

THE MARKETING AXIOM

If you're like me, I tend to gravitate towards black or white "truisms". How about, "*the early bird gets the worm*"? This proverbial saying means that the one who arrives first has the best chance for success, and was first recorded in English in 1605. Seems pretty black and white, until you consider that the "worm" got there earlier and I wouldn't consider that he was exactly successful. How about "*the bigger they are, the harder they fall*"? This came from boxer Robert Fitzsimmons in 1902 in a newspaper interview before fighting a much heavier James J. Jeffries. Guess what, Mr. Fitzsimmons, the smaller fighter, lost. So far, we are not doing so well. How about the old marketing axiom that "*everybody should market*"? In fact, I believe even that statement is false.

In Dentistry there are a couple of sayings that seem to work every time when we think about marketing. Who in dentistry wouldn't want more patients? The problem is that just wanting them is not enough. You have to earn them. Consumers vote with their feet, and if you keep seeing the backs of their heads you are doing something wrong. You might remember an article that I wrote a couple of years back called the Donor Practice. In short, there are always those practices that run off patients. The practice that seems to run them off is the Donor practice and the practice that the patients seem to gravitate to is the "Recipient practice". While speaking to a doctor on the phone a couple of days ago, I was struck by this doctor's inability to recognize that being the Donor practice can never be overcome with more marketing. Thus, we have two marketing axioms that ring true for all of dentistry.

1. **Good practices (Recipient practices)**, who don't need to market, because they have lots of new patients, *should* market.
2. **Poor practices (Donor practices)**, who really need more new patients, because patients don't "like them", should *not* market.

This sounds pretty cruel. Most of you are thinking that you're not the Donor practice, and some of you are wrong.

The Recipient or Good practice is doing everything right: Great hours, in-network for insurance, long-term staff, productive office, and a healthy overhead in the 50-60% range. Truly, what they do internally shows and the public loves them. While they don't really have to work hard to attract patients, they need to learn the tools and systems it requires to maintain growth, because marketing and consumer

growth are moving targets. Great businesses never fail to grow year in and year out.

The Donor or Poor practice is just the opposite. They are so desperate for new patients that they spend a lot of money hiring professionals to implement some convoluted strategy of internet, web, radio, TV, and print marketing in order to maintain their growth or just survive. The problem is that the reason most practices struggle with new patients is that the people they do attract don't like them. If you don't have the people skills, staff, systems, and consumer affinity in a good location, you will always struggle and most times will come up short.

Marketing brings them in, but if we don't deliver, they won't return. If you have high staff turnover, less than a 50% direct referral rate, increased cancellation and no-show percentages, marketed driven practice, patients want a second opinion or need to speak with their spouses, no one can afford your treatment plans, poor financial arrangements, or you are using assisted hygiene you are probably a Donor (Poor) practice and need to take action to reverse this trend. Consider that an average practice has about 25-30 new patients per month in a one doctor, one assistant, one front desk, one hygienist office or about 2 new patients per day per hygienist. That means if they hit that 30/month mark they have about 360 new patients per year. An average hygienist can see about 400 patients a year when they see them twice a year, throw in some scaling and root planing and a few new patients. That means that if you are not hiring a hygienist every 1.5 years or so, you have more people leaving the practice than coming in and staying. If you have been in practice for decades and still struggle to fill a hygiene schedule, then it is even more important to look at everything you are doing, because the public has already voted you off the island.

Growth occurs in any business and is sustainable when our message (marketing) and methods (people skills and systems) are balanced. This is how you Summit.

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