as key barriers to successful self-promotion:

Limiting belief #1.

'Accomplishments should speak for themselves' (also known as the Princess myth): Often people believe they don't have to self-promote because good work should speak for itself.

However, many individuals are surprised to find that their bosses, colleagues and peers do not recognise their skills and contributions. It is your job to let people know about your work, why it is important and how it benefits others. Individuals who see themselves as too polite to self-advocate often get overlooked for jobs and pay raises throughout their careers due to this passive mentality.

Limiting belief #2.

'My employer/colleagues are too busy to hear me talk about myself':

We all know that doctors, particularly GPs, are busy people. Resources are often spread thin, which is why the resource you provide is so important. By keeping the stakeholders within your practice regularly informed about what you have accomplished in your role, you are providing them with the information they need to make decisions, both clinical and commercial. The practice manager and/or GPs you work alongside don't want to spend time prying information out of you; the whole practice will benefit if you keep everyone in the know about your role, what is going well, where the struggles are and what you need.

Limiting belief #3.

'Team players don't take credit':

Actually, high visibility benefits the entire team. You need to be skilled at communicating the value of the work and the talent of the people on your team. At times, your efforts may highlight your individual role; in other cases, you may promote another team member or the team as a whole. This type of promotion generates reward and recognition for a deserving team.

“

You need to be skilled at communicating the value of the work and the talent of the people on your team.

”

Limiting belief #4.

'Self-promoting represents shameless bragging' (also known as the Bitch myth):

What many individuals may consider as 'tooting one's own horn' is actually good self-marketing and necessary for peer recognition and job advancement. If you believe that self-promotion is simply a vehicle for individuals to boast, you need to shift your mental model: view talking about your accomplishments as a way to help others (i.e. other primary care nurses in your profession) who might be working on similar projects or tasks. Sell yourself and your peers as a resource. Think of this as walking into the spotlight rather than trying to shine it on yourself.

Limiting belief #5.

'I lack the skills to promote myself like others':

For a variety of reasons, some people are incredibly uncomfortable speaking up about their accomplishments. For those who naturally shy away from self-promotion, the key is to use tactics and behaviours that you feel comfortable using because they fit with who you are as a person, e.g. you may prefer to deliver a report documenting the positive outcomes your role has achieved last quarter via email rather than present it out loud at a team meeting.

Limiting belief #6.

'Self-promotion is a waste of time and won't change anything' (also known as the Martyr myth): Some individuals believe that you can't change people's minds once they have already formed an impression about you. This self-denigrating belief only further propagates the notion that one's accomplishments are not worth mentioning.

What does successful self-promotion look like, in theory and in practice?

The next section of this booklet will introduce you to six key marketing principles that will help you engage in effective self-promotion. Part 3 will then describe specific communications and activities you can use to promote yourself within your practice on a daily basis.

Part 2

MARKETING 101

Introduction to basic marketing principles

In this section, we will cover six basic marketing principles that will help you promote yourself, your nursing peers and your profession.

The first step to successful self-promotion is recognising that you are the product. Self-promotion is all about 'selling' yourself by marketing your particular skills and accomplishments.

The service that *you* (and your peers) provide as nursing professionals is the product we want you to promote to others. In order to do that, you need to understand what your product (i.e. you) has to offer.

Step 1: Understand your product

Exercise:

To help you gain an understanding of your offering, imagine that you are a product sitting on a shelf in a store. Consider all the reasons why a general practice – a business seeking to satisfy patient care needs and pursue commercial goals – would want to 'buy' you.

Start by listing all of your professional skills and capabilities. Don't limit your list merely to specialist attributes that pertain to your work as a nurse. Also consider other points of value that a 'business' would esteem, such as leadership qualities and interpersonal skills.

Once you have created your list, identify where your particular strengths and weaknesses lie. What are you really good at and what areas need improvement? Also take time to consider your areas of interest and career aspirations. What motivates you in the workplace? What, given the opportunity, are you likely to immerse yourself in? From here, distil what it is that you, *specifically* – as distinct from other potential job candidates you may be compared with and/or others working in the practice already – have to offer. What is your point of difference? What makes you unique?

