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Business

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Medical marketing links doctors, patients

Couple's home-based business relies on Web sites, newsletters and printed brochures.

By ROY HARRYMAN Special to The Star

The **Highland Group** hopes it has just what the doctor ordered.

The medical marketing business, launched six years ago by Overland Park residents Jeff and Carolyn Baruch, is striving to carve a niche as a connection point for physicians and patients.

On the patient side, the firm created and maintains KCDocs.com Web site, a free listing of area physicians, hospitals and health insurers.

For doctors, the Highland Group offers an A to Z of marketing products, from Web sites to newsletters and other printed materials.

The home-based business also is preparing to launch a Web site that will list health-related businesses, such as health-food stores.

The Baruchs began creating KCDocs.com in 2002, before they moved here from the Chicago area. The comprehensive list of physicians was created through two years of networking, phone calls and beating the streets.

"We've actually visited every office," said Carolyn Baruch. "As we would go around the city calling on people, we found more offices."

The Baruchs informed doctors about their marketing services while offering a free listing on the site. That way they built their database and business simultaneously.

KCDocs.com lets users select physicians by city, and then groups them according to specialty. It includes major areas of medicine, plus chiropractors, psychologists and psychiatrists.

"The way they mapped it out, it's easy to locate a specialist," said Greg Robinson, a customer of the Highland Group and practice administrator of **Midwest Gastroenterology** in Lee's Summit.

About 5,000 health-care providers are listed on KCDocs.com, which receives visits from about 15,000 different viewers per month, Carolyn Baruch said. The site is continually updated through phone calls and mailings.

Physicians also can pay \$15 monthly for an expanded listing and link. This



summer, the site was modified to make room for banner advertising and syndicated health-care information. The Highland Group plans television ads in October to drive more viewers to the site.

The Highland Group also manages FoxDocs.com, a listing of physicians in the Fox Valley region of Chicago's western suburbs. The company is considering launching similar sites in Denver, St. Louis and Omaha as well as in additional Chicago neighborhoods.

The company's leading revenue source has been Web site design and hosting. The Highland Group offers doctors a choice of pre-designed templates that can be customized for each office. This keeps down labor costs, Baruch said. A five-page Web site starts at \$695.

She said many patients expect doctors to have Web sites and prefer to gather information online. In addition, Baruch said, rising malpractice insurance rates and managed care have caused health-care providers to search for more revenue.

"Which is why they are needing to do more marketing," she said. "Doctors didn't use to do marketing or believe in it."

Robinson estimated that no more than

10 percent of doctors engaged in marketing about a decade ago. He said the figure has risen to about 40 percent.

"There was always this taboo that you don't chase patients," he said. "You let them come to you through the doctor referral source."

Robinson discovered the Highland Group at a time that Midwest Gastroenterology was expanding.

He wasn't satisfied with the pricing and quality of his marketing campaign.

"One thing led to another, and the prices were great, and they were professional and do a high-quality job," he said.

The Highland Group designed and maintains the practice's Web site and created printed brochures and other marketing pieces.

"I'm not paying an arm and a leg for creative work," Robinson said. "It just seems like part of the package."

The Highland Group also designed Web sites for **Midwest Ear, Nose & Throat** in Olathe.

Mary Henshaw, practice administrator, said the office chose the company because of its individualized approach to customer service.

"I tell them what I want, and they take care of it," she said.