

# Nurturing for Life

## Nurture Marketing program empowers patients and profits at Chicago's Cancer Treatment Centers of America

By Carol Ellison

Few healthcare organizations market their concept as aggressively—or as successfully—as Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA).

“On the marketing side of things we’ve always been a consumer-driven organization,” says Jack Moore, chief marketing Officer at CTCA. “The message of Cancer Treatment Centers of America is taken directly to the consumer through some very traditional and, in some cases, some very innovative ways.”

That message generates between 75,000 and 85,000 calls yearly from television commercials, national newspaper and magazine ads, seminars, referrals and, more recently, from an interactive Web site that assists cancer patients when they research the disease online.

But about two years ago, responding to such overwhelming success had become a serious challenge—and not strictly from a marketing point of view. For an organization in business to fight the world’s most dreaded disease, effective follow-up can literally mean the difference between life and death. And at Cancer Treatment Centers of America the increasing call load had begun to make that difficult.

The solution? A customer relationship strategy called Nurture Marketing.

### Nurturing Natures

Jim Cecil, Seattle marketing strategist and called the father of Nurture Marketing, describes it as a new twist on an old truism: Treat people as you would like to be treated.

Nurture Marketing takes off where the concept of Permission Marketing stops, using Cecil’s “drip irrigation” strategies of ongoing communication to cultivate the customer relationship once you have the customer’s permission to do so.

When CTCA founder and CEO Richard J. Stephenson learned about Nurture Marketing, he jumped at the concept’s synergy with his own organization’s inherently nurturing philosophy called Patient Empowerment Medicine.

Patient Empower Medicine is at the heart of CTCA’s mission and has its origins in the 1982 death of Stephenson’s mother due to complications following treatment for transitional cell bladder cancer. Taking the lessons he learned from her experience, coupled with six years of research into patient-centric healthcare, Stephenson founded CTCA outside of Chicago in Zion, Illinois, in 1988.



**Richard J. Stephenson**



CTCA works to empower patients with information about their cancers and engage them directly with people on the medical staff who work with them and together determine a course of treatment. At the heart of its offering is a focus on building patients’ immunity through nutritional and spiritual approaches that compliment traditional surgical, radiological and chemotherapy treatments.

### That Special Something

“There’s something very very different going on here,” explains Moore. “And Jim Cecil’s introduction of Nurture Marketing to us has just allowed us to carry our philosophy even further.”

Before Nurture Marketing came to CTCA, persons requesting information from CTCA would be contacted by an oncology information specialist (OIS), specialists who possess a deep knowledge of the types of cancers, their treatment options, national and local support networks, insurance, and general healthcare issues. They would gather information from the callers, determine if each caller was qualified and ready for treatment and, if so, enroll them in a program.

Those who were not ready or able to enroll would receive follow-up calls at later dates. But there was no systematic mechanism to insure that the specialist would still be in touch with the patient at the time they were ready to make a

decision. And the growing volume of calls was making it more and more difficult for the OIS staff to follow-up.

Nurture Marketing changed all that.

Following an initial Nurture Marketing consultation with Cecil, CTCA launched two carefully targeted Nurture Marketing programs—one for patients and one for caregivers. Data collected by the OIS staff was fed into a Microsoft Access database that was integrated with a simple CRM program called SalesBook.

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**We just want them to know that we're still thinking about them."**

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SalesBook was customized with point-and-click entry options to lessen the amount of time the oncology specialists spent gathering basic information, allowing them more time to discuss the caller's specific needs. (SalesBook has since merged with another company and is now marketed as StayInFront Software.)

Patients who had not committed to seek treatment and were in danger of falling through the cracks of the old system were immediately assigned to the Nurture Marketing program. Of 272 who were immediately entered into the program, 24 ultimately sought treatment in one of CTCA's four facilities—an improvement of nearly 10 percent in patient enrollments.

"So right away we started seeing the dividends of this investment," says Steve Mackin, relationship marketing manager at CTCA. Now, he adds, "when we talk to someone who's interested but not ready, they're automatically enrolled in our Nurture Marketing program and we begin to develop a personal relationship with them."

Every few weeks, with the candidate's permission, that person receives some form of personal communication from CTCA. Mailings often include nutritional information, analyses of new options for treatment, or materials to provide moral support—"anything that lets them know this is a radically different kind of healthcare organization," says Mackin.

