



NEW SCHOOL MARKETING FOR YOUR PRACTICE

LIKE IT OR NOT, DENTAL PRACTICES MUST CHANGE WITH THE TIMES

Guest Contributor

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In today's challenging economy, every dental practice needs to differentiate themselves and create effective, consistent new patient flow and conversion strategies. The hottest topic in all the dental meetings is how to utilize the Internet: website, search engine optimization and social media to increase new patient inquiries. Using the Internet to promote your practice is the "new school" of marketing. Baby Boomers turn even greyer at the concept of "tweeting" their patients and most practice's immediately get overwhelmed at the prospect of implementing these important steps. New school marketing is here to stay. It is the answer to many practice's challenges, so let me help set the stage for successful integration.

In order to get the ideal results, new school marketing must create awareness, engagement and commitment. For example, if you have a website that is visited nightly by little old ladies surfing the Net in Belgium, you may have generated some awareness, but you have no hope of providing these ladies with implants or new dentures! Awareness, in and of itself is not enough to bring patients into your practice. Whether you are looking to generate

more new patients through internal referrals, traditional advertising or Internet activities, your marketing efforts must fire on all three pistons: Awareness, Engagement and Commitment. When they are firing on all three pistons, you will see immediate returns.

In the old days, when we had to fold, stuff and stamp direct mail pieces or spend a significant amount of money to have a quarter-inch ad in the yellow pages, marketing was incredibly costly from a financial and resource utilization point of view. In contrast, today's new school marketing strategies are incredibly low in on-going cost and resource allocation and exponentially touch so many more potential patients, that any dentist can effectively market their practice without breaking the bank or backs of their team. New school marketing includes: online communication strategies, website design and upkeep, search engine optimization (SEO) and "pay per click" (PPC), social media interaction and on-going online reputation management. In defining "new school", this is where we usually start to lose the dentists who went to high school in the 60s and 70s (don't worry – I am one of you, too)! As I said earlier, considering that Boomers grew up using rotary telephones, this whole topic can be daunting and create a fair amount of inertia. The great news is that in every

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ENGAGEMENT
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dental practice in America, there is at least one team member who is very comfortable with Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. There are also outside experts, companies that make it their business to understand online marketing and they can guide us ole' folk towards a new horizon.

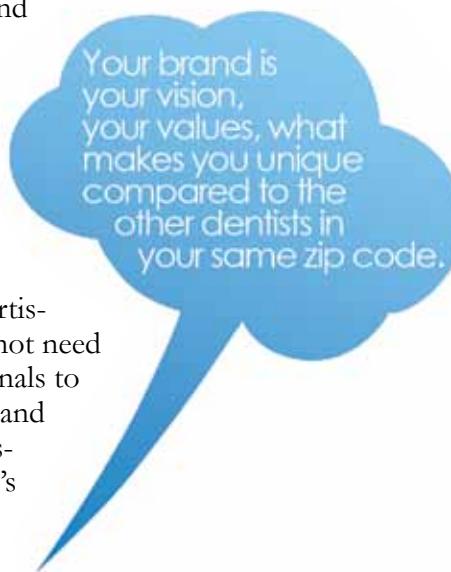
And the truth is, like it or not, each dental practice must change with the times. To illustrate this point, I'll share with you that the fastest growing demographic on Facebook is not members of Generation X, but seniors. Studies show that 66% of all medical/dental prospects use the doctor's website as the primary decision driver as to whether to make an appointment. The bottom line is that if you do not embrace these new opportunities, you will be left behind.

So, now that you are convinced you need to move forward you are probably wondering, "What are the first steps towards this horizon of new school marketing?"

Before you upgrade your website, or hop in to Facebook posts, your first priority is to unify all of your existing and future marketing and communication strategies by taking a close look at your brand (who you are, the promise you make to your community with the intention of never breaking it). Ask yourself, "When patients look at my practice's marketing materials do they have a professional, cohesive look and message?"

One misconception that dentists often have is that when considering a brand for their practice, they do not have to hire an expensive advertising executive. You do not need one of these professionals to look into a crystal ball and develop a slick advertising slogan like, "World's Best Cup of Coffee." Your brand is your vision, your values, what makes you unique compared to the other dentists in your same zip code.

The more authentic the brand – the more likely the messaging will be consistent. You can create loads of awareness, but engagement is created when people connect to your brand.



The additional benefits of having a strong practice brand are:

- Branding differentiates you from all the others. For example, what makes Burger King different from Wendy's? Which means what's your square hamburger?
- Branding unifies all your communications – If you are a modern, high-tech, sophisticated practice that focuses on cosmetic and long-term health solutions, you better avoid featuring a photo of Garfield the cat on the front of your continuing care post cards (unless you are a pediatric practice, and then Garfield works fine).
- Customers are loyal to brands. Case in point - I am pretty sure most of you have not left Charmin or Northern toilet tissue behind for generics, just because of the economy...have you?
- Consumer will pay more money for well-branded goods and services. Whether it is your favorite shampoo, hotel or restaurant... we love what we love, and we are often happy to pay more for them!

Before you fully define your brand, you need to know WHERE your patients come from and WHO they are, so that you can ensure your brand is meaningful to them. Once you are branded, and you have a logo that matches that brand – you are ready to market your practice! Your website, blogs, tweets and posts then all must personify and support your brand message. This helps you to make the hard decisions on what your website should look like and beyond.

New school marketing is the answer.

Educate you and your team, create a plan and roll it out. This will be your secret to addressing the challenges of 2012 and succeeding!

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