

Making Your Practice Visible: Practical Do's and Don'ts of Practice Marketing

By Steven Rasner, DMD, MAGD.

For many office managers the idea of marketing their dental practice is met with hesitation because in their own minds, marketing = sales. Office managers often feel that they don't need to, or shouldn't have to, market (or sell). However, what we're talking about today is a new definition of marketing: letting your community know that your practice exists and informing your neighbors about the various services you provide.

The benefits of marketing can be experienced on all levels of the practice. Although many dentists may find it easy to dismiss the notion of marketing for their practice, it's hard to dismiss the idea of a happy, thriving practice. Over time, fickle patients and changing lives will affect patient flow and new patients will be needed for even well-established practices. The best way to increase new patient flow is to make your practice visible to the community. Numerous opportunities to get in touch with your community are available, from patient "thank you" letters on your wall to sports dentistry for the local high school teams. Here's a list of some practical do's and don'ts for marketing your dental practice.

Must Do's

Do set goals. The goals you set need to be relevant to where your practice is and where you want it to be in terms of production and profitability. More than likely, you're not going to achieve your goals without increasing the number of new patients that come into the office, which requires marketing. So, set production goals that are tied back to new patient consultations and make a plan to reach those goals.

Do make yourself visible. Marketing isn't about renting a billboard announcing you're here. It's about getting out there and being part of your community. Here are a few ideas: sponsor a family rollerskate night for charity. For about \$500 or less, you offer a couple hours of roller-skating and a slice of pizza for your pediatric patients and their parents. Their cost for admission is canned food, toys for tots or a donation for the Salvation Army. Your pediatric patients may even bring another family along who may not know you exist. Offer scholarships to high school stu-

dents with the most improved grade point average. Coordinate a dinner-dance for mentally disabled kids. And, make your practice more than a dentist and a dental practice; become part of the community through ongoing efforts.

Do encourage professional referrals from all related specialists. Contact your local Lasik centers, plastic surgeons, cardiologists, and other GP's, endodontists, oral surgeons, etc. Send a letter letting them know about your practice with an 8" x 11" of your best before-and-after case studies. (Make sure you have appropriate patient permissions.)

Do make your patient experience exceptional. A great marketing tool is word-of-mouth referrals. Giving your patients welcome gifts or end-of-treatment thank-you gifts are thoughtful ways to inspire your patients to give you referrals and to talk positively about their experience at your practice.

Do offer patient financing. You can leverage a patient financing program like CareCredit to bring in new patients. It also increases recommended treatment acceptance because your current patients also need No Interest monthly payment plans. Plus, CareCredit can help you attract new patients with their online doctor locator site where patients go to find a practice that offers CareCredit in their neighborhood.

Practical Don'ts

Don't be afraid of the Web. Using the Web and creating a website is a great way to attract new patients. New patients you get from the Web tend to be high quality because if they're on the Web, they've done their research.



Don't waste your money or energy. Results don't happen over night. So, if you're not going to make a reasonable investment in time and money, it's better not to do anything at all. If you don't have patience or persistence, don't pursue marketing.

Don't wait. An office manager for a new dentist should consider marketing for their practice as they would consider electricity or the office equipment as a necessary part of setting up shop. And for the established practice experiencing that period of non-growth, start now. It's much more difficult to fix a bad or declining situation than to be proactive.

Marketing is so much more than advertising; it's almost everything the practice says and does that is shared with the community. In addition to traditional and non-traditional methods, marketing is making your practice a positive part of the community through involvement and networking. Too many patients out there don't know you exist. Be visible. Be creative. And be successful.

To learn more tips and techniques for marketing your practice, order Dr. Rasner's FREE CD from CareCredit, titled "Effective Marketing Techniques". Call 800-300-3046 x4519 (not yet enrolled) or 800-859-9975 (if already enrolled).

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