



Winning Lifetime Patients and Unending Referrals

A marketing game plan for busy dentists



About the Author

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Win Lifetime Patients

Best Practices for Gaining and Retaining

Recent changes in technology and the dental market are changing the way practices of all sizes attract and keep new patients.

Today, you need to up your game and start marketing your practice—or change the way you market it—to stay competitive.

New media channels and media consumption via mobile devices expose Americans to more than 5,000 ads a day. Ads on smart phones, email, the Internet, radio, television, newspapers and magazines, billboards, product packaging, store windows, buses, cars, clothing, buildings and more pop up everywhere you turn.

In the dental industry, private practices are declining in market share, according to ADA research. Mid-size and corporate dental practices, with their large marketing budgets and increasing market share, can use economies of scale to make their marketing dollars go further.

Information overload makes it increasingly difficult for prospective patients to pay attention to your marketing message.

How can a private dental practice hope to compete?

The good news is, you now have more ways than ever to get your marketing message out there. As advertising gurus Rex Briggs and Greg Stuart say in their book “What Sticks”:

“There are more than 46,656 different ways you can market and promote yourself.”

With so many avenues to market your practice, you may be overwhelmed with choices. That’s why this eBook focuses the best practices that help you create a marketing game plan for winning lifetime dental patients.

No Silver Bullet?

If you’re looking for one juicy advertising message, or one perfect postcard you can put out there to fulfill your practice marketing needs, stop looking.

There is no silver bullet—**no single marketing tactic** for your dental practice—that will bring in all the new patients you need.

Today’s marketplace is very crowded. The typical private practice owner has a lot of competition from corporate and mid-size practices. Remember, they have large marketing budgets and can buy ads in volume.

You need multiple marketing tactics and coordinated, ongoing activities across several different media channels to market your practice effectively. Many of these tactics are very low cost.

In the next three sections, you’ll find **lots of ways you can compete** with larger practices and win.

So, if a marketing agency says that you only need **this one** “Facebook page, local magazine ad, direct mail piece, etc.” to attract new patients, find another agency.

Know Your Message

What Are You Going to Market?

New patients need a good reason to come to your practice. “Come and See Us” on a direct mail piece or a billboard is simply not compelling enough.

The first step of your marketing game plan is to **figure out who you are as a dentist** and define what your practice brings to the table.

Prospective patients assume you do crowns, bridges, teeth cleaning, tooth whitening and so on. Listing your services and your equipment, or talking about your quality of care and your friendly team, won’t cut it in today’s dental market.

To give people a compelling reason to choose you over other dentists in your area, ask:

- What makes our practice different?
- What do we offer patients that no one else does?
- What is the “why” behind what we do?
- What motivates us to come to work each day?
- What do our patients say when a friend asks them why they chose us?

Create your marketing message to focus on what you provide that’s different and impactful to patients, **things not every dentist does**. It may be something intangible like weekend hours, or something tangible like a lifetime tooth whitening program.

Feature your unique offerings in your marketing message to **differentiate your practice** from larger dental practices. They may have the marketing resources to fill local mailboxes with postcards every month, but they don’t do what you do.

Sample Messages

Your marketing should make a compelling case as to why people should choose you as their dentist. Here are some examples:

“When you choose our practice, you choose less time, more comfort and great care. You can expect on-time appointments, early oral cancer screening, fewer visits to restore your smile and more comfortable treatment options.”

“Our pediatric practice is especially for children. In fact, we **ONLY** serve children, from infants to teenagers.”

“Choose our practice—your [city name] home for cosmetic dentistry—and enjoy your new smile makeover.”

“Enjoy a dental team focused on creating a positive dental experience for you and your child. You are invited to stay with your child throughout the entire appointment.”

“Choose our practice and experience in-office tooth whitening, sedation dentistry, on-time appointments and one-visit dental crowns.”

Know Your Target Audience

To Whom Are You Marketing?

Dentistry is and always will be about relationships and trust.

Marketing your dental practice is really about attracting and building new relationships.

Like dating, if you want to attract that special someone, you need to go to the places he hangs out and say the right things. Lame pickup lines won't work. Even a great pickup line won't work if you're in the wrong place.

Your target audience—the type of patients you want to attract—determines your marketing message and your message delivery. The type of patients you want to attract depends on the kind of dentistry you want to do.

Where and how you deliver your message depends on where your target audience lives, works and plays.

Do you want to do more comprehensive dentistry? More cosmetic dentistry? How can you reach these people?

First, select a small area where you have a lot of patients already, and where the demographics **match your target audience**. Then, market to that specific area. For example:

- Sponsor fun runs, soccer teams or other neighborhood events.
- Send a direct mailer to your target area.
- Place your name in anything relevant for that area, such as local directories, business listings and so on.
- Optimize your website for searches in that zip code.
- Attend business networking events in that area.
- Sponsor a local country club event or host a lecture or event of your own there.

By focusing your message on the right target audience, and delivering that message in all the right places, you'll achieve better results from your marketing investment.

Website Tips

Your online presence is key to your marketing success. No matter how they heard about you, prospective patients will probably visit your website before they call for an appointment.

Take a hard look at your website:

- Is it responsive to the device (phone, desktop, tablet, etc.) being used?
- Does it represent your practice brand well?
- Do you appear credible?
- Does your office seem up-to-date, or does it look old?
- Is this a place where patients will feel comfortable having dental work done?

You want the answer to be “Yes, absolutely!” to all of the above. Also, check your website for these must-have items:

- **Upper right corner** – call to action, phone number, patient login, social media links.
- **Upper left corner** – your logo.
- Meet the doctor page with a three-quarter body shot of the doctor (not just the head).
- **Patient reviews** and testimonials.
- **Contact form** on every page.