When you complete this exercise, keep the following points in mind:

1. You don't have to be *all* things to *all* people (as much as we would all like to be!). In fact, it is better – in a marketing sense anyway – if you are not because our objective is to define, as clearly as possible, what makes you special and unique relative to any other 'products' on offer. For example, you may not have great venepuncture technique but you might have specialist expertise in chronic wound care. In this case, don't be afraid to 'pigeon-hole' yourself as a generalist or a specialist. Developing clarity about where your skills truly lie can better help you define your unique point of difference and how you can best create value for a practice.
2. You will naturally have items on your list that don't really differentiate you from anyone else. We refer to these skills as your 'points of parity'. They are your 'entry to the game' insofar as they are mandatory skills that every nurse needs.
3. Your product offering is a dynamic resource. Accordingly, this is an exercise that you'll need to repeat throughout your career; what you have to offer is likely to change as your competencies, skills and areas of interest evolve over time.



Step 2: Believe in what you are ‘selling’

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*Personal branding
is a mindset ...*

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Ask yourself a question: ‘If I were a consumer of professional competencies, would I “buy” myself?’

Or, put another way, if *you* don’t believe in what *you* have to offer, how can you expect others to find value where you find none?

Personal branding is a mindset; if you believe in yourself, you will project that belief to others and act with conviction in all that you do. A beneficial by-product of such self-belief is the confidence it inspires in others. The confidence you display in your own abilities will lead others to have confidence in what you do. This confidence will lead them to assign more value to you and your role.

This self-belief, along with your actions each day, demonstrate precisely what it is that makes you – a product – eminently consumable. You are, therefore, your own best (and worst) advocate.

A useful analogy to help clarify this point is that of the door-to-door salesperson, or the call-centre operator, trying to sell you something. You will surely have noticed the difference between (i) the salesperson who believes that his or her product is worth selling and successfully convinces you in the process of pitching it and (ii) the salesperson who woodenly rote reads the script that has been distributed by a manager.

The difference between the two scenarios is whether the seller believes in the product they are selling. This is why professional self-esteem (or ‘buying’ yourself) is key to ‘selling’ yourself to others. Professional self-esteem (or believing in the value of what you do professionally) stems from two main sources.

i) Understanding the very real and tangible benefits your role brings

As a nursing professional, you provide and create value. Primary care nurses offer a range of benefits for general practices, as illustrated in Table 2. These benefits are not just clinical in nature. Primary care nurses introduce economic and productivity benefits into practices. They also play host to a wide range of intangible benefits, such as increased patient satisfaction and improved work–life balance for practice owners and staff. Some benefits are clearly measurable and can be tracked over time, e.g. cost savings and the creation of new revenue streams. These parameters, in particular, provide objective measures of your performance that you can report back to stakeholders on a regular basis.

By taking the time to identify, measure and track the benefits that flow from your role, you will grow more confident about the value that you bring to your practice. You will also be able to compile a well-defined list of discussion points to help you communicate this value to others.

ii) Having a sense of purpose

Individuals with a well-defined sense of purpose generally have very good levels of professional self-esteem because they have a very clear understanding of the difference that they, as a professional, are trying to make in the world, along with a resolution to go about the business of making that difference a reality.

Having a sense of purpose and believing in yourself are mutually sustaining; the clearer your understanding of what you are trying to achieve through your role, the stronger your resolution will be to honour these obligations – and

the greater the likelihood that you will satisfy or exceed your own expectations. A virtuous cycle results: the self-belief that emerges from the success you experience in the workplace will strengthen and refine your sense of purpose and fuel your desire to achieve even more.

Exercise:

So how do you identify your sense of purpose or understand what drives you, personally, to perform and deliver each day? Take a moment to reflect on what motivates you professionally. Consider a typical workday. What do you enjoy most about what you do? What don’t you enjoy? What frustrates you? What brings you joy? What saddens you? What buoys you? What do you apply extra effort to? When do you just concentrate on getting the job done and nothing more?

These moments in your day all add up to define what you stand for and value as a professional. These moments will also help you understand why what you do matters. And the more deeply you understand the purpose of your role and the outcomes it can achieve, the more motivated you are likely to be in the workplace. You will then be well placed to take what you do beyond the rigours of everyday practice in order to help others understand the ‘bigger picture’ that your role serves.

