



Dentistry's Great Marketing

Disconnect



by Jay Geier

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consultant. He is the creator of the five-star telephone training program that has revolutionized the way dentists attract new patients to their practices.

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I have to laugh when I look back at early advertising in dentistry (which wasn't that long ago, I might add). No photos, no hook or offer, no listing of services, sometimes no phone numbers, and certainly no websites. Often it was just a name and basic contact information in the Yellow Pages. Ahhh ... the simple days.

But these days, with technology moving at what seems like twice the speed of sound, marketing a practice has gotten a lot more complex. For those of you fresh out of dental school, you don't know a world of marketing without a plethora of options: television, print, radio, Google, Twitter, Facebook and Yelp—to name just a few. The unwired world is your marketing oyster.

One more week

In fact, if you're looking to increase your monthly new-patient numbers, you've probably spent the past few years reading about the importance of heavily marketing your practice—whether it's through radio ads, postcards, or the Internet. You're mastering SEO maximization techniques, revamping your website, and re-engaging on social media. You're working toward snagging that sweet top spot on Google searches and boosting your Yelp reviews. You might even have hired a marketing director.

All along you've been led to believe that pouring your money into these marketing vehicles is the key to achieving the best possible results. That's what they are telling you, isn't it? Maybe you're still holding your breath for that marketing-induced spike in new patients, production and collections. "If I just run that ad for one more week..."

I hate to be the one to break it to you, but it's well-rehearsed hogwash. You've fallen prey to the biggest (and most expensive) lie in the dental industry. Throwing money at your marketing won't fix your practice's plateau—or even boost a successful, thriving practice—if your practice is missing one critical component.

The missing link

You've been taught that marketing results in new patients. Wrong! Marketing alone doesn't provide you with any new patients. Marketing simply generates phone calls. Therein lies the difference. It's what you do with these valuable phone calls that can either make or break your practice. Either these calls become new patients—each worth \$1,500 and more, on average, to your practice—or the person on the other end hangs up. The caller was interested enough to bite the bait, but you just couldn't sink the hook.

And you can spend all sorts of money on the newest “marketing tool of the day,” but if your staff can’t generate an appointment from the call that your marketing generated, you might as well be running the same ad in those almost obsolete Yellow Pages!

Make the connection

Now this doesn’t mean you throw out your marketing budget or fire your marketing director. What it does mean is that you need to rethink and invest in that one critical component.

My organization, The Scheduling Institute, has carefully studied thousands of dental practices around the world. That means we’ve listened to hundreds of thousands of phone conversations between practices and their potential patients. The results have proven one thing: if the practice is not deliberate, intentional and professional about how its team handles the phones, potential patients are being lost every single week. Those are patients you could be seeing, treating and billing.

Throwing money at your marketing won’t fix your practice’s plateau—or even boost a successful, thriving practice—if your practice is missing one critical component.

You know how much a new patient is worth to your practice, so you can do the math. If you lose five potential patients on the phones this week—which is a low estimate, based on our research—what does that add up to? At the least, probably around \$7,500. Now multiply that out to a month. What does that add up to for a quarter...or a year? You’re looking at a possible annual loss of more than \$390,000. Take a second and just think about that.

That is \$390,000 that your practice may have lost in the past year simply because you haven’t invested the time or money into

training your front-desk team on how to properly answer the phones and engage callers. What’s worse, when your team misses these golden marketing-generated opportunities, you’re also flushing your marketing budget down the drain.

The bottom line is this, you can have the most professional webpage, the biggest, flashiest sign, the very top ratings and the best online ad that the world’s ever seen, but none of it will matter if you haven’t properly trained your team on the phones.

Your phones are the only aspect of your practice that can singlehandedly ensure a significant return on your marketing. They are also your best chance to achieve enormous practice growth. That’s why training your teams on the phones is the smartest investment you can make. And the return on your investment can be rapid, happening within weeks.

So next time the phone rings, no matter what medium motivates the call—your website, a personal reference, a mailer or the Yellow Pages—you can relax. Your team will have the tools to ensure that the caller finds the best possible place to service his or her dental needs: your practice! ■

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