The CTCA database was designed to identify those who qualify for treatment at CTCA and enable OIS specialists to work closely with the candidates to enroll them in a program.

Today, Mackin says, "our enrollment is continually growing and our patient numbers are improving each and every month as more patients are getting enrolled into plans that fit their needs."

But for those who cannot come to CTCA—either because their insurance will not cover treatment, they do not wish to travel to a facility or they are not ready to decide on a treatment program—the program allows an oncology specialist to communicate with them over time, sending them additional information and directing them to other helpful resources.

"Admittedly they're not going to be receiving an extensive 10-step plan (such as patients receive)," says Mackin, "but what we do is refer them to a resource where they can get their questions answered, their needs met, and still feel empowered about their whole interaction with CTCA.

Whatever they decide to do, whatever happens with their lives is OK with us. We just want them to know that we're still thinking about them."

### **Cards, Letters, and Boxing Gloves**

And persons in the program do know that. Often they return letters of thanks for the cards and gifts that they receive.

"You can never send me too much and too soon," one woman writes. "On the contrary, along with each mailing, I also receive the much appreciated care and support. I am so grateful."

"Even though God did not let me go to the center there in Zion," writes another, "I know he is with me...and I wanted to just let you know that I so appreciate your ministry ... to me."

Another expressed special thanks for a 'Beat Cancer Boxing Glove' that came in one mailing. She relayed the story of her 10-year-old granddaughter's trip to the doctor where "I loaned it (the glove) to her and it helped her get through the appointment and aided in keeping her mind off of things. She added that "at the current time, I am doing well and use much of the information Cancer Treatment Centers of America has provided to me at my fingers, actual tools to learn about management of my illness and some realistic steps for the future. I salute your organization and look forward to what arrives next from Cancer Treatment Centers of America."



From a marketing perspective, says Moore, that sort of feedback provides a big benefit. "One of the big challenges for marketers is to be able to identify and understand why people choose not to avail themselves of your product," he says. The reasons can be entered into the Nurture Marketing system so that appropriate mailings can follow and the data can be used for market research.

In August, CTCA began augmenting the program with a feature on its Web site called My Cancer Compass that has been introducing approximately 100 new people per week into the Nurture Marketing database.



**CTCA headquarters outside Chicago.**

CTCA's research has shown that cancer patients with Internet access prefer to research their disease on the Web. My Cancer Compass allows them to enter information about themselves and their disease to receive regular e-mail updates with information about their particular condition.

My Cancer Compass is one of several new Web tools that add depth to CTCA's nurturing efforts.

"Our research shows it's the medium those customers prefer to use," says Mackin, "they would much rather read an e-mail over physical mail, although if they tell us they want physical mail or phone calls, they're going to receive those as well. It's all built into the program."

As CTCA captures information about the patient and begins to develop an e-mail relationship, information from My Cancer Compass begins to flow to the Nurture Marketing system where it is accessible by the OIS staff.

### **Dollar Costs, Life Dividends**

Moore estimates the cost of the Nurture Marketing program about \$200,000—most of it in staff salaries and fulfillment for creating and mailing the enclosures that are sent.

"Overall, it's been very easy for us as a marketing team to justify that to the organization," says Moore.

"If you're not maximizing the investment you're making to develop leads and appropriately managing all of the relationships that stem from those leads, you're losing out on that investment."

For CTCA, Nurture Marketing is that maximizing influence.

"Essentially you can pitch another dime—which is the cost of Nurture Marketing—into the bucket and you're going to get a



**My Cancer Compass is one of several new Web tools that add depth to CTCA's nurturing efforts.**

fantastic return," says Moore, adding that "over time what we've seen is that it's reduced our overall marketing costs because it's taken our print and television advertising and allowed us to follow up on those leads. It's prolonging the sales cycle, enhancing the relationship, and more people are buying down the road."

But even if the financial returns weren't there, says Moore, the program "would exist for other reasons." Those trace to Dick Stephenson, the reasons he founded CTCA almost 14 years ago, and a sense of mission that transcends business to focus on the issues of life and death confronting cancer patients each day.

"If you do know of something that could be empowering and would be useful, you've got an ethical imperative to find a way to tell people," says Stephenson. "And that's what drives us to Nurture Marketing. It's what drives us to everything we do."

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