Table 2: Benefits that may be offered by primary care nurses

Clinical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved continuity of care through improved patient follow-up and other nurse-led initiatives • Longer consults • Case management and care coordination • Enhanced multidisciplinary care • Facilitate self-care and self-management (provision of patient/carer education, information and support, health coaching and assisting patients to navigate the health system) • Facilitate quality care outcomes
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for new revenue streams • Cost efficiencies • Removal of unnecessary duplication of work
Practice administration and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved practice teamwork through shared practice encounters • Can help address workforce issues and potential shortages through effective utilisation of general practice nurses to undertake a broader range of tasks • Improved work-life balance for practice owners and the general practice team • Better workflow management • Contribute to educating other members of the general practice team • Leading/supporting practice accreditation • Reactive and strategic problem solving and agent of change to improve systems or processes in the practice • Enable provision of multidisciplinary team-based care • Positively influence clinical service planning, development, delivery and innovation • Assist with clinical systems management – often, lead the implementation and updating of practice and clinical policies and procedures
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships and improve liaison with local hospital networks and other health service providers to enable smooth transfer of care between healthcare sectors • Facilitate integrated service delivery between providers • Contribute to developing and analysing population health data, including developing and monitoring disease registers • Encourage health promotion via promotion of healthy lifestyle and liaison with community groups
Patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved patient satisfaction and health outcomes • Increased opportunities for patient education and information sharing • Greater patient advocacy • Improved access to services • Increased choice of services, including offer of new services to patients, e.g. outreach services, nurse-led clinics

Step 3. Know your audience

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Different stakeholders in the practice will care about different things and have different information needs.

”

Once you fully appreciate, and have faith in, what it is that you are selling, the next step is to know the consumers of your product. In your case, the consumers are typically the doctors within your practice, the practice manager, supporting administrative staff and, of course, your patients. For you to be seen as a vital part of a practice's ecosystem, these are the individuals – the target audiences – to whom you need to demonstrate your value.

The first point to understand about the members of your audience is that *they are not you*. Why is this important? Because it means that they do not necessarily care about the things that you do. More importantly, their priorities within the practice may not be the same as yours. The issues or matters you may wish to focus on and draw attention to may hold little interest for them.

Furthermore, what does matter will differ amongst your audience; different stakeholders in the practice will care about different things and have different information needs. What is important to the practice manager may diverge sharply from the principal concerns of the GP. For best results, you need to factor these competing priorities into your conversations. You need, in effect, to tailor your ‘sales pitch’ to the particular interests of each audience member.

By understanding what matters to each of your stakeholders, you are more likely to frame your discussions meaningfully and put what you do within the context

of the things that your colleagues care most about. For example, if you are talking to the practice manager, ROI (or the return on their investment in you) is all-important. Your communications with them may focus on cost savings borne out of initiatives that you have introduced. On the other hand, your communications with GPs may focus on improvements in patient care, such as increased childhood-immunisation rates.

By taking a more strategic approach to your communications with peers and colleagues, you can increase the appeal of what you do by aligning your service offerings with their priorities. The key is being able to demonstrate that what you do matters, while knowing that what matters for one individual may scarcely enter the consciousness of someone else.

Exercise:

There is, in general, a lack of understanding on the part of other healthcare professionals and healthcare consumers about the role and expertise of nurses in general practice. The best way to overcome this problem is to know what it is that your audience wants to know about you. What will be in the interest of audience member X to know about you, and what will be in the interest of audience member Y?

To understand your audience better, ask yourself the following key questions about its various members:

- What are the gaps in their knowledge?
 - What misconceptions do they have about you or your role?
 - What is it about your role that they should more clearly appreciate?
- What are their priorities within the practice?
 - What do they most value?
 - What do they least value?
- What is their favoured medium of communication?
 - Are they the type of person who likes to receive an email?
 - Do they prefer to have a chat in the kitchen?
- What experiences may have informed their current opinion of you?
 - With whom might they be comparing or associating you? If pejorative comparison or association has diminished your value, think about ways in which you can disencumber yourself from unwanted ‘baggage’.

Step 4. Determine your key messages



Marketing should inform the 'buyer' of a product's:

- **Features** ('what you do/provide') and
- **Benefits** ('the results that you produce').

By taking a combined features/benefits approach, you enrich your self-presentation. You focus not simply on what you do, but also on what you achieve. This outcomes-orientated approach can better position you 'in the market' relative to others, including competitors. It enables you to differentiate your suite of competencies and benefits from those of comparable professionals.

Exercise:

When you are thinking about what needs to be communicated, think of yourself in terms of features and benefits. Step back from yourself, and imagine that you are a product on a shelf. Now, make two lists.

1. The first list should detail everything that you do (your features).
2. The second list should describe the direct benefit of each feature.

By paying as much attention to the outcomes of what you do as to the tasks that you perform, you will be able to articulate the specific benefits that you can offer your audience – on an individual level and on a practice level, and even, if relevant, on a national level.

