



Simple Strategies to Increase Patient Referrals

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Dental marketing trends come and go, but one method of advertisement will never lose effectiveness. That is word-of-mouth. Patient referrals are an important part of your income stream, and well worth the effort to optimize.

Don't just count on happy patients to spread the word. They might not know you are accepting – and actively seeking – new patients. Furthermore, they might not be motivated to send family and friends your way.

Should you reward patients?

First and foremost, decide if you will reward referring patients, new patients, both, or neither. Rewards are usually offered as a discount or free service, which can significantly increase referrals. However, the decision is not just a matter of preference. Professional organizations and local laws often prohibit or limit this practice. For example, Alberta dentists are prohibited from rewarding patients for referrals, discounting new patient services, or using coupons.

Other ways to increase referrals

Even without a financial or similar incentives, there are plenty of ways to encourage patients to recommend you.

- Use in-office signage to encourage referrals and advertise rewards (if any).
- Use referral cards. When happy patients are leaving your office, hand them an extra business card with a request to pass it along to a friend. Better yet, offer a specially printed referral card with an invitation to new patients, along with discounts if applicable.
- Thank referring patients. Maybe you can't legally offer financial rewards, or you might not be comfortable with the idea. However, a heart felt "thank you" can go a long way toward encouraging more referrals.
- Optimize the patient's experience. Often, a person will leave your office with a numb or painful mouth, areas of swelling, or feeling woozy from anesthesia. Only after the

patient heals will he or she fully appreciate the clinical quality of your work. Therefore, a lot of judgments are based on customer service, wait times, attitude of staff, comfort of surroundings, and other aspects of the person's overall experience with your practice.

- Get social. In today's world, most "word-of-mouth" advertising happens in the form of social media. Make sure you have an active presence on platforms such as Facebook, which allows patients to tag your practice when their friends ask for dental practice recommendations.
- Encourage reviews. Yes, some people still ask trusted friends to recommend a dentist, and that will probably never change. However, others simply go to Yelp, Facebook, or Google and read the reviews. Every patient who leaves a good review is essentially recommending your practice to everyone. It is also helpful to display testimonials on your website (this is also prohibited in some provinces, so check local laws).

Conclusion

This is one of the least expensive marketing tactics, with virtually no risk. Even if you offer a financial incentive for referrals, it is contingent upon getting a new patient, so your ROI is guaranteed. However, that doesn't mean it should be treated as a passive income stream. Put just as much thought and effort into your referral program as any other marketing strategy.

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.

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