

Five Surprising Reasons Why Your Patient Retention Is Low

Targeting new patients should always be a part of any marketing strategy, but don't lose sight of the patients you already have and ways to keep the new patients returning for your services.

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Your patient retention starts the minute patients walk into your office.

New patients boost your dental practice income. However, if they only come for one appointment, the benefit is minimal. On average, acquisition is [seven times more costly](#) than retention. What keeps them coming back (or keeps them *from* coming back)? Here are five areas where dental practices often lose patients without even realizing it.

Appointment reminders and confirmations

Email appointment confirmations and reminders are standard in many dental offices. Unfortunately, your patients might not see them. On average, people only open [one out of five emails, but they open nine out of ten SMS messages](#).

You can try switching from emails to SMS. Even better, offer several options and ask patients for their preferred communication method tailoring communications for each individual patient.

Waiting room

The waiting room, or reception area, is the [first part](#) of your practice that patients see when they walk through the door. They will proceed to spend some time there before entering a treatment room. If it is unattractive, unclean, or uncomfortable, then new patients have already formed a negative opinion of your practice long before they see a dentist or hygienist. Furthermore, they are less likely to schedule another visit, knowing they will be spending more time in the undesirable waiting room.

To find out what patients experience, try spending about half an hour in your own waiting room, and ask staff members to do the same. This should give you ample ideas about how to make it more comfortable, convenient, and inviting.

Marketing

If you are like most dentists, your marketing efforts are targeted to new patient acquisition. As important as that is, it should not be the sole focus of marketing. Invite patients to connect with you on social media and subscribe to your newsletter. Send greeting cards for holidays or patient birthdays. Run occasional promotions or contests targeted to current patients.

The possibilities are endless, but the goal is the same: develop and strengthen the doctor-patient relationship. You don't want to be "out of sight, out of mind" between appointments.

Staff training

No matter how great the dentist is, patients won't want to come back if the hygienist is uncaring, the assistant is incompetent, or the receptionist is rude. On the other hand, some people stay with a particular practice just because they are so fond of certain employees besides the dentist. Basic customer service training is essential to customer retention in any business, and even more so in a dental practice. A high percentage of your patients are feeling some degree of fear and anxiety. If you and your team soothe those feelings, people are much more likely to come back.

Technology

In a time when people can have groceries delivered to their door within hours, conduct global business meetings from the kitchen table, and operate household appliances with voice commands, convenience is no longer a bonus. It is an expectation.

You might have a brand-new CAD/CAM system, a suite of lasers, and CT scanning. Yet, your practice will seem outdated and low quality if patients have to wait until Monday to contact you, put up with long wait times, and then fill out lengthy paper forms. The types of technology they notice and expect are website chatbots, email contact forms, online account access, quality phone systems, digital forms, and similar features that simplify the patient experience.

Takeaway

This isn't to say that patient retention is less important than acquisition. In fact, both are essential to the financial health of your dental practice. Just imagine trying to fill a bucket that has multiple leaks. The water

pouring in is your new patient flow. The leaks represent patients lost. Your income potential, like the water level, will rise quickly when you increase the incoming flow while plugging the leaks.

For more practice management insights, read on [here!](#)

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With a team of 180+ full time marketers, www.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 to speak one-on-one with Naren.