In completing this exercise, you'll need to recognise that 'it's all relative'. So, when you are itemising your features and benefits, be sure to compose your lists with an eye to your competition. Depending on your circumstances, you may need to position yourself relative to other job candidates or nurses, or, if the practice is weighing up the cost of employing a nurse practitioner at all, relative to the absence of such a practitioner.

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Focus not simply on what you do, but also on what you achieve.

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Step 5.

Plan your execution: words and deeds



Figure 2: 'How' you say it counts.

Having taken the foregoing steps, you will know what needs to be said, and to whom you need to say it. After the 'what' and the 'whom', you need to address the 'how'.

Your message is important, but so too is its delivery. Consider, carefully, how best to say it. An important message flatly or incoherently articulated will win you little or no influence; you may lose ground rather than gain it. Figure 2 illustrates the impact that can be made by a judicious selection of words.

Exercise:

Which advertisement in Figure 2 says it better? Which one tells you more? Which one is more likely to be remembered?

Your communications should enlighten your audience, not confound it. Get your audience to see that what you say is very much in its interest to hear. Make your audience want to hear what it is that you have to say. One way in which to communicate fittingly, informatively and memorably is to be guided by the four 'Cs':

1. Clarity
 - Have a clear message; if you're confused, your audience, too, will be confused.
2. Consistency
 - Be consistent in what you say; don't say one thing one day and another thing the next.
3. Credibility
 - Be genuine, and impart your message with confidence. Confident delivery builds credibility.
4. Creativity
 - Strive for impact. Be memorable. Tell a story.

If you need to *tell* a story, you also need to *show* one. Your deeds should reinforce your words by authenticating their verity – day in, day out. In other words, you'll need to 'walk the talk'. It may be that, for your audience, seeing (rather than simply hearing) is believing.

Because people don't always listen to what you say, and often don't like 'to be told', you need to treat your actions as a script, that is, as a form of communication. You build a brand as much by what you do as by what you say. And remember, a brand's credibility can suffer irreparable damage if the audience perceives a misfit between what is said and what is done.

Use every day as an opportunity to show *in vivo* how general practice nursing involves the application of significant clinical skills that contribute to the delivery of desirable medical outcomes.

“The most honest and effective way to market yourself is to let your qualities and accomplishments speak for themselves.”

Step 6.

Give yourself the best chance of being heard

There is no point in doing all of these things if you are not being heard or putting yourself in the right places to be heard. There are some basic rules here. Promotion is most successful when you:

- Repeat the same message over and over: even if they are prepared to listen, people often need to hear something more than once.
- Say it in as many different ways as possible: different ideas/reasons resonate with different people.
- Deliver it to as many people as possible: the more 'brand advocates' to seed your message for you the better.
- Seed it in as many (relevant) places as possible: make sure that you are unmissable. Be where your audience

is. What's the point in spending all your time tweeting if your audience doesn't know what Twitter is? You may achieve better results by leaving in the tearoom a copy of your latest research paper or a flyer you've put together about a new practice initiative.

Summary

An understanding of the basic principles of marketing provides a useful theoretical framework for reimagining your professional self as a unique product that serves a clear and valued purpose.

Use the six steps described in this section to reveal your 'personal brand' and what it has to offer:

1. Understand your product
2. Believe in what you are selling
3. Know your audience
4. Determine your key messages
5. Plan your execution: words and deeds
6. Give yourself the best chance of being heard.

The third and final section in this booklet will describe how you can put the above theory into practice in a real-life clinical setting.



Part 3

APPLYING THESE IDEAS
TO EVERYDAY PRACTICE

Monitoring your brand

Marketing one's skills and accomplishments as a nursing professional is an ongoing activity. It does not stop at the job interview. In a sense, marketing, like nursing, is all about self-care. Your task is to monitor the health of your brand; if your brand is ailing, it will need to be medicated.

What are the signs that your brand may be ailing and that you need to invest in some self-promotion?

- You have been overlooked for a promotion or new position
- Your practice is cutting back on nursing resources
- Your practice is outsourcing a service that you feel should fall under your responsibility
- Stakeholders within the practice do not seek your opinion or professional advice before making decisions that impact upon your role/service offering
- You don't feel that your pay is commensurate with your role
- Others in the practice frequently talk over the top of you or ignore your contributions in meetings
- Initiatives or results are being attributed to the work of others; your achievements are being overlooked
- You don't feel that you are seen as an important part of the team.

