

How Not to Market Your Dental Practice: Top 5 Mistakes to Avoid

January 3, 2020

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There was a time not too long ago when dentists relied on word-of-mouth referrals. Marketing was virtually unheard of, as most people just went to the same local dental practice that their friends and family use. Oh, how times have changed!

Today, there is not a local dentist, but dozens of them in most cities. In just a decade, the dentist-to-patient ratio in Canada changed from 1:1,742 to 1: 1,622 according to a CDA (Canadian Dental Association) study performed in 2016 . This trend has continued and shows no signs of slowing.

Advertising and marketing of dental practices is not only common but essential in this competitive climate. Moreover, the effectiveness of your marketing plan can make the difference between a struggling practice and a thriving one.

1. Outdated website

You probably put up a simple site many years ago, which was considered progressive at the time. However, the internet evolves at lightning speed and that old website is now outdated, out of compliance with SEO (search engine optimization) and out of touch with patient's expectations. If it hasn't been updated recently – or at all – this should be your top priority.

Basic requirements for a patient-friendly, Google-friendly website include:

- Entirely functional on mobile devices with a fast loading time
- Original, high-quality content (no keyword stuffing, and no reusing articles that already exist on the internet)
- Aesthetically appealing layout, with long blocks of text broken up by bulleted lists, subheadings, and images
- Engaging or interactive features, such as videos and chatbots

2. Anti-social approach

A few years ago, social media was just something the kids were doing. Today, it is a hotbed of activity with people of all ages shopping, researching businesses, seeking out healthcare information, and more. More than 25 million of Canada's 37 million residents were using Social media as of 2018, and that number is expected to exceed 27 million by the year 2023 . If you aren't on social media, or if you aren't taking it seriously, now is the time to start.

Key points for social media success include:

- Take the time to complete your profile. Fill in all the fields, add services offered, practice description, office hours, and any other information you can.
- Choose good profile and cover photos. They should be high-quality images and reflective of your branding. A logo or a professional photo of the lead dentist are good choices for profile picture.
- Keep it active. You'll quickly lose your following if the account stagnates. Post regularly, and update your profile as needed if any practice information changes.
- Engage! Respond to comments and messages promptly and professionally.

3. Unclear branding

Brands aren't just for products. Branding refers to presenting a certain image that conveys your marketing message and makes your practice recognizable. If a lot of people are involved in your website, social media, and other public relations, then you might want to consider a written brand style guide to keep everyone "on the same page." For smaller practices with marketing duties relegated to just a couple of employees or contractors, an informal verbal description of your brand is enough.

No matter how you choose to implement it, the most important elements of branding include:

- Marketing message: Your USP (unique selling proposition), niche, and general image should be reflected in marketing materials.
- Logo: Choose something distinctive and stick with it. A one-off change as needed is okay, but don't change your logo every year or use multiple versions.
- Colour palette: Don't be too rigid with this and quell creativity, but keep a constant look through your website, social media images, advertisements, and printed materials.
- Text: The tone of writing should match the personality of your practice, be it formal, humorous, friendly, etc. You might also want to pick one or a few fonts to be used predominantly in your materials.

4. Lack of customer service training

Marketing begins outside your practice, with blogs, web pages, advertisements, social posts, and other lead-acquisition methods. However, marketing doesn't stop there. The final, and most important, step is converting those leads into patients. That means your receptionist's skills should include not only proficiency with your practice management software and booking appointments, but also customer service and sales.

Here are a few ways to ensure that your team is handling phone calls properly.

- Make sure everyone in your office is aware of any special offers you are running, and that your staff can answer basic questions about services available.
- Have adequate staffing so that callers are not rushed or put on hold.
- Randomly monitor phone calls and follow-up with the responsible employee if you discover poor customer service.
- Use phone scripts to help receptionists through common scenarios.
- Invest in professional customer service training for your staff. Many types and levels of courses are available, and you will be richly rewarded for the small investment.

5. NAP inconsistencies

NAP – name, address, and phone number – is probably the most basic part of your practice information, but discrepancies can hurt your digital performance more than you might imagine. When a person searches for a physical business such as a dental office, Google offers local listings, conveniently displayed on Google maps. In order to provide the best and most accurate results, it filters out potentially bad listings (closed businesses, wrong addresses, etc.) The more mentions that Google finds of a business at a given address, the more confidence it has that the information is accurate. The catch is that those mentions must be exact matches.

Inconsistencies in your NAP can happen more easily than you might think. Common problems to check for include:

- Old info: If your practice has moved or changed phone numbers, update or remove any online listings with the previous location.
- Spelling differences: Abbreviated words (ST vs street), omitted words (Smile Factory INC vs Smile Factory), and variations (Dr. Doe vs Jane Doe DDS) read like different businesses to Google.
- Provider-specific entries: Do not create a separate Google My Business listing for each dentist at your practice. Google will see it as separate businesses with unverifiable information.

As many dentists are relatively new to the world of marketing, many are making serious missteps. The good news is that if you avoid these common mistakes, you can get an edge on the competition.

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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