

Have You Done Your Marketing Communications “Homework” Yet?

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Getting your family mentally and otherwise ready for a new school year requires a favourable time horizon. You don't want to rush it. After all, having the right supplies and mindset at the start [sets the tone](#) for the balance of the academic year and can also have repercussions for the succeeding academic years.

The same mentality applies to your practice and team. Get your communications in order before the back-to-school (BTS) rush. Provide “friendly reinforcement” to your community. With awareness, we can all work together to [minimize the madness](#) at the start of the year as parents scramble to cram in dental visits with all their kids' competing BTS commitments.

Do not leave [communication](#) strategies on this front to the last minute due to both practical *and* opportunity-oriented reasons, as noted here:

- **If you do not take this phase in the lifecycle of your practice seriously, you are seriously missing out.** There are opportunities within the greater opportunity presented by pediatric patient-oriented messaging.
- **Notably, there exists the obvious benefit of carving out long-term relationships.** These pediatric patients eventually grow into adults with their own families and circles of friends who have children in need of professional dental care, too. The cycle continues!
- **There is the other, perhaps *indirect*, benefit of re-establishing partnerships with older family members, ranging from adult parents to grandparents who may also be full-time or part-time caregivers.** Just as their children’s oral health journey is kicking off, you can get these caregivers back onto the right, healthy path and kickstart those relationships as well.
- **Now to the more practical “stuff.” Just a little bit of advance planning on your BTS marketing and communications strategy is essential.** After all, you will likely want to [pre-schedule social media posts](#) now when your team has the time to do so. Once they are in the thick of things with appointments and their own family BTS obligations, it will be too easy to put such content on the back burner.
- **Plus, due to the nature of such content, you need to post these items *before the start of the school year* or at least very close to the first days of the academic year.** The idea is to get people to think and act sooner rather than later.
- **Furthermore, by facilitating more of a “rolling” schedule of appointments, your practice is also afforded the opportunity to “right-staff” for the start of the year.** You can ensure appropriate staffing levels are maintained to accommodate such peak periods. Last-minute needs to fill gaps in staffing are minimized with the best intentions or avoided altogether.

Now, to the fun stuff ... *the content!*

This is what our team does best. You are already off to a great start by “doing your homework” and reading this article. The case for back-to-school as a potential practice boon is on your radar. Now that you understand the value and importance of directing resources toward “business development” on this front, embark on the following steps:

Do your “homework.”

Assess the “health” of your pediatric patient base. If you haven’t prioritized pediatric dentistry services previously, do so now. As referenced above, you are creating a “customer for life.” Visiting your office becomes second nature as children grow. You are partnering with them to develop healthy habits that they carry with them through the decades.

Market your diverse patient base!

Once you have better assessed your practice's current and goal demographics, you can develop content to continue the upward trajectory or build upon your aspirational future patient composition. Consider how competitor practices may be far more limiting; they may see very few younger patients. They have not, perhaps, actively addressed acquiring new patients, such as younger families or households that are new to your respective market.

Promote the *value* of partnering with a practice and team that has experience with caring for children.

Not every practice has the right team, nor is it equipped to effectively help kids learn how to care for their developing mouths. It is essential to demonstrate that you know pediatric patients are not simply "smaller adults." Convey your team's patience when working with children, or your approach to speaking with them, making them feel less nervous and inspiring them to return from "setbacks," such as a cavity.

Also, account for how your practice distinguishes itself from other practices with a niche or specialized patient base.

Everything from new or revamped pediatric service pages or pithy social posts could highlight the merits of *continuity of care*. These children will not "graduate" and become "too old" for the practice once they reach a certain age. Craft content around the broad theme of "ensuring your children do not miss a beat, nor ever miss a check-up, as they transition from their teens to young adulthood."

Tie your communications in with visits to the family physician.

Just as parents are gearing up for their kids' annual health check-ups or [shots](#), you can naturally transition to "friendly reminders" about the dental check-up. "Integrative" or multi-disciplinary medicine is a hot topic as health care swings toward this model. So, in acknowledging the role of the family doctor, you also have the added benefit of indirectly demonstrating your savvy or comfort with health teams across disciplines. You know it "takes a village" and are privileged to play a vital role in that community.

Remind parents and caregivers that there really isn't a "too early" time to begin visiting you regularly.

Some members of your community may still be surprised to know that the CDA recommends the **first “assessment”** occur within six months of the eruption of the first tooth or by the time the infant turns one year of age. This may seem early to a lot of people. So, a post or content on the first visit lends itself to and likely demands more of an explanation or justification for such early timing. Helpful items and education around the role of baby teeth, for instance, may be second nature to you as a clinician but are not everyday parlance for the layperson who may assume, “Baby teeth are just going to fall out! They do not matter.”

As you approach the start of the school year, consider a *series of articles* on your website. Cross-promote on social channels.

For example, a series could guide parents through health needs and related services at every stage of childhood. The first article could explore baby and toddler care, transitioning to care and professional dentistry for school-aged children, and so on. This is an ideal way to provide meaningful content in manageable “chunks” while promoting relevant and unique areas of expertise for your practice and team members.

Think beyond services!

Consider, instead, amenities or features of your practice and office that lift barriers to consistent dental care. Notably, market the likes of block scheduling for family members. This is a particularly desirable feature during times of peak “busyness” for families, such as the start of the school year. Likewise, highlight convenient early morning, evening, or weekend scheduling as appropriate.

Address financial barriers head-on.

Market family-friendly financing or alternative payment methods. If you offer member savings plans as an alternative to traditional insurance models, consider devoting content toward any in-house pediatric plans that may be provided. Similarly, *all* practices can benefit by communicating preventative care as a far more affordable alternative to restorative services. For parents who may have fallen behind on their recall appointments, it is worth reminding them about the many preventative services that are fully covered by most insurance plans, too.

Think in terms of visual learning and high-impact content.

When explaining things like early childhood caries, for instance, it may be helpful and memorable to record a video of you pointing out different parts of a handy model of a specific tooth to show how decay marches through the tooth. Much of the content you may already have on your website can lend itself well to visuals on YouTube or elsewhere, and, if age-appropriate, can also be integrated into the “offline experience” for the kiddos (run the videos in treatment rooms or play areas). Content across channels could also support fun promotions, such as entries into a raffle for a backpack stuffed full of dentist-approved goodies. Entries could be in exchange for scheduling a kid’s BTS check-up by a specific date.

As always, assessments and planning efforts related to marketing communications have a way of uncovering operational gaps, redundancies, and potential opportunities. These strategies, accordingly, do not exist as an island. They can help get your practice’s overall operations in shape and poised for a more profitable and rewarding year – back-to-school and beyond.

About the Author:



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