If any of these apply to you, now is the time to start rebuilding your brand and reshaping the way you are seen by others within your practice. Self-promotion may be all that stands between you and being taken for granted by peers and colleagues who do not appreciate the value that you create.

Your unique value proposition and its practical application

Part 2 of this booklet emphasised the need to be able to identify what makes your product offering unique in order to understand exactly how you create value in ways that other stakeholders within your practice do not. In practical terms, we refer to this as your 'unique value proposition'.

So what do you want to be known for versus everyone else in the practice? What do you bring to the practice that no one else does?

1. Try to articulate your answer in a few (easily remembered) words, for example:
 - 'Specialised care in a primary care setting'
 - 'Best practice wound-care management in a community setting'.

You can be as detailed or as general as you like, depending on the kind of role you have (or are pursuing) and what you believe you do (or can) bring to it.

2. Once you have laid the foundations of your proposition, consider what it means for others so that you can frame your value proposition in terms of the benefits it can deliver. Articulating your role in terms of its emotional benefits can be particularly powerful and engaging, as demonstrated by the following example value propositions:

- 'The human face of chronic disease management'
- 'The extra help patients need to become confident about making important lifestyle changes'
- 'A much-valued source of regular information and support, preventing many unnecessary trips to hospital'.

Remember that you are selling the *benefits* of your expertise and experience, rather than your competencies alone. The 'buyers' of your product offering will expect to hear of your skills and qualifications, but what they are more likely to want to know is *how they will be the beneficiaries* of what you bring to the workplace.

Is anyone else in the practice as well placed as you to do precisely what *you* do, and to deliver the benefits that *you* deliver? If the answer is no, then your colleagues and patients will come to view you as both necessary and irreplaceable – but only if you take the time and make the effort to communicate this value to them.

So once you are clear about how you provide value in ways that others in your workplace may not, work to build your professional presence on the basis of this *uniqueness* since it is this proposition that captures your value potential. And it is this perceived value – a fruit of your uniqueness – that will help build your reputation and standing within the practice.

On a practical level, this value proposition once defined provides a clear focus for all your self-promotional efforts going forward. Everything you say and do to 'promote' your role within the practice should act to enhance others' understanding and appreciation of your unique value proposition.

Identifying opportunities for self-promotion

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What can you do each and every day to make yourself more visible within your practice and to encourage recognition from others?

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Key to successful self-promotion is your ability to seek out ‘marketing’ opportunities that align with the specific attributes or areas of expertise that you want to become known for; that is, they highlight your ‘uniqueness’. These opportunities exist both *within* and *outside* the day-to-day practice setting.

External activities

External activities can play a big role in influencing internal impressions, as they come with additional, inherent kudos that internal activities do not. To increase your visibility and credibility in a particular area, consider the value of each of the following types of opportunities outside the practice that can later be used for the purposes of self-promotion internally:

- Attend, and if possible address, professional conferences
- Search out relevant training opportunities to further your learning and gain additional qualifications/certificates in your area of interest (this kind of ‘third party recognition’ can help you validate your point of difference)
- Contribute opinion articles to journals/newsletters/social media sites about issues within general practice nursing that relate to your particular area of interest
- Become involved in research projects and, where applicable, author or co-author related articles for submission to peer-reviewed journals

- Involve yourself in AML Alliance/APNA-led activities at a regional, state or national level.

By being involved in these ‘external facing’ activities, your peers and colleagues will come to associate the value they assign to these industry-specific activities – by virtue of their history, pedigree, reputation – with you as well.

Internal activities

By definition, external activities are ‘occasional activities’. These opportunities come up every now and again. So what can you do each and every day to make yourself more visible within your practice and to encourage recognition from others?

- Be proactive in leading the practice in your area of expertise or interest. Be the one to innovate in a particular area by suggesting new practice initiatives, applying for research grants, developing models of care/protocols etc. Keep up with and guide others on best practice standards in this area of care. Pinpoint related opportunities for improvement or growth of the practice (including new revenue lines), supported, where possible, by a robust evidence base
- Commit fully to furthering your professional development and letting others in the practice know what you are doing to advance your skills. This is particularly important if you

are engaging in these extracurricular activities ‘on your own time’

