

Creating Your Dental Marketing Plan

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In the highly competitive world of modern dentistry, it is nearly impossible for a practice to survive without some form of marketing. But random or disjointed marketing efforts are very different from a cohesive plan. This distinction is also the difference between a surviving dental practice and a thriving one.

Where to Start

Before you can create an effective plan, you need to know exactly what you are marketing. The answer isn't just a dental practice. After all, there is no shortage of practices. A well-developed unique selling proposition (USP) and brand identity should be at the heart of your marketing efforts.

First, what is your USP? Why would patients go to your office instead of the one down the road? Maybe you have different services, a more convenient location, or better trained staff. Maybe your practice is high-end, or maybe it is budget-friendly. Define what sets you apart.

Next, what is your brand identity? Repeated exposure breeds familiarity and, therefore, trust. However, you need some common elements in your marketing materials to make your practice memorable. The most important elements of your brand identity are your practice name and logo, but it can also include taglines, slogans, your photo, or preferred color themes and fonts.

Once you've decided how you want to present your practice, the next step is identifying your target market.

Begin with your practice's physical location. How far are people likely to travel to visit your office? This depends on how unique your services are, how many dentists are in the area, and the availability of local

transportation. Identify towns and zip codes that are reasonable to target.

Now, consider your target demographics. Think about the age range, income level, and lifestyle of your average patient. Also look into the demographics of locations you would like to target. For example, it would be a waste of money to advertise a pediatric practice in a neighborhood where most residents are retirees.

Making a Plan

Now that you have identified what you are marketing and to whom you are marketing it, you just need to connect the dots. How do you reach your target market? There is no single “best” way. It takes a combination of coordinated efforts. A few of the most effective and integratable marketing techniques include:

- **Website:** Your website is the hub of your online presence. It should accurately represent your USP and provide important information about your practice. You want an attractive, user-friendly design and content that is valuable to potential patients. Also, don't forget about search engine optimization, or SEO. According to [sprout social](#), more than half of all patients use a search engine to find a dentist.
- **Social media:** The number of people using social media grows every year, and it is expected to pass [3 billion](#) by 2021. The most popular sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, are free to join. They provide an opportunity to stay in touch with current patients and attract new ones. Share news about your practice, current specials, links to content on your website, and anything else of interest to your patients. It is also a great channel for paid advertising, because you can choose your target audience based on factors such as interests and location.
- **Email:** The death of email marketing has been predicted for years, but there are no signs of that happening. According to [HubSpot](#), more than half of all internet marketers consider email their top source of return on investment, and 80% percent report that it is important for customer retention. Include a newsletter signup form on your website and share the link on social media. Add links to your site and social accounts in your newsletters.
- **Community involvement:** This is a great way to attract the attention of potential patients and build your local reputation. Accept speaking invitations, sponsor or participate in community events, and partner with other local businesses to start. The possibilities are virtually endless. This offline marketing channel integrates with online marketing more easily than you might think. For example, you can add your website URL to event flyers, request a linkback from organizations you sponsor, post pictures from events on social media, and discuss your community involvement on your website.

Improve Your Results

A well-defined, coordinated, and integrated marketing plan is a great start. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work as expected. The final and essential step is to measure your results and refine your plan accordingly. No matter what marketing channels you use, it is important to include ways of measuring effectiveness. There are several options, including:

- **Call tracking:** You can include a unique phone number on your website or on certain marketing materials. This allows you to measure how many calls were generated by that source.
- **Promotional codes:** If you are running a special, you can ask patients to provide a certain code to qualify for the discount. This allows you to use different codes each place it is advertised, so you can tell which channel generated the most new patients.
- **Tracking pixels:** This technique is not for the novice marketer. However, if you have a skilled web designer, he or she can implement this tiny bit of HTML to gain a wealth of information about the behavior of visitors to your website, including conversion rates for certain pages or ads.
- **Patient survey:** The easiest and most low-tech way to find out what attracted new patients is to ask them! If you offer a patient satisfaction or similar survey, include a question asking how they heard about your practice.

Conclusion

If this seems like a lot to think about, it is. For the hands-on dental practice owner or manager, coordinating and executing a comprehensive plan is well worth the time and effort. If you don't have that kind of time, consider

choosing an employee to oversee all aspects of marketing or working with a third-party professional.

Mr. Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete Internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dentists. With a team of more than 180 full-time marketers, ekwa.com helps dentists who know where they want to go get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call (855) 598-3320 or email naren@ekwa.com.
