

Increase Your New Patients By Differentiating Your Practice Online

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In today's world, traditional practices are not only competing against each other, but also against corporate dental practices, also called Dental Service Organizations (DSOs). DSOs typically have the advantage of a much larger advertising budget and generally charge lower fees. How can you succeed in gaining new patients when competing against these Goliaths?

Delivering Superior Quality of Care

If you plan to differentiate and grow your practice, the delivery of high quality care is non-negotiable. Any marketing strategy will be short circuited without good clinical and nonclinical care.

While doctors base their perception of a high-quality practice on the level of clinical care provided, patients use a totally different yardstick. Since most patients are not able to evaluate clinical care, their evaluation is largely based on several nonclinical factors.

One critically important factor is your staff. Patients want staff members that are well-trained, friendly, courteous, compassionate and offer the highest level of customer service. Do your staff members make scheduling an appointment quick and easy? Does your practice respect the time of your patients and run on time, or with only minimal wait times?

Another factor influencing patients' evaluation of your practice is how trustworthy they feel the doctor is. It is very important for doctors to build trust by establishing a strong personal relationship with the patient. It only takes a minute to look the patient directly in the eyes, address him/her by name and show your interest in them as a person. That could be as simple as asking about family members, job and other personal matters, all of which can demonstrate that you care about them and their well-being. The doctor should take time to thoroughly explain to the patient their dental symptoms, recommended treatment options, and communicate the negative impact of not accepting treatment.

Your competitive edge over low fee competition is your ability to build strong long-term relationships, and those relationships are built on trust. Now, let's talk about how to leverage that trust, which translates into a competitive

edge, using social marketing.

Power to the Practice

In today's competitive dental marketplace, it's essential to have a carefully crafted digital marketing plan to effectively communicate your superior quality of care, and differentiate your practice from your lower fee/lower quality corporate competitors. Below are three strategies to harness the power of patient referrals, tell the story of your practice, and capture the attention of potential new patients cost-effectively.

Reputation Management: In Reviews We Trust

Potential patients trust online reviews and often base their decision on what others say about your practice. A recent survey by BrightLocal.com found that 84% of those asked said they trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation. That's the same as a friend telling them that they should call your office. The same survey showed that 74% of consumers reported that a positive review will make them trust a local business more.

Your future patients are researching practices online and will make a decision based on what they find, particularly on review sites such as Google and Yelp. Just going from 0 to 1 favorable review increases the rate that online practice shoppers will contact your practice by 65%. And to be truly effective, you need to generate at least 20 favorable Google reviews. This creates a cycle – the more reviews, the more new patients joining your practice, leading to even more reviews, and higher search engine rankings.

The survey also revealed that a majority of patients will leave a review for your practice, if asked. This highlights how important it is to have a system in place to amplify positive comments you hear in your office and help “catch” potentially negative experiences before they go public.

It's not as hard as you may think to convert an offhand comment into an authentic, five-star public review so that potential new patients can read it. At the same time, it's important to offer a sounding board to patients in case their experience wasn't perfect, giving them a chance to vent before they take to the Internet to air their grievances.

Social Engagement Done Right

There's no better way to add value to your practice than having current patients share your content with their social media friends. Actively engaging with your patients through social media will reap benefits exponentially if done right. A Facebook page must not only have a regular stream of updates, but also must be interactive, encouraging current fans to like and share your post on the pages. This helps reach their network of friends, increasing the number of potential new patients aware of your practice.

The content needs to be personalized, informative, or entertaining to be good enough to share. A contest that incentivizes patients to like and repost to their own page in order to have a chance to win is just one of many great examples of interactive, shareable content.

Facebook Advertising: Choose Your Audience and Get Clicks With Educational Content

Facebook's dynamic ad platform allows doctors to target a specific audience and potential new patients who are in need of your services, and live within a short distance of your practice's physical address. These ads can be directed back to educational content on your website, with forms that are specifically designed to capture new patient data delivered right to your inbox.

Stronger Together

While these strategies can operate independently to boost your practice's referral rates, they work best together. In conjunction, reputational management, social engagement, and Facebook advertising form a digital marketing plan that's unmatched in communicating your competitive advantages in expertise and experience to deliver personalized customer service that's superior. This will help you compete and win against DSOs in converting more new patients.

** Amy Epstein, MBA and Dr. Leon Klempner, a retired orthodontist, are cofounders of People in Practice a digital marketing agency that builds and manages social marketing and online reputations exclusively for the dental profession. For more information, or a free marketing analysis, you can contact them at 888.866.DOCS, or by email at hello@pplpractice.com.*

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