

Strategies to Improve Dental Patient Retention

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According to common wisdom, an increase in new patients equals growth for your dental practice. However, that is only part of the equation. If you are losing as many patients as you are getting, then your practice is not growing.

Never underestimate the importance of patient retention

If you focus all your efforts on new patients, then you are missing a valuable opportunity for several reasons.

- Patient acquisition can cost up to 25 times more than patient retention.
- Repeated visits increase the CLV (consumer lifetime value) of a patient. If new patients are more valuable, then your marketing ROI (return on investment) increases.
- Most people read reviews before choosing a dental practice. Positive feedback from long-term patients is most impactful because they indicate a consistently high standard of care.
- Loyal patients speak highly of your practice, which helps build your professional reputation. A good reputation is valuable for your standing in the dental community, branding your practice, and even SEO (search engine optimization) for your website.

Does your practice have room to improve?

You strive to make your patients happy and keep them coming back. Yet, you know that is not always possible. Research shows that the average attrition rate in dentistry is 17 percent. If your number is similar, then your practice is doing okay. However, your goal is not to do okay or be average. Top performing practices often have an attrition rate of just three percent. That indicates there is almost always some room for improvement.

Success in a new era of dentistry

To be fair, the numbers mentioned above reflect data gathered before the emergence of COVID-19. Extended periods of practice shutdowns and continued fear of human contact have had a negative impact on most dental practices. However, as we adapt to the “new normal,” it is time for your practice to not only recover from the effects of the pandemic, but plan for future growth and improved performance. This includes:

- Address concerns upfront – Surely, you are taking every possible precaution to protect your staff and patients. That is great for avoiding spreading the virus, but it does not help your business unless patients are aware. Discuss new protocols on your website and social media.
- Answer questions – When patients ask about risks, do not just placate them with generalized reassurances. Be specific and give detailed answers.
- Create a safe atmosphere – Do not just tell patients that they are safe, show them. When people visit your office, show everything possible to make them feel safe.
- Reach out – Appointment reminders, follow-up phone calls or messages, newsletters, social media activity, and other methods of staying in touch with patients are more important than ever.

Creating a positive patient experience

One of the best ways to improve your retention rate is make patients happy – and that requires more than good results. Surely poor-quality clinical work will keep most patients from returning. Yet, good quality is not enough to create a loyal patient.

We all know how common dental anxiety is. In truth, many people are afraid to visit your office, and they are not worrying about how long a crown will last or how it will look. They are worried about pain, about feeling intimidated, and about being treated like a machine in a repair shop rather than a human. The best way to improve your patient satisfaction rate, and in turn your patient retention rate, is to provide a great experience every single time. Here are a few tips to make that happen:

- Make a good first impression – The patient experience does not begin when the person walks in your office. Most likely, a person will “meet” the digital version of your practice before interacting with a staff member. It might be your social media profile, your website, or an online advertisement. Whatever the person sees first will make an impression, and you want it to be a good one. Ensure that all marketing materials reflect your brand message.

- Communication is essential – People are accustomed to having multiple options for contacting a business. Provide chatbots and forms on your website. Offer phone numbers and SMS texting options. Use a patient portal. Most importantly, respond to communications promptly, because no one likes to wait for an answer.
- Customer service counts – Everyone on your team has a specific role, be it clinical or However, they all share an additional role, and that is customer service. From the receptionist to the hygienist, it is everyone’s job to make the patient feel like a VIP. If that is not happening, then basic customer service training can be a worthwhile investment.
- Focus on efficiency – Patients might not directly see the business side of your practice, but it has a direct impact on them. Outdated computer systems might require them to fill out extra paperwork. Inadequate phone systems can make it unnecessarily difficult to contact your office. Poor scheduling results in longer wait times. Simply stated, the smoother your office runs, the better the patients’ experiences will be.

Final thoughts

Attracting plenty of new patients can help a dental practice survive. Converting them to loyal, long-term patients can help a dental practice thrive. The tips mentioned here are just a few of many ways to make that happen. One of the best ways to improve your success is to try and look at your practice through a patient’s eyes. What do they see, hear, and experience? What gives them reason to come back? What might stop them from returning? Use these insights to optimize your strategy. After all, a patient-friendly practice is a profit-friendly practice.

About the Author:



Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you’re looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren.

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