

Your First Dental Marketing Plan: How To Get The Word Out And Get Patients Into Your New Practice

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Maybe you are fresh out of dental school, and ready to open an office. More likely, you've been working for someone else for a while, and are ready to strike out on your own. Either way, the idea of marketing a brand-new dental practice can be daunting. With no established reputation or patient base, there is no foundation to build on. Where do you start? Where do you go from there?

Educate yourself



Yes, you are already quite well educated – as a dentist. However, dental school does not prepare you for entrepreneurship. Clinical skills are no use in accounting, HR (human resources), PR (public relations), computer network administration, marketing, and business management.

In reality, you probably won't be handling these things personally. The business side of dentistry is a full-time job, or several of them. A large, busy practice will have several employees or contracted companies overseeing various aspects of management and marketing. However, as a business owner, you will be hiring these people and overseeing their work. It is important to learn the basics, and understand every aspect of your business, even the ones you aren't actively involved in.

Start with a good business plan

What are the demographics in your area? Who is your ideal patient? What services do you want to sell the most? How quickly do you expect to grow? How many similar dentists are already in the area? What differentiates your practice from them?

These are just a few of the basic questions that you will encounter when developing a branding and marketing strategy. The answers should be in your business plan, which is a written document detailing your business description and strategies. If you don't have a business plan, it is advisable to draft one now. It will be an invaluable reference and "roadmap" as you develop your marketing plan and other aspects of your practice.

Define your brand



Consistency is essential for making your message memorable, as well as for effective SEO (search engine optimization). The following elements should be decided and recorded before you begin marketing.

- Practice name – Are you using your own name, or a business name? Will you use the full name, or a shortened version in marketing materials? You don't want different variations showing up in different places.
- Phone and address – These might seem obvious. However, like your name, you want to avoid different variations. Different formatting and spelling variations will undermine SEO. It's much easier to be consistent from the beginning than it is to update multiple listings later.
- Logo – Online directories and many membership-based websites will request this. You also want to include it on business cards, signage, and other materials.
- Other brand identity elements – Many practices use a slogan or tagline. You might also want specific colors, styles, or fonts in marketing materials. Again, making these decisions early and recording them will simplify many tasks.
- USP – This is your Unique Selling Proposition, which should answer the question of why someone would choose your practice above the competition.
- URL – You might not be ready for a website, but you can still reserve your URL. It will be included in many advertisements, business cards, and other materials that you will probably want to design early. Avoid placeholder text by having it ready to go.

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Lay the foundation for branding and marketing

You want to establish a basic online presence and brand identity before you open your doors, or shortly thereafter. This includes:

- Get a good website – The importance of your website cannot be overstated. It is central to everything you do online, and it is where prospective patients will go first to learn about you. A common mistake is taking too long to get started. Design, programming, content creation, and optimization take time. Ideally, the website should be designed in advance, and ready to launch a few weeks to a couple of months before opening.
- Sign up for social media accounts – Don't go overboard with so many accounts that you can't manage them all. However, you'll want to use the most popular ones, such as

Facebook, Instagram, and You Tube. Encourage friends and your new employees to like and share your social pages. This will help build excitement in advance of your grand opening.

- Add your practice to directories and review sites – The most important is Google My Business, which can help you appear on Google Maps and local search results. You will also want to add profiles at other popular doctor rating websites, business directories, and general review sites. Don't forget any local directories that are specific to your region.
- Prepare signage and printed items –Although most modern marketing happens in the physical space, branded physical items still matter. Number one on the list is on-site signage. You want it to be attractive, eye-catching, easy to read, and prominent. However, building owner or local ordinances may limit the size and placement of your sign, so you'll need to check before purchasing one. Additionally, have letterheads, branded forms, employee badges, and similar items printed and ready before opening.

Opening and marketing your practice



The transition from planning to actively marketing happens a few weeks to months before opening. If you start too soon, people will lose interest. However, you need time to create a buzz and generate leads. How can you get people excited about a new dentist in town?

- Make a splash with your grand opening – This is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the community. Make it special. An open house or fun event that reflects your brand is ideal. Offer coupons, discounts, or other special offers. Promote it on social media and paid advertising. Distribute a well written press release. Invite local health reporters and social influencers.
- Stay active on social media – Post regularly, with quality content that appeals to your target market. Include some educational and entertaining posts, along with practice news and promotions.
- Start a blog – People are always looking for information online, and you can attract their attention by providing it. Google loves fresh content, so regularly adding new posts will boost your rankings. Lastly, quality educational material helps establish you as an authority in the field.
- Encourage patient reviews – It is often said that word of mouth is the best advertisement. That still holds true, though the word is more often spread via online review websites. Ask patients to leave reviews, via email, text, printed handouts, or even a verbal request.
- Update your website – It should be optimized for user experience and search visibility before launching. However, optimization is an ongoing process. Stay up to date with technology trends by adding new popular features. Adjust your strategy as search algorithms and SEO standards evolve. Make updates when your hours, staffing, services, or other information changes. Build quality backlinks. Regularly add new content.

Conclusion

As a dentist, you are focused on the clinical aspect, getting the right equipment, hiring qualified people, and planning your services. Marketing might seem like a vague concept, something you can put off until later. That is the first marketing mistake that many new practice owners make. It's never too late to start marketing, but the best way to get an edge on the competition is to start planning early.

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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