

MARKETING SAVVY:

Employer Partnerships

How Occupational Health Services Can Maximize Benefits

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by Carolyn Merriman, BFA, FRSA and Catherine Baumgardner, BS, MHA

Imagine that your largest client just signed a deal with your competitor, feeling that the competitor would do a better job of meeting its needs. How would that news make you feel? Now imagine that the employer had 500 employees, plus an average of four members per family. The magnitude of the situation is apparent: not only have you lost access to those 500 employees for work-related care, you have potentially lost access to their 1500+ dependents for urgent/primary care.

Sounds pretty scary, doesn't it? Well imagine no more, because it's happening every day.

The best way to prevent the loss of your top clients is with employer partnerships. Building such partnerships is not a new topic. However, today's goals are broader than in the past. Employers expect healthcare programs to save them money with better management—not only of work-related injuries, illnesses, and exposures, but also the overall health of the covered individuals (employee and family members). Group health is creating opportunities for employer partnerships that occupational health programs should not overlook. In this article, we explore ways you can capture and retain work-related and group health business.

An employer partnership helps you solidify your competitive edge and prevent the loss of your top clients

Define the Employer Partnership

First define the goals you want to achieve with employer partnerships. Then determine whether those goals are best met by reaching into a new market, retaining existing business, or growing within your current client base. The most important first step is to talk with your current client base in order to determine their wants and needs, and identify what you could be doing better.

Develop the Strategies

Retention: Retention is sales and service focused on accounts you already have, and can't afford to lose.

Companies that typically fall into this category are those that:

- are clients for at least three years;
- are regular users of your services;
- provide you with feedback; and
- comprise a significant portion of your revenue stream.

In deciding which companies are most important to retain, consider the following factors.

- Are they in the top percentage of your profitable business volume?
- Do you have procedures already in place to make these clients feel valued?
- Can you exceed their expectations and ensure greater loyalty?
- Are you capable of not only retaining, but expanding their business with you?

Growth: Growth is the sales effort targeted toward business you don't have but want to acquire.

Companies that typically fall into this category are those that:

- are well-known clients of a competitor and fit your strategic and financial goals;
- may have been former clients of your program;
- have a well-respected presence in the community; • have a strong desire to enhance the employee work environment.

In picking growth target companies, consider these questions.

- How much does the company desire a partnership? • What impact would the company have on existing services?
- Can you meet its demands?
- How important is its referent power (the degree to which others identify with this client and are likely to do what it does)?
- How quickly could it shift to your services? Is it under contract to another provider?

Put Your Strategies to Work

Let's say that you are in a competitive market that isn't seeing a lot of new business development or company growth. You work hard to be visible in the marketplace, provide quality patient care, and service your accounts on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, a client sees little difference between you and your competition, and they shift loyalty. What do you do?

Put your retention strategies to work!

- Focus on the top accounts that comprise 80% of your bottom line. Reinforce their wisdom in doing business with you.
- Create an account management plan establishing regular visits, providing reports on utilization and strategies for enhanced management of their employed lives.
- Engage your team and listen to client feedback to develop a portfolio of ideas to improve service to these accounts.
- Determine the added services you could offer to them. Assess how you can become their resource versus just a program they access when they have an episodic need. Consider plant tours, personal contacts, and satisfaction visits.
- Provide employer report cards to show the value that you bring. Share benchmarks that compare them with others, and identify areas where you can help them. Foster your role as an expert.

Let's say that you are in the same competitive market above, and find that you aren't getting the new business you desire. What do you do?

Put your growth strategies to work!

- Focus on the top companies you want to attract that aren't currently using your services.
- Create a priority index of the companies you most want to attract.
- Define a strategy for gaining feedback on these companies.
- Determine the "must haves" for them to select you as a partner. What elements must be a part of your core services to even be considered? Are you prepared to deliver?
- Find out why they haven't considered you before.
- Implement consistent marketing efforts targeted to these companies; try to get them to test your services or expand episodic care into a partnership.

Gear Up for Tomorrow

Competing for business in the occupational health marketplace is often difficult and fraught with challenges. An important strategy in remaining competitive is employer partnerships. These partnerships can help you retain existing clients and grow your client base with new business. It takes work to establish these partnerships, but they enhance your relationships with employers, maximize your program's benefits for the long term, and are worth all your efforts.

Checklist to Help You Gear Up

- ❑ Evaluate current clients and potential clients. Identify those suitable for retention and growth. Forecast possible relationships, revenue streams, and service volumes.
- ❑ Assess your program's capabilities. Determine how to improve existing services and how to create new ones that appeal to your market. Design messages that will make employers, brokers, TPAs, and others take notice of your efforts. Ensure that you can deliver on the promise.
- ❑ Develop a sales plan that focuses on your retention and growth partnerships. Be specific! This plan should detail the 5 Ws: Who you're calling on, Why, for What, hoW frequently, and When.
- ❑ Clarify client expectations. Everyone on your team should be aware of the expectations and be prepared to meet and exceed those expectations.
- ❑ Define success (consider client satisfaction, patient volume, service expansion, revenue, etc.). Track the results.
- ❑ Report those findings to your clients to educate, prove value, raise the bar in the community, and underscore your staff's reputation as healthcare experts.



Carolyn Merriman, FRSA, President, Corporate Health Group, www.corporatehealthgroup.com,
1-888-334-2500

Catherine Baumgardner, BSBA, MHA, FACHE, Consultant,
Corporate Health Group, www.corporatehealthgroup.com, 1-888-334-2500