

## Dental Marketing 2014

Marketing is not a department. Marketing is every thing we do that creates the story of who we are, and how we can make a difference in the lives of our patients. Some people feel that advertising and marketing are the same thing, but the truth is that advertising is at the most, a small sub-set of marketing. Marketing is about communication, and today, that communication has become a two way street. We are not just talking to our patients, we are also listening to them. We have to know how to read our patients, to discover what is important to them, and have the right tools to allow us to deliver.

What is important to our patients today? Certainly quality of care, but that is a given. How about convenience, time and efficiency, payment options, impeccable customer service? These are expectations that must be met as part of our marketing strategy.

Today's dentist must brand him or herself as not only a problem solver, but as a problem seeker as well. We must be able to have an open and honest give and take with our patients to allow them the opportunity to explain their needs and wants. Marketing is about building a relationship of trust, so that instead of just trying to get people to "buy now", we create an environment that will allow patients to believe in you for a lifetime.

Marketing is not about procedures, it is about benefits to our patients. It is about slowing down and listening. The average MD interrupts their patient within the first 18 seconds. We must be better than that.

Marketing is about knowing your patient. It's about knowing about their lives, remembering the names of their children, where they work, what team they cheer for.

The most important concept to understand about marketing, is that every single thing you do that is in any way associated with your practice is marketing. We are marketing every time we speak with someone, every time we go to the bank, attend a CE course, go to your child's swim meet. Most dentists view the goal of marketing to bring new patients to their practice, but it is also about retaining these patients, and ultimately having them want to refer others to you. What kind of dentist do you want to be? What is your market? Then cater to them.

Dentists have been advertising for many years now, but most of those that do advertise are using techniques that have become antiquated in today's world of instant connection to others. Mailers, newsletters, newspaper ads, radio, etc. had been the means of reaching out to potential patients, and they still have some validity, but today's marketing is all about social connectivity, networking, and being "referable". Interactive, informative websites, use of social media, community involvement, and great communication skills are the mainstay of affordable, effective marketing. Many more people will hear about you through social media or word of mouth than any form of traditional advertising, and it will happen in a fraction of the time.

There are many companies that claim to have the best system for bringing patients into our offices. In reality, the only thing that they are truly able to do is to get a person to make an initial contact with your

office. The rest is up to you. Giving a patient, whether new or existing, not only what they want, but exceeding their expectations, is what marketing is all about.

The receptionist greeting a patient by their first name as they walk in the door, sending out thank you notes to patients who refer, giving out gifts when a big case is completed, offering a cup of coffee or tea while in the reception area are all examples of marketing ideas that patients will talk about.

20% of customers in a business generate 80% of revenue. Figure out who your 20% are. Never disappoint a 20%er. These are your missionaries. Figure out what your patients want, and find ways to meet that need. That is the essence of marketing.

Once the patient has made their initial appointment, and arrives at our office, the second, and perhaps more important aspect of marketing begins. Now is the time to give that patient an experience that is “referable”, so that not only will they want to come back, but will want to refer others as well. Despite all other avenues of marketing and advertising, this is still the way in which most successful practices are grown.

We want to make sure that our new patient is greeted warmly by name. They are not an interruption, they are the reason we are here. We want to be on time, and make sure we take as long as necessary to ask the right questions, and listen, really listen to the answers. The patient’s first impression should be one of a team that exudes both confidence and empathy, two key emotions necessary in establishing the doctor-patient relationship.

There should be a seamless hand-off from one team member to another, and the patient should not have to recite the same story more than once. To me, this is one of the most frustrating aspects of a medical or dental visit. We want to make sure that as the visit ends, there has been communication with our front desk so that this aspect of the appointment, finances, insurance, and future appointments, is handled in a professional, organized manner. It is every team member’s responsibility, including the dentist, to make sure that this first appointment has been handled flawlessly.

Follow-up phone calls to any new patient should be routine, making sure that their expectations were met, answering any additional questions they may have, and thanking them for choosing our practice. A welcome to the practice letter is another nice touch, as is a thank you letter to the person who referred them.

Think about the scenario I just outlined, and compare it to most of the experiences you have had in the past, particularly with medical or hospital based appointments. These subtle, or perhaps, major differences are what will set you apart, and create an atmosphere that will make you “referable”.