

HOW TO WIN PATIENTS AND INFLUENCE COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR LOOPING YOUR COMMUNITY



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These days, we see a lot of articles and “buzz” about how private practice audiologists can distinguish themselves from all the “big box” retailers and other competition. We contend that an important key to set yourself apart from your competition is your advocacy for hearing loops in your community. In our practice this has become a vital part of our Pillar-of-Community marketing strategy.

We know who you are. You are like us. You go to conferences and hear about looping and think to yourself, “Yeah, that is a good idea.” Then you go home, file your conference notes away, and do nothing. If you want more patients, better quality patients, and happier patients, you owe it to yourself and your community to begin a community looping program. This article will give you the basic building blocks for how to do this. Nobody else is going to do this for your community.

STEP 1: LOOP YOUR WAITING ROOM

Looping your waiting room is not optional. You have to have your waiting room looped so that you can have a place demonstrate the loop in a controlled environment. You also then have a unique place where patients who have poor hearing can hear the TV when nobody else can. Our waiting room is looped. Patients love to come in and listen with their telecoil setting. We use the waiting room to demonstrate the clarity of the looped signal to friends and loved-ones. We use it to demonstrate the “WOW” effect of the loop to local PIPs (people in power): leaders of houses of worship, library directors, community center directors, etc. Purchase two or three loop receivers with headphones so you can demonstrate your loop for people who come into your waiting room and do not use a t-coil or have hearing loss.

STEP 2: CULTIVATE YOUR LOOPER

You cannot become a looping expert yourself, nor do you want to. You already have a career as a successful audiologist. Therefore, you need to develop a looping expert. You can do this by contacting the major loop equipment manufacturers for trained people in your area. If you are unlucky enough to have nobody in your area who knows anything, then you will have to cultivate someone from what you have to work with—local AV people who are willing to get trained on looping and have the expertise and small-business insurance, as well as the required electrical/carpentry/flooring skill for seamless installations. You must be able to work closely with this person. You have to develop and cultivate this relationship. Furthermore, just because the person knows how to install a loop and measure a loop signal doesn't mean they REALLY know what they are doing. You will still need to be involved with your looper to ensure that the “job” they are doing has satisfactory results. It only takes one bad looping experience to turn everyone off. You cannot afford a bad looping experience, especially in the beginning!

STEP 3: CULTIVATE YOUR TORCHBEARERS

You cannot be enthusiastic enough about hearing loops on your own. You need to get your patients excited. Go through your database and pick patients with moderate hearing loss and with whom you have a good relationship. Invite a small group to your office after hours for a demonstration of the loop. Program the loop setting on their devices ahead of time. Have them bring their significant others with them. Explain to this select group what the loop is, have them listen to it, and get them excited about it. Have your group brainstorm places that they would like to see looped. Single screen movie theaters are ideal, as are churches, libraries, and other venues that host smaller meetings and groups.

STEP 4: PICK YOUR TARGET FOR LOOPING

Once your torchbearers decide where they want to focus their efforts, get your torchbearers to start campaigning the PIPs associated with these places. Your torchbearers can invite the PIPs to come to your office and listen to the loop for themselves. Your torchbearers can brainstorm how to fund the looping effort. Your looper can measure the target facility and lay down a “test loop” in the facility and do a presentation for the PIPs. Your looper should be able to provide the facility an estimate of the installation costs as well. It is critical that you stay involved at this point—have your looper deliver the quote for installation in person and attend the meeting at which the proposal will be discussed by the PIPs. You may wish to consider funding part of the installation in exchange for recognition of your practice.

STEP 5: TELL THEM TELL THEM TELL THEM!

Once you get your first loop installed, your work is just beginning. You need to host an open house at the newly looped facility. Show up with loop listeners (you purchased for your own waiting room) and invite everyone! Invite the press, the public, your patients—anyone who can spread the word and get excited about the loop. Have “readers” or an ongoing sound input so that you are free to move about and interact with people coming to the open house. You might even be crazy enough to bring a laptop and programming cables and do some looping set ups on the spot. Have packets of information available about the hearing loop. Have refreshments and door prizes. Get people in your community excited about the better hearing that loops provide! Make sure clear signage is installed to notify the public about the presence of the hearing loop.

STEP 6: PICK YOUR NEXT TARGET!

Once you have your first loop, have your torchbearers pick your second target. Dr. Linda Remensnyder, a looping advocate and private practice audiologist from Chicago, says that “Loops beget loops.” She is right. Once people with hearing issues in your community see the power of the loop, they get excited. This excitement is catching and spreads like wildfire. You just have to be ready to ride the wave.

Adding hearing loops to your community will change your practice. It will change your life as an audiologist. Looping efforts will tell your community that you are a cut above your competition and that you care about community communication. You cannot buy the gratitude and goodwill your community will show you from your efforts. You will gain patients in spades. Enough about better waiting rooms and improving patient experience scores--the best way to stand out from your competition is to become a looping champion in your community.

Drs. Lopez and Caccavo are private practice audiologists from Lafayette, Indiana at the Lafayette Hearing Center. Lafayette looped its first facility in the fall of 2012. Since then, over 18 facilities in their community have been looped locally with more facilities being measured and loops installed all the time.

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