



Inbound vs Outbound Marketing – Which Is Better For Your Dental Practice?

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Modern technology has transformed dentistry in almost every way, from laser treatments to electronic medical records. It has also transformed dental marketing, with the growing popularity of inbound marketing. What is it, and how can you put it to work for your practice?

Push vs pull: the difference between inbound and outbound marketing

You've probably heard these terms, but you might not know exactly what they mean. They sound like just more buzzwords, but there is a distinct difference. One refers to aggressively pushing your marketing message, while the other pulls in the audience.

Inbound (pull) marketing

Think of inbound marketing like a magnet, which attracts new patients to your practice. This technique utilizes social media, SEO (search engine optimization), content marketing, and other platforms to attract attention. The marketing materials are more than advertisements; they offer some value to the end user.

Most commonly, inbound marketing materials seek to educate, entertain, or both. Inbound is sometimes called permissive marketing, because people are viewing or hearing your message by choice.

Outbound (push) marketing

This method includes some of the best-known traditional marketing channels, such as television, newspapers, magazines, billboards, cold calls, and radio. It works by spreading and broadcasting your materials to as many people as possible, essentially pushing your message into the market.

The primary tool of outbound marketing is advertisements, which offer the end user little or no value. People don't seek out these types of marketing materials, but they see your message because it is where they are already looking. As an example, a commercial appears in the middle of a TV show the person is watching. For that reason, outbound is also known as interruptive marketing.

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Why inbound is overtaking outbound

Inbound is a newer, more progressive style of marketing. It is also much better suited to today's audience, especially dental patients. The benefits of inbound marketing include:

- Lower cost – The most basic inbound techniques, such as posting on social media or a hosted blog platform like Medium, are free. The next level, such as premium posts or a customized and optimized website, are quite affordable. Compare this to the price of a TV commercial or roadside billboard.
- Targeted audience – The goal of outbound marketing is to reach as many people as possible. Of course, only a small percentage of those might be interested in your services. Inbound marketing targets people who are actively seeking the type of service you offer, in your area. They might be using Google to look for dental information. Facebook might recommend your page because it is similar to content the person has viewed.
- Higher ROI – HubSpot surveyed thousands of businesses and other organizations for their 2018 State of Inbound global marketing report. According to their results, 53 percent of all respondents reported that inbound marketing provides a higher ROI (return on investment). Only 16 percent reported a higher ROI from outbound.
- Two-way relationship – People fast-forward through commercials, skip over print ads, and hang up on telemarketers. Outbound marketing is called interruptive for a good reason, and no one likes to be interrupted. Not only do people tend to ignore those messages, but they also get annoyed. That's not a good start to a doctor-patient relationship. On the other hand, inbound marketing uses content that people choose to view. It creates positive connotations for your brand. Furthermore, it is often interactive, making the person feel like he or she is getting to know you.
- Build your brand – As mentioned above, inbound marketing materials attract an audience because they provide value. Your audience might be looking for information about a

dental procedure or ways to solve an oral health problem. Your article, video, or infographic provides the answers they are seeking. In addition to delivering your marketing message, it showcases your expertise.

Why outbound isn't dead yet

The same HubSpot survey mentioned above asked respondents if they think their current marketing strategies are successful. Among businesses using primarily inbound, 75 percent said yes. For those using primarily outbound, the number of positive responses was only slightly lower, at 62.

As you might have noticed, the percentage of professionals who express faith in outbound marketing is much higher than those who are seeing good ROI. Why are so many people dedicated to inefficient methods? There are a few reasons. One is simple dedication to the "tried and true." Professionals have used standard outbound advertising for decades, and some are hesitant to progress. However, outbound marketing does still have some distinct benefits.

- Brand awareness – You will almost certainly reach a larger audience with outbound marketing, which can help spread brand awareness. The more times a person sees your practice name and logo, the more likely they are to remember it.
- Greater reach – Additionally, this type of marketing casts a wide net. It will certainly reach many people who aren't interested in your services. However, inbound methods are so targeted that they might miss a few people who are interested.
- Business-specific factors – Some industries are well-suited to outbound marketing. Generally, dentistry is not among them. However, this can vary depending on your specialty. Much (but not all) of inbound marketing revolves around content that lives online. Internet use is lower among older adults, who may look to television, magazines, or newspapers for news and entertainment. Therefore, geriatric practices may see more benefit from advertising in those mediums than other practices do.

Putting it all together – tips for adapting your marketing strategy

How can you implement inbound marketing? Should you discontinue outbound? The best marketing strategy is customized to your dental practice, so there isn't a universal answer to those questions. Here are some tips to help you evaluate and upgrade your strategy.

- Analyze – Don't blindly spend money on advertising and hope that it works. Your marketing plan should include a way to track important metrics such as leads, new

patients, and ROI. Review these numbers comparing your inbound and outbound strategies to see what works best for you.

- Diversify – The best dental marketing is usually primarily inbound, but not exclusively so. In particular, local media can be beneficial, and advertising is usually less expensive. For example, a neighborhood publication or broadcast might have a small audience, but most of them are within driving distance of your practice.
- Have a good website – As the hub of your online presence, this is central to most inbound marketing techniques. Furthermore, if a traditional ad piques someone’s interest, that person will probably check out your website before calling your office.
- Get social – Your presence on social media is the second most important part of your online presence, and it is one of the best platforms for inbound marketing.
- Use inbound ads – Inbound marketing doesn’t exclude paid advertisements that reach large audiences. However, it offers opportunities to reach more targeted audiences. For example, Google AdWords puts your advertisement at the top of the search results – but only if the query is relevant. Most dentists find this to be a much better use of advertising dollars than the “shot in the dark” that is traditional media.

Conclusion

Very few dental practices use inbound or outbound marketing exclusively, but most have a strong focus on one or the other. A focus on inbound techniques can lower your marketing budget while improving results and building better patient relationships.

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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