

Let's Get Real: 5-Plus Ways to Inject Authenticity Into Your Practice and Attract Loyal Patients

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"Authenticity," as defined by Merriam-Webster, is about being "true to one's personality, spirit, and character." The daily onslaught of information has naturally led to consumers craving authenticity now more than ever before. Yet, by its very nature, marketing is not inherently authentic, sincere, or genuine. It is a dog-eat-dog competitive world, whereby brands compete against each other to put their best faces forward and resonate with the consumer – whether that consumer is "shopping" for a service like health care or goods and products. It is a balancing act, the rush of meeting consumers wherever they are "at" within the digital universe, without sacrificing the brand's core values and stepping on potential PR landmines.

The Marketing Society, a development organization for communications professionals, highlighted five different types of authenticity:

- Natural
- Original
- Exceptional
- Referential
- Influential

Dental practices can harness these five concepts in specific ways to grow the best "brand ambassadors": loyal patients *and* your loyal employees or teams.

Natural authenticity

As the term suggests, "natural" as a feature refers to a lack of human intervention. Artificiality and the synthetic are *not* to be celebrated. As it relates to dentistry, there is an opportunity here to market those products and materials that are biocompatible or are derived from organic and

hypoallergenic ingredients. Likewise, there is an opportunity to showcase those techniques, technologies, and tools that *support* such concepts. It is not merely about limiting oneself to, for example, oral care products that are certified organic by reputable bodies.

Original authenticity

Here, those individuals and brands that are perceived as being original, ingenious, creative innovators and adopters are lauded. If one is not the “first” to provide a given product or service, one can still stand out favorably through a one-of-a-kind approach to that product or service. The idea is to respect the special, not “mimics” or “imitators.”

Opportunities abound in dentistry on this front. But, first, it requires introspection. Assess what really makes your team and organization different. Shout it from the rooftops! Demonstrate how you are not saddled with traditional or accepted methods, materials, procedures, practices, or equipment. Remember, there are plenty of businesses that still do things “because we have always done them this way.”

Exceptionalism

The concept of “exceptionalism” is often, unfairly, put in a bad light. It is conflated with being boastful, braggadocious, immodest. However, at its core, we are just talking about what makes a given individual, team, product, or service “exceptional.” This, too, requires standing back and assessing one’s operations for a moment. What do you see as your office/professionals doing exceptionally well? As dentists, you can really shine by showcasing specific technical or artistic skills and training. You already have built-in authority as a clinician. Ensure you are authentically conveying that authority and exceptionalism.

Note: Using photos of actual patients and videos of real people (yourself and your staff) are good starting points. Patients can sniff out disingenuous stock photos from kilometers away. Moreover, what they really want to see is *your work* — not somebody else’s smile makeover or a smile that was designed on a computer with software “magic” or wizardry. This is where things like photos of your patients “before and after transformations,” or videos and audio featuring your thrilled patients go far to build trust and communities of brand advocates online and offline.

Referential

Simply put, looking at authenticity through this lens is about establishing a reference point. By getting into your patients' and prospects' minds, you convey empathy and show that you are relatable and understand where they are coming from. Put yourself in the patient's shoes. Remember the last time you went to a GP or other health care provider? What could they have done *better*? Did you feel like you were just another hamster on a wheel, going through the motions? Did they lack personal, unhurried care?

Draw from what has become a trope about practices and create a picture of something else entirely. As it relates to dentistry, convey accurately how you stand out from experiences elsewhere with the likes of care that is delivered in a non-judgmental, gentle, plain-speak way that defies the notion of "drill-fill-bill" — all within a cozy, inviting office. These elements can convert even those patients with debilitating fear and anxiety about visiting the dentist.

Influence

Consumers are hungry to patronize and support those brands that are "doing good," and that they can really rally behind. These brands respond to a higher calling and greater purpose beyond themselves as owners or leadership, their organizations, and respective industries. There are plenty of opportunities for dentists to market such "good." Again, evaluate how you are elevating the industry, community, society, and planet. Is it through minimizing waste? Is it through responsible disposal of waste? How are you living ethically and sustainably as a practice, day in and day out? Everything from your use of safe, non-toxic materials to employee benefits and internal professional development is fair game here.

Likewise, letting your communities know about pro bono work to help the less fortunate or aid your neighbours following a local disaster shows how invested you are in something greater than your business. "Buying local" as much as possible by selecting vendors in your own backyard is also something worth talking about!

Patients await your "realness"

There are many ways that you are already exercising broad influence, exceptionalism, and elevating standards as a community steward and industry leader; you just didn't think to highlight it before — *until now*.

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. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing – Lila, by clicking <https://www.ekwa.com/msm/> or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.