Lastly, if your website is more than two years old, you probably need to redo it to take advantage of new technology.

Repeat Your Message

How Will You Get Your Message Out?

Your target audience must hear, see, feel and experience your marketing message five to seven times before it resonates with them.

No matter what you're marketing, you need to find at least five different ways to get your message out. For example, if you're running a tooth-whitening special, you could:

1. Send an email about it.
2. Put up a sign in your office.
3. Ask your team to talk to patients about it.
4. Post a video of before-and-after photos on your social media sites.
5. Add the special to your office's on-hold recording.
6. Mail a postcard about the special.
7. Feature it in your newsletter.

Other ways to reach your prospects five to seven times include:

- Your website.
- Your blog or podcast.
- Online advertising and landing pages.
- Email and direct mail campaigns.
- Expos and business networking events.
- Outdoor billboards and signs.
- Print, radio and TV ads.

Whatever channels you choose, your marketing should always portray a consistent image of your practice with a powerful message that promotes your unique strengths.

Consistency and repetition amplify your message because they create familiarity.

People like things that are familiar; the more they're exposed to something, the more they like it. The more they like it, the more they notice it and take action. If you want your message to be heard and acted on, repeat it five to seven times. Consistently.

Too Much or Not Enough?

Many dentists worry about sending too many messages, communicating too much and ruining relationships.

The reality is that most dental practices aren't sending out enough messages.

Every day is too often, of course, but staying in regular contact with your patients is a good thing. Most people want to hear from their healthcare providers.

An email campaign with a start and end date is the perfect way to pace your messages.

Practice communication software can help you create and send messages at the right times, automatically. It also helps you measure the effectiveness of your email campaigns.

Your practice should send something to your patients at least once a month, in addition to emails or postcards for special events.

Regular communication with your patients keeps them updated on new procedures, specials and events. It also gives them something to talk about when referring you to their friends.

Earn Unending Referrals

If You Don't Ask, You Won't Receive

Your practice marketing game plan must include marketing to your existing patients for three main reasons:

1. They are your most valuable source of new patient referrals.
2. The corporate dental practice that just opened in your area is targeting your patients. Protect your turf.
3. Lifetime patients can provide referrals, testimonials and online reviews for generations to come.

Right now, you know your patients better than any other dental practice in town. This gives you significant advantages over large practices with big marketing budgets.

People like to be treated well. No one wants to feel like just a number. You see fewer patients than the corporate competition. Your team can remain constant with less turnover. You truly know your patients and have for years.

Use this knowledge of your patient base to brainstorm with your team about:

- Improving the patient experience
- Raising the level of customer service
- Staying engaged with your patients
- Starting (or promoting) a referral program.

Continue to nurture relationships with your patients through internal marketing, social media and regular communication. Unexpected communication, like a hand-written note or personal phone call after a long appointment, can earn you a friend—and unending referrals—for life.

Most importantly, no matter how busy you are, **remember to ask for referrals every day**. Decide in your morning huddle who is going to speak to which patients, then follow up in the next morning huddle with the results. Hold each other accountable and celebrate small victories to ensure future success.

Online Reviews

The best way to gain new patients is by treating your existing patients like royalty.

Give them something to shout from the rooftops (or social media sites) about!

One thing people like to discuss on Facebook more than cats, babies and a bad customer service experience is a **great** customer service experience.

According to Spark Report, **41% of people said social media would affect their choice of** healthcare provider.

Online reviews on Yelp, Google+ and other sites are crucial in today's competitive dental market.

A 2016 BrightLocal survey says **84% of consumers trust online reviews** as much as personal recommendations.

If someone posts a negative comment on your social media sites or gives you a negative review, **keep calm and remain neutral**.

Respond simply with, "Thank you for sharing your concerns. Someone from our office will be in touch with you shortly." Then you can handle the situation in private.

Negative comments lend authenticity and show that you listen to your patients.

Too Busy to “Do Marketing”?

Leverage Your Dental Software

Your dental software can help you execute your marketing game plan while saving time for your busy team.

Dentrix, **Dentrix eServices** and the **Dentrix Marketplace** provide automated processes for patient communication and practice efficiency. For example, you can:

- Eliminate mailing appointment reminders by hand.
- Automatically send appointment reminders, birthday greetings and more at the appropriate time.
- Reduce phone calls for confirming appointments.
- Provide your patients with online access to their scheduled appointments, treatment plans and balances.
- Allow patients to pay their balances online.
- Give new patients an easy way to request appointments via your website.
- Include a referral request and links to online review sites in the post-appointment satisfaction surveys.

Ask a Professional for Help

Dental marketing advisor Misty Clark understands today's dental market and has years of experience helping dental practices reach their marketing goals. Her company offers brand development, advertising messages, online marketing strategies, website building, search engine optimization and more. Contact her at www.jamesonmanagement.com.

Rely on the Industry Leader

Dentrix provides software solutions for greater productivity and profitability in your practice. That's why more than 35,000 dental practices rely on Dentrix today.

In addition to patient communication tools, Dentrix includes full-featured clinical tools, financial analytics, accounting and billing tools, training and profitability coaching.

What to Watch

Dentrix offers these patient engagement tools:

- Treatment Plans with Benefits Available Report so you can reach out to patients who may not know they have unused insurance benefits available.
- Automated Reminders for upcoming appointments that allow patients to confirm by text message or email.
- Letters & Custom Lists to generate lists of patients who meet specific criteria such as overdue recare, certain treatment plans and those who submitted referrals.
- **Dentrix eServices** for:
 - Online bill paying
 - Online claim tracking
 - Electronic Insurance Eligibility Verification
 - Online requests for appointments
 - Electronic patient forms
 - Patient portal and website management
 - Followup questionnaires
 - Online referral submission

Visit www.Dentrix.com for details.

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