

# A Guide to Identifying Opportunities, Reframing Goal-Setting in a COVID-19 New Year

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As we eagerly shed 2020 and await with cautious optimism the year ahead, not unlike other industries, thought leaders in our “space” are prognosticating on what dentistry will look and feel like in a post-COVID-19 era. It is the season of resolution-making, waving good-bye to the previous year and embracing a better year on the horizon. Amid a pandemic and bear market, this notion is under the spotlight. Yet, there are still so many variables to contend with, which further challenge goal setting and resolution-making.

We can take what we have learned thus far from previous closures and re-openings and apply precedent to position ourselves well for the unpredictable, our only certainty at this point. How we have adapted and innovated since the outbreak serves us well; we can sustain and identify ways to take advantage of the new opportunities to provide value and, in turn, to grow even when such growth seems counterintuitive to the situation at hand.

## *The best ideas, born from crises*

As hard as it may be, it is important for us to remember that some of the darkest chapters in history trigger the most beneficial, society-altering changes and positive disruption. For instance, the 1918-1919 flu pandemic led to several medical and scientific discoveries. As researchers sought a vaccine, much was learned about the tools that ultimately led to the development of other vaccines. The enhanced understanding of genetics that was acquired along the way ultimately informed the discovery that DNA held the genetic code. Much more recently, what we learned from the HIV/AIDS crisis informed present-day infection controls. So, dentists were in a better position than many other industries to take on the safety challenges presented by COVID-19.

We do not know what is ahead, no one does, but we can use our not-so-distant past to elevate efficiencies and to intentionally identify and deploy ways to better serve and engage patients and their families. The additional needs that arise during crises often present opportunities for you and

your team.

### ***Teledentistry, more than a “quick-fix”***

If you and your team adopted technologies that facilitated the likes of virtual visits as a temporary fix in the time of COVID-19, it is time to consider teledentistry for the long haul. Instead of viewing tech-facilitated visits as a coping strategy through the pandemic, look at them for what they are: *best practices!* After all, these appointments provide more than peace of mind amid the social distancing of a public health crisis; long after the crisis has passed, they will be providing much-needed convenience and heightened access to patients and communities. Ultimately, this means more opportunities to connect with those patients who are now increasingly committed to their oral health. Additionally, we have seen technologies on this front evolve dramatically. As telediagnostic capabilities and monitoring continue to improve, there will only be more ways to deliver services efficiently, accurately, intuitively, and yes, *safely*.

### ***Managing the elevated risks***

In the moment, you may be seeing more patients who are battling oral health challenges for the first time in their lives. Some of these challenges are directly or indirectly related to the pandemic. Researchers are connecting the dots between tooth decay and painful, sensitive gums and poor blood flow among COVID-19 patients. The effects of the novel coronavirus will continue long after the worst of the pandemic is over, due to the many sufferers who are experiencing serious long-term health consequences (the “long COVID” sufferers). Of course, there is also the role that stress and even the use of PPE is playing in the development of chronic dry mouth and stinky “mask mouth.”

The relationship between professional oral care and COVID-19 presents opportunities for you and your team to recommend products and provide guidance that is relevant during these times. Assure that your messaging is timely, and ties to some of the newest findings in the always-evolving realm of pandemic research. There is something to be said for continuing to convey the importance of a healthy mouth, free of periodontitis and associated bacterial pathogens, as a way for patients to further lower their risk of developing serious COVID-19 complications. Now more than ever, it’s important to “meet” patients where they are “at,” not only in terms of how you deliver services but also as it relates to “of-the-moment” content that resonates with them.

### ***Mind the “fundamentals”***

Tragedies have a way of providing perspective, removing distractions, and isolating and highlighting what is most important. As much as we may rely on sophisticated technologies in our day to day, we must also focus on what is truly most important: partnerships. This partnering extends to patients and their families and to your “extended family” – your team. It also accounts for partnerships with vendors, suppliers, and other parties. There is no time like the present to re-energize and strengthen your team. You need not be all in the same location to do that. Additional opportunities for online education further inject new life and positivity into your team, the enthusiasm that may have been present when you had a young, upstart practice.

You can replicate some of these approaches toward your relationships with other partners, those extensions of your team. Re-engage with these partners to assess the services that you offer or leverage from a back-end perspective. There may be opportunities through these discussions to save money and/or headaches, or to boost cash flow. For instance, you may want to consider offering in-house membership plans or third-party financing. And, once you have debuted these new offerings or services, you will want to shout it from the rooftops! Assure that existing and new patients know such options exist by sharing them across all social platforms and other marketing channels.

### ***Pandemic today, stronger dentistry tomorrow***

It may not seem that way right now, but your practice and the industry can emerge stronger on the other side. Your team will not only be intact, but it will also be more committed than before with a renewed sense of what that word “team” means. After all, you have adapted and supported each other through the worst. Rich rewards await those who are willing to think creatively and strategically as the world panics around them.

### **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.