- Take the time to enlighten those you work alongside about how your role helps them achieve their own objectives within the practice and, where possible, make these benefits explicit and tangible, e.g. produce a monthly or quarterly update of key metrics relating to your specific tasks/responsibilities within the practice, then email and/or pin the results up in the tearoom. Every so often, track and compare your results across reporting periods to provide ‘the bigger picture’. You may even like to produce an annual report of the results you have kept across the year. These metrics will also provide the basis for a good discussion at one-on-one performance reviews. For best results, make sure to report on parameters that matter to you and your stakeholders! Seek their feedback to ensure you are capturing information of value to them
- Create opportunities to capture quantitative and/or qualitative measures of your performance, e.g. develop a patient survey to assess the value created by a particular service you provide, calculate cost savings resulting from any measures you have introduced etc.
- Be seen and be heard. It can be easy for nurses in the primary care setting to become invisible. Your presence in a general practice may not be as apparent as it is on a hospital ward. It can be difficult to assign value to a

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Be seen and heard. It is easy for nurses in the primary care setting to become invisible.
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colleague you rarely see or hear so if your role is a particularly autonomous one, make sure to involve yourself in other aspects of the practice where others do get to see and hear from you regularly, e.g. team meetings, tearoom conversations. This will encourage others to get to know you and to understand how your role integrates with their own role within the practice

- Don't allow yourself to be taken for granted. To avoid being seen as a commodity item, do not let HR issues or workplace politics undermine your value, e.g. assert your right to be paid what you are worth, speak out about inadequate workplace conditions. To assist with these kinds of 'political' tasks, consider:
 - Seeking professional development to learn negotiation and other skills relevant to handling conversations pertaining to delicate or sensitive practice management issues
 - Doing adequate research before making any requests/demands of your practice (e.g. what are the appropriate benchmarks?)
 - Participating in peak bodies or lobby groups that advocate at a higher level (i.e. beyond your own personal practice setting) for positive change within the profession as a whole
- Align yourself with your medical colleagues. Doctors can represent valuable allies within the ecosystem of a general practice. They represent a highly credible and authoritative lobby group, both within and beyond the walls of your practice. If the value you create for the doctors you work alongside is known and appreciated, they are likely to represent a powerful advocate for you
- Act professionally at all times to make yourself worthy of the respect and trust that you expect your colleagues and patients to place in you. If you approach this obligation from a marketing perspective, you will realise that your brand is an intricate quality. It includes your suite of skills and experience, and much else besides. Treat every action that you perform, every idea that you have, every utterance that you make as a separate, yet intertwined, strand within the composite structure of your personal brand. You will 'rub off' on your audience in small as well as in large increments of time – in a quick greeting and in a prolonged discussion, in an email message and in a formal report. Attend, therefore, to the quality of your verbal and written skills, to your phone manner as well as your clinical etiquette. Your appearance, too, will inflect your brand. Look the part, and think posture as well as wardrobe – remember, *you* are your brand, and you will be noticed by what you do and by how you behave
- Be genuine and transparent in all your dealings. The fluency of your speech will count, as will your humour, your commitment, your attention to detail, your insight into the big picture, your care both for the incidentals and for the necessities
- Help the practice to be seen in a positive light within the community. Where relevant, represent the practice at community or local council meetings, present at local mother's groups, create waiting room posters or patient leaflets, volunteer your services at local shelters as part of the practice's *pro bono* contribution to its community etc. This will help demonstrate your commitment to the good repute of the practice as a whole.

There are many more activities – all potentially beneficial to your reputation – in which you may become involved, so choose judiciously. Aim to do a few things well rather than a lot of things poorly.

Since your time is finite, invest in activities that are achievable and aligned with the needs of your practice. Prioritise activities with impact and memorability, as these will remain 'top of mind' with your colleagues long after the associated event has passed. If in doubt, consult your nursing mentors – who have tread the same path before you – for guidance and advice.



Summary

As a self-marketer, it is important that you understand, and can clearly articulate, the qualities that make you unique. There will be much that you want your colleagues in the healthcare profession to know about you. Know yourself, believe in yourself: that's the starting point. Just as importantly, know who makes up your audience, and appreciate that they will be assessing your worth from a point of view that is informed by their own interests and priorities. Show them how those interests and priorities can be served – uniquely – by you.

Be ever mindful of opportunities to market yourself where the intent is not to be boastful or arrogant but to create awareness amongst significant others of your contribution in the workplace. Above all, be consistent: your authority will vanish if your words or deeds cannot be credited. The multi-stranded package of your personal brand must maintain its integrity – day after day.

Finally, keep at it. Self-promotion is never something you do just once. If you are passionate about your job, if you have faith in what you do, then know this: you owe it to yourself and to your profession to make yourself seen and heard. Consider it your duty of care!