

How to Position Your Dental Practice for Success

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The delivery of excellent oral care is pivotal to running a successful dental practice. Patients after all base their opinion of a practice largely on the kind of service they receive. However, running a healthcare practice is no easy task. Ensuring patients enjoy positive brand impressions while seamlessly managing the day-to-day running of the clinic takes a lot of time and effort. And it doesn't stop there; healthcare brands need to continuously focus on expanding their brand presence if they want to attract new patients. Some brands succeed at this while others find the task of maintaining and pushing for greater market space in the midst of running the practice difficult.

In the majority of cases, healthcare practices find themselves so caught up in the day-to-day running of the practice that they tend to ignore other vital aspects of running a successful practice.

Positioning your dental practice for success requires careful planning and monitoring of the various aspects of running a practice while also looking for areas that need or can be further improved. The end goal is always patient satisfaction which also is the foundation of running a practice with heart.

What Makes Your Practice Special?

Every brand has its own story, its own set of services and care attributes that provide competitive advantages, and its own unique pitch point. These factors help a brand stand apart from its competitors. However, most brands fail to identify and/or successfully project their unique selling point (USP) thus missing out on huge competitive advantages. The very first step in positioning your practice for success revolves around effectively promoting your distinct brand perspective. This is what provides potential patients with a reason to connect with your dental brand and helps you retain your current patient volume. Start by identifying your dental brand USP which could be a specific service you provide or it could be easy payment and scheduling options for patients or even after-care services that give your brand a distinct perspective. Promote these aspects of your brand in all your patient interactions and in all your dental advertising programs which includes your newsletter and social content. Benefits of such an exercise include greater awareness of your brand, the opportunity to showcase what your brand can offer by way of service and care advantages, and easy brand promotion in local markets.

POSITIONING YOUR PRACTICE for SUCCESS

4 IMPORTANT AREAS OF FOCUS



UPGRADE YOUR BRAND EXPERIENCE

- ➔ Brand building experiences start at the first point of contact with your brand.
- ➔ Optimize your practice website, blog, and social profiles for search results – this will not only increase practice visibility but it also connects the right kind of patients with your practice.
- ➔ Provide brand experiences such as 24/7 support, easy scheduling and payment options, seamless check-in and check-out, and simplified online form filling among other such brand experience touch-points to make patients feel special and cared for.
- ➔ Personalize patient interactions to encourage loyalty.
- ➔ Plan and implement a rewards program for repeat patients.
- ➔ Acknowledge patient loyalty by thanking your patients for selecting your dental practice.
- ➔ Improve patient flow as it not only improves practice reputation but can also have a positive impact on your practice bottom line.



APPEARANCES MATTER

- ➔ Don't ignore office ambiance.
- ➔ Small changes such as a new coat of paint, or a new carpet, patient friendly themes and de-cluttering of desks and counter tops can do wonders to your office appearance.
- ➔ A clean and warm feel to your office is another way of showing you care for your patients comfort.
- ➔ Ensure your staff appears professional, presentable, and approachable at all times.



OPTIMIZE ON PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

- ➔ Teamwork is an important aspect of running a successful dental practice.
- ➔ Ensure your team of dentists, hygienists, dental assistants, office managers, and receptionists are motivated and ready to give their best and play as effective team members.
- ➔ Conduct monthly staff meetings so everyone is up to date on office issues – another advantage of these meetings is that it provides a forum for open discussions on important issues.
- ➔ Acknowledge and appreciate the work your staff does and reward their hard work.



BUILD GOODWILL

- ➔ An effective way to build practice goodwill is by investing some of your time and resources in community work and in charitable causes.
- ➔ It is important that your patients and your target audiences see all the good work you do.
- ➔ Healthcare providers by virtue of their jobs are held in high esteem and hence are expected to be more giving towards society and the less privileged.



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Engagement, Engagement, Engagement

You've probably heard or read about the importance of engaging with your patients over and over again. Well, it's not without reason. Patient engagement is crucial to building a loyal patient following. Today's patients expect brands to engage with them beyond offering of products and services. They expect brands to engage and connect with them on a personal level. So if you are thinking that convenient hours and good service will keep patients coming back to your office, think again.

