

Understanding and Optimizing the Dental Marketing Funnel

September 2, 2021

by Naren Arulrajah, Ekwa Marketing

Understandably, most dentists hesitate to think of their patients as customers. Yet, today's patients take a consumer approach to selecting dental care. They have information, they have options, and they shop around before choosing a provider. Therefore, the sales and marketing funnel, which has long been used to guide retail strategies, can easily be applied to dentistry.

What is the funnel?

This is a useful way to understand and visualize a person's journey to becoming a loyal patient. Just consider how many people know about your practice. This is a large group represented by the top of the funnel. Only a percentage of them will become patients. Similarly, only a percentage of those who visit your office will return. Even fewer will provide useful recommendations that help grow your practice. This much smaller, valuable group is represented by the tip of the funnel.

The funnel allows us to identify the stages of the patient journey and understand the individual's experience at each step. This makes it easier to identify problems and areas of potential improvement. An ideal marketing strategy helps people move seamlessly from one level to the next.

Level 1: Awareness

The top level includes everyone who knows about your practice. Your first goal is getting people into the funnel by catching their attention and making your practice memorable. For example...

Branding – Get your name out there, use your logo frequently so that people begin to recognize it, and be consistent with your marketing message.

Building a strong digital presence – Most people who look for a dentist begin their searches online. You want to be discoverable, wherever they look. Build a website, establish social profiles, add your practice to directories, and consider other channels such as blogging or podcasting.

SEO – Your website is the core of your digital presence, and Google is (arguably) the core of internet experience. Make sure that your website is discoverable and optimized for popular search terms.

Level 2: Consideration

The next level is people who are considering your services. We can eliminate those who do not need a dentist, as well as those outside your service area. The goal is to get everyone else to move farther into the funnel by catching their interest. For example...

Landing pages – SEO will get people to your website, but it will not keep them there. You want an inviting, professional design to make a great first impression. Make sure your services are listed and easy to find so people know that you offer what they are looking for.

Social media – What do people see when they visit your practice page on Facebook or other networks? If it is an incomplete profile, poor quality photos, and no recent posts, they are going to move on.

Level 3: Conversion

This level is when people go from leads to patients. Now you need them to not only consider you but choose you instead of another dentist. This is where the details are important because today's savvy consumers research before deciding. For example...

Website content – Provide more than a generic overview of your services. If the content on your website sounds like it could be on WebMD or any other information site, then your practice seems no different than any other dentist. Describe what sets you apart from the competition, include dentist bios, and add before and after pictures showcasing your skills. Detail financing options, insurance acceptance, office amenities, and anything else that gives people a reason to choose you.

Reputation management – A good reputation can make all the difference at this stage. It is important to monitor online reviews, thank patients for positive feedback, and respond professionally to negative comments.

Special offers – Do you offer a free exam for new patients, a discount on the first cosmetic treatment, or other incentive? If so, make sure it is highly visible, because this can become a deciding factor.

Level 4: Loyalty

Now you have the patient in your chair, but you need him or her to return. At this level, a new patient becomes a loyal patient. This is where customer service and clinical excellence shine. For

example...

Patient experience – The atmosphere, amenities, cleanliness, and even aesthetics of your office can make a difference. However, the most important aspect of the patient experience is service. Your office and clinical team members should be helpful, knowledgeable, and skilled in customer service.

Communication – It is often said that communication is the key to a good relationship. That is true of most types of relationships, including the doctor-patient relationship. Answer questions and explain your policies before an appointment, listen to the patient during the visit, and be diligent with follow-up communications.

Meeting expectations – This is an important part of patient satisfaction. You can convince people to try your practice by making big promises. However, they are not likely to come back if you do not deliver what you promised.

Level 5: Advocacy

While converting a stranger to a loyal patient could be considered a success, there is still one more level in the funnel. The most valuable patient is one who not only keeps coming back, but also helps bring in new patients.

Review requests – You will get a lot more reviews if you just ask. There are several ways of going about this. You might give patients a card asking for reviews when they visit your office, include the request in follow up emails, or send an SMS message. There are also several programs that help automate the process.

Testimonials – It is great when people leave five-star reviews on Yelp. It is even better when they write a personal note, or even film a testimonial video. Ideally, you can add these testimonials to your website or other marketing materials. However, be sure that you have proper permission from the patient and be mindful of any local advertising regulations.

Social media connection – Encourage patients to follow and interact with your practice on social media.

Marketing your dental practice is not a simple, one-step process. You need to funnel people in, carefully guiding the patient journey through each stage.

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 www.ekwa.com/msm/ or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.

RELATED ARTICLE: Video Marketing for Your Dental Practice