

Marketing Your Dental Practice Without Breaking the Bank

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Hardly anyone can claim to be unaffected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Even those fortunate enough to avoid illness have surely felt the economic pain. That is especially true of businesses that require personal contact – such as dental practices. Across North America, dentists have closed their doors to non-emergency patients, due to caution, mandates of local governments, or simply the lack of demand.

The short-term economic impact of this pandemic has been devastating, and longer-term projections look bleak. No longer are financial experts debating if there will be a recession, but rather how bad it will be. That leaves many dentists wondering how their practices are going to recover from recent losses while facing an adverse economy. As you might expect, marketing is an important part of the process.

You need new patients, and lots of them. So does every other dentist in town. Meanwhile, people suffering personal financial hardships are likely to postpone elective treatments. That means the potential patient base is shrinking while competition becomes fiercer, and your marketing budget is tighter than ever. What can you do?

Let's start with the one thing you should not do. Don't give up. Recessions end, and hard times get easier. The need for essential treatment – and the desire for elective treatment – is perpetual. There will always be dental patients, even if it takes a little more effort to bring them through your door.

Most importantly, keep marketing. If you can afford to ramp up your efforts, by all means do so now. However, if your budget is especially tight, you can still promote your practice. The key is concentrating on low cost, high ROI (return on investment) strategies. Below are three of the most effective.

Focus on Local SEO

You've probably noticed that the search page looks different depending on your query. For example, if you search for interior design ideas, you'll see an assortment of pictures at the top of the page. However, if you search for furniture store, you will see a map. When Google detects a search for a physical business, it will limit results to those in close proximity – this is known as local search. Local SEO specifically optimizes your website for this type of search.

Local SEO is one of the most cost-effective ways to market your dental practice for several reasons. To begin with, your audience is naturally targeted. Organic SEO is beneficial, but it can attract searchers from out of your area, or even from other countries. Unless your service is exceedingly specialized and high-end, those people are not going to travel to your office. They might visit your website but will never become patients.

Postal mailers or ads in the local newspaper might seem like a good way to target your neighborhood. After all, most people who see the ads will be close to your office. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of them are looking for a dentist at the moment. Furthermore, postcards and printed publications quickly find their way to the recycle bin. Once that happens, your ad is gone – along with the money that you spent on it. SEO, on the other hand, is a long-term investment.

Make the most of social media

It can be hard to build momentum on social networks without paid advertising, which is discouraging to dentists on a tight budget. However, that doesn't mean you should give up on social media marketing. Facebook and most other networks allow you to target specific demographics when you advertise, making the investment more valuable. Also, if your campaign increases your following, then it will have the lasting benefit of increasing the organic reach of future posts.

What if social media advertising just isn't in your budget? Should you still keep posting? Absolutely! In truth, the real value of social media marketing is not in direct lead acquisition, but rather in digital visibility and reputation management. People expect any business to have a social media presence.

Approximately 70 to 80 percent of people will research a business online before visiting. That means, even if the lead wasn't acquired via digital marketing, your online presence is crucial for converting the individual into a patient. Your dental website is the single most important

representation of your practice on the internet. However, social media is probably a close second. Regularly post engaging, inviting content reflective of your brand identity.

Never underestimate the importance of patient reviews

Many dentists prefer to ignore online reviews, because they cannot control what people say about them. Furthermore, patient privacy ethics and laws (especially HIPAA for USA dentists) make it difficult to respond appropriately. Unfortunately, people tend to be more outspoken when they are displeased. Therefore, a passive strategy will probably lead to a disproportionately low rating – and that matters more than you might think.

There was a time when word-of-mouth was the best advertisement you could have. If someone needed a dentist, he or she would ask friends, family, and acquaintances for recommendations. People still put high importance on others' opinions, but they don't need to ask around. Instead, they look at reviews on Google, Facebook, Yelp, and similar platforms.

According to BrightLocal's 2019 Local Consumer Review Survey, 82 percent of people read online reviews, and only 53 percent are willing to consider a business with an overall rating below four stars. Contrary to common belief, it's not hard to increase positive reviews. You just need to ask. A simple text, email, or even verbal request will go a long way toward encouraging happy patients to review your practice.

When calculