

Marketing 101

The “*Practice of Dentistry*” has become the “*Business of Dentistry*”. The buzz word today is Consumerism: “*Giving our patients what they want, when they want it, at a price they can afford.*” Far too many dentists “*hide in plain sight*”. How do we become remarkable? How can we get our fair share of the patients in an ever more competitive environment? Marketing can mean more opportunities, more fee-for-service dentistry, reduced stress, better systems, improved quality, and will remove the pressure to sell.

There are five tenets in marketing that every office must know.

1. **The budget.** In our benchmarks of a General Dental Practice we suggest that you count on spending 3-5% of your gross collections on marketing. Determine what you are currently spending on any marketing, and decide if the money is well spent. If you are not getting at least a 3 to 1 Return on Investment, consider altering the type of marketing or offers you are making. Once we decide on the dollar amount we must allocate it to a variety of different marketing outreaches.
2. **Case Average:** Divide the average number of new patients into your average production to get your production amount per new patient (This is not the production for each patient, but gives us a dollar amount per each new patient). This amount will determine what each new patient is worth. This will allow you to determine your return on investment (ROI).
3. **Tracking.** Far too often, I find doctors tracking their marketing by how many patients make appointments from a particular marketing strategy. Instead, we should measure the number of phone calls generated by each marketing strategy. It is not the fault of the marketer if they generate calls but the front desk cannot persuade them to schedule. If this happens, you have the wrong person answering the phone.
4. **Referral Mechanism.** What truly makes marketing work is your ability to turn a marketed patient into a referral source. Do this and your ROI goes out the roof. What you spent on one patient may yield 5 or 10 more referred patients.

5. **Capacity.** This is the over-riding valve that will control new patients. You must have peak demand times (7AM-9AM, 3PM-6PM, and Saturdays), physical plant (at least one more Op than you use for same day dentistry), and come off as being convenient, compassionate, confident, and competent. All this must be transferred with the first phone call. Patients vote with their feet. If they do not schedule, you are not consumer friendly.

One last word of advice: Good practices don't need to market (they already are doing things right and have their share of the crowd), and poor practices shouldn't market (they will just keep running patients off by not having their house in order). Don't look for an external solution for an internal problem. As you look at your own practice remember that every system is precisely designed to give you the result you are currently getting. If you don't like the results, then do something different. If you ever find yourself resisting change, you are on the edge of a slow death spiral in your practice. When you are done with change; you are done.