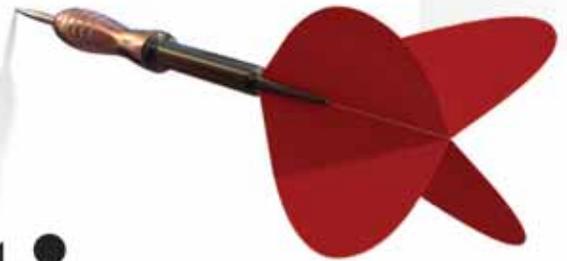




10 Missed Marketing Opportunities



by Jay Geier

Many dentists think that their patients are aware of everything they do and every service they offer. Many think that just being a good dentist will attract new patients. Wrong! Patients often don't understand the treatment you're presenting to them. They need to be educated. Some just want a beautiful smile but have no idea how to get it. They need to be given options. You must be intentional about engaging with people to let them know who you are and what you can do for them. The more engagement you have with patients, the more willing they are to stay, pay and refer. Here is a list of marketing opportunities I find most dentists aren't taking advantage of, but are great ways to engage with patients.

1. Send Your Patients CDs

The most common ways dentists communicate with their patients is through newsletters and emails. So if you record a special message to your patients and mail it to them on a CD each month, there's no doubt you'll stand out and stay on top of mind. After all, who else is sending their patients a CD? Your message should educate patients on something valuable and then tie a product or service you offer into it. One month you could talk about the benefits of Invisalign, how it works, what kind of results to expect from it, etc. Interview a patient you treated with Invisalign and talk about his or her experience and then make a special Invisalign offer for listeners. You can do the

same type of thing to promote whitening or any type of cosmetic procedure. The key to this is consistency. If getting this out monthly seems daunting at first, then do it bi-monthly, quarterly or semi-annually to start.

2. Include Video in Your Emails

Instead of just sending emails with only text and a few photos, spice it up with a personal video message from you or someone in your office. Like with CDs, mix up the topics you cover and talk about things your patients value and are interested in. Promote products and services and extend special offers to patients who watch the videos. The key to these video emails is keep them brief and interesting. Use humor, do skits, keep them short. You don't always have to be the one doing the video. Hygienists can make a video for patients who haven't come in for their recare appointments. Front desk staff could make a video about your patient referral contest. The entire team could get together and invite patients to an upcoming patient appreciation event.

3. Add VIP Benefits to Your Patient Referral Program

Everyone wants to achieve status of some sort and receive special benefits. People want to be at the top of any group they are involved in. Your patients are no exception. You can leverage that human desire by awarding your patients with VIP status based on the number of patients they refer to your practice. A referral program is a way to say thank you. People don't expect much for referring someone, but they do like acknowledgement. Small gifts, discounts or coupons work great. Include a hand-written thank you note for an extra special touch. The VIP benefits should be designed to acknowledge those patients who repeatedly refer to you. For example, after the third referral a patient may get "VIP Status" and begin receiving Level 1 VIP benefits. After the sixth referral the patient may move up to Level 2 benefits. My clients receive \$100 for every client they refer to the Scheduling Institute. After the third referral they get discounts on products and services and priority seating at our events.

VIP Ideas You Can Use:

- Preferred parking
- Recognition in newsletters
- Discounts
- Priority scheduling

4. Have a Really Great Sign

A really great sign outside your office is one of the best marketing tools you could ever have. Over the last five years, I've really pushed my clients to invest money in their signs

and they have seen great results. Their signs have actually become a source of new patients. The keys to a great sign are size and uniqueness. Bigger is better and make sure your phone number is big (at least large enough that you can quickly read it from the street as you're driving by). If everyone else in your town has a static sign, get a digital sign. If everyone else has a standard square or rectangle sign, get a sign that's the shape of a tooth or toothbrush. A unique sign becomes a landmark for people in town and they won't forget you.

5. Become the Expert In Town

Write articles for your local newspaper and magazines. Reach out to radio stations, schools and large businesses in your area where you can reach large groups of people at one time. Present yourself as an expert. Schedule talks and information sessions on topics the audience will be interested in. For example, at a gym you could do a talk for customers on cosmetic procedures because you know they care about how they look. At a local business you could talk about overall dental health for adults and children. In addition to setting yourself up as the community expert, when you give live talks be prepared to schedule appointments on site and always make a special offer to the group you're talking to.

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6. Send Out Newsletters

A newsletter helps you stay connected to your current patients and is a great way to get you in front of former and potential patients. You can mix offers in with human-interest sections so it balances both marketing and relationship building. There are many companies to which you can outsource your newsletters.

Sections to Include:

- **Patient Success Story**

This is social proof of what you can help patients achieve and it gets other clients excited and feeling good about doing business with you.

- **Referrals and Contests**

In this section, explain your referral program and list patients who have VIP status. Show a photo of your referral gift or any other contest prizes.

- **About the Dentist**

Let your patients get to know you and your family. Tell them about vacations, your kid's accomplishments, your philanthropic efforts, etc.

- **Patient Highlights**

People love to see photos of themselves so include a section with pictures of patients in the office, at your events or even let them submit pictures.

- **Calendar**

Highlight special events and promotion dates.

7. Host Patient Events

Events are a great way to show your appreciation to patients and a fun way to get to know your patients better too. They should also be a great way to get new patients. Encourage your current patients to bring their families and friends and tie your referral program and VIP benefits into the event. Our clients have had great success with movie nights at the local theater, BBQs in their parking lots, bowling nights, and picnics at local sporting events, just to name a few. Events will keep your prac-

tice connected to the community by boosting its overall brand and creating an engaged client base.

8. Send Direct Mail

Social media has taken over and direct mail has become a lost art. The thing is direct mail is still very effective. Fewer businesses are sending mail so it's the perfect opportunity for you to stand out. Direct mail is more costly than online marketing, but we have found in our own marketing and with our client's marketing that it typically produces a higher quality patient if you're targeting the right groups. Newsletters and postcards are the most common form of direct mail marketing, but the more creative you get, the better. Sending a letter with a small, inexpensive gift item so that your mailer is lumpy and can't just be put in a stack of flat mail is one way to stand out.

9. Make Outbound Calls

There are many great technologies that automate patient communication, but don't eliminate personal communication completely. People still like to hear a live, friendly voice. And let's face it, it's more difficult to cancel or say no to a person than a recording. Someone on your team should be making outbound calls to patients due for their next cleaning, patients who just missed an appointment, patients who haven't been in for a while. You should even call to extend personal invitations to patients for your special events and reach out to prospects you've met at community events and talks.

10. Add Marketing Capacity

Although this isn't an actual marketing activity, it's very important because if you don't have the capacity to create and execute marketing then it will never get done. Now may not be the time to add a dedicated marketing person to your team, but you should have a goal to hire one at some point in the future. At minimum, choose a person or two in your office who can take on the marketing and help them set budgets and goals and create an incentive plan to reward them when the marketing they do produces results. ■



Got any out-of-the-box marketing ideas? Share them below this article at Dentaltown.com.



Author's Bio

Jay M. Geier, is a speaker, consultant and the president and founder of the Scheduling Institute (SI). More than 300 doctors attend SI's Marketing Techniques workshops each year; 101 doctors have their Marketing Directors enrolled in SI's Marketing Masters Program this year; and 4,180 doctors and their staff attended The Best Marketing Seminar Ever 2.0 last year. SI also offers private, in-office marketing trainings to dentists both nationwide and abroad. To purchase DVDs from The Best Marketing Seminar Ever 2.0 go to www.bestmarketingseminarever.com. For more information on private, in-office marketing trainings for your practice call 877-215-8225.

