

On Carpetbaggers, Scalawags and Other Marketing “Partnership” Opportunities for Your OBL



For more information contact:

Jim Koehler, President
Armada Medical Marketing
Jim@ArmadaMedical.com

If you own an OBL and perform interventional radiology services, chances are good you’ve been contacted by one or more companies professing to be “specialists” in the branding and marketing of specific embolization procedures... especially GAE and UFE. In some cases, these companies represent separate entities that will contract for time at your OBL, bill the patients for procedures directly and then pay you a smaller fee for the procedures and services you provide to the patients that they supply. Others tell you they will “guarantee” a specific number of embolization procedures (e.g. 25 per month) for a high fixed fee each month.

ARE THEY LEGITIMATE? AND IS IT WORTH PARTNERING WITH THEM?

In answer to the first question, yes, several are legitimate. But is it worth it to work with them? Here are some considerations:

First, these companies are opportunists, spurred on by the explosive growth (and anticipated future growth) of outpatient IR centers. They are well aware of the costs associated with building and staffing an OBL, and do not wish to do so themselves. They know that YOU have taken on this risk, and what they offer may sound attractive to an upstart OBL practice, especially one that hasn’t yet fully developed their referral base or figured out how to cost-effectively market their services directly to patients.

After the U.S. Civil War, opportunists from the north sought to take economic advantage of the south’s misfortunes. Many carried cheap bags made from carpet, earning them the nickname “carpetbagger.” Over time, the term came to be associated with opportunism and exploitation by outsiders. Another term from the era, scalawag, came to be associated with a deceitful, mischievous and unreliable scoundrel.

Which brings us to the second point, legitimate does not necessarily mean “scrupulous.” We have worked with clients who have once tried working with such companies, only to find that the promises made weren’t the promises delivered. What’s more, such a company may demonstrate initial success, then begin demanding equity in either your practice or an ongoing specific percentage from the procedures booked.

The fact is that you can get 10, 20, 30 or more booked procedures for any service each month if you throw enough money at it. But is this approach sustainable for these organizations? Or do they have an ulterior motive and an agreement structure that rewards them even when they begin investing less in marketing and patient volume slows down?

Finally, we have always contended that the cost of patient acquisition is only going to increase with each passing year. You can expect more competitors (if they haven’t already arrived) driving up the digital marketing costs for everyone. When this happens, you need to be able to navigate around different media and invest only when the ROI is demonstrated... then quickly back off and change tactics when they no longer work—just like any business must do. Moreover, developing physician referrals is tantamount to long-term success. This marketing investment required to earn new referrals is arguably more vital to the long-term success of your OBL than direct-to-patient marketing.

Don't believe for one moment that a call center somewhere can do a better job turning inquiries into consultations than you and your key staff. This is your community, not theirs, and there isn't a long-term benefit to high-pressure closing tactics or a churn-and-burn lead management process. The patients you serve are your friends and neighbors, and even if they aren't ready for a procedure today, they will likely be at some point in the future. These are your relationships to build and nurture over time. Do you honestly believe that one of these companies—with their rapidly-turning-over call center employees—will offer the same kind of guidance and expertise to these patients that you or your staff can? Or follow up with them to make sure they're getting the care they need?

It's no coincidence that some of these enterprising companies are focused on the procedures that represent the greatest potential patient and revenue volume—such as GAE. They are keenly aware of the potentially massive income that they can earn with your OBL bearing the brunt of the work. And in the end, what will the patient say? He or she will tell their friends and family that they have a life-changing procedure at a place that goes by a name other than that of your center.

The right marketing partner can help you achieve success for YOUR business... not a third-party company that leaves you with no recognizable community brand of your own. The temptation might be to jump on the opportunity to quickly build some procedure volume. But as many have learned, something that sounds too good to be true... well, usually isn't.