The nature of digital space is such that patient engagement has not only become interactive but much of it happens in real time so practices have the opportunity to continuously build interest and trust in their brands. Use your social channels, newsletters, and/or email marketing program to connect with patients in their moment of need. Give them reasons to connect with you and tell them what they can gain by coming back to you.

Patient Referrals Are Important to Practice Success

Word-of-mouth advertising has secured a place in both traditional and modern marketing arenas as an effective marketing strategy for pulling in new consumers. A recommendation from trusted sources is one of the leading reasons behind why consumers decide to engage or buy from a brand. Your patients are no different. They will prefer a healthcare practice that comes recommended from a family or friend or colleague.

However, patient referrals is a two way street. There has to be something of value to be gained on both sides. In short, if you expect your patients to refer you to their contacts, then you need to make it worth their while. A referral rewards program is not only the best but it is also the most effective option for encouraging patient referrals. Another way to encourage referrals is by actually directly asking your patients to refer their contacts. You will be surprised at how responsive patients can actually get when they are asked by their healthcare providers to refer contacts. If you are wondering why, the reason is simple – at its very basic, this is a relationship/trust building action. It makes them feel special and important to you. So go ahead and ask for a referral!

Consider Expanding Your Practice

A vital component in positioning your dental practice for success revolves around expanding your service offerings. If you want your brand to have greater representation in the market, then you need to also consider how or what you can do to expand your services in a way that will improve brand value and further consolidate your market position. Practice expansion can happen in a number of ways – you could actually move into a bigger or new space, think of expanding your current location, include new service offerings, improve or add new technology, or even bring in new service associates.

Regardless of what step you decide to take, it is important that you do so after careful deliberation and planning. Keep in mind functional and financial limitations of any such action. However, if you feel the time is right and your practice can withstand the change and substantially gain in the long run then go ahead by all means. Practice stagnation can eat away at not only your revenue and goodwill, but it also dilutes passion and motivation of not only the service providers but also of the staff.

Few Other Considerations

Success is easy to visualize but much difficult in practice. The above mentioned points highlight some of the bigger aspects of gaining practice success. Now let us look at some of the smaller yet no less vital aspects of positioning your dental practice for success.

Optimize Your Scheduling System

A scheduling system is more than just appointment booking. An optimized scheduling system is crucial to practice productivity as it improves patient flow. It also helps in ensuring the patient, service providers, and the staff move in sync, and is also a great touch point for delivering excellent customer service. You might want to consider upgrading your scheduling software so it is more accessible to patients and easier for your staff to navigate and manage.

Provide Flexible Financial Options

With so many dental practices out there, every little reason to attract new patients and hold on to your current patients can be the difference between a successful and a not-so successful practice. Easy payment options are an important consideration for patients when selecting a dental practice. Also keep in mind that not all patients opt for insurance coverage so you might want to work on better or easy payment options for those patients who come to you without insurance coverage. Dental coverage is not as comprehensive as regular medical coverage so for patients with dental insurance, try and work with insurance providers to come up with payment options that are beneficial to not only your practice but also your patients.

Build on Your Dental Brand Culture

Your dental brand culture is not something that exists only in the digital space. It is emulated in every aspect of your practice and the kind of service delivery you provide. So every step that a patient takes towards your practice right from the first point of contact is an opportunity for building brand impressions.

Ensure patients find it easy and convenient to navigate your digital assets (website, social sites, review and rating sites, blog) and also your physical location. Make sure your staff is professional and courteous to patients and committed to delivering excellent patient interactions. Issue resolutions should be carefully planned for and carried out at all times if you want patients to keep coming back to you.

Conclusion

Positioning your dental practice for success in a competitive market space can be difficult, but not impossible to achieve. The best way to beat competition is by identifying and highlighting those aspects of your practice that make you a better or smarter choice for patients. Positioning your practice for success also involves winning the trust of potential and current patients. So brand building and patient engagement need to be as much a practice priority as practice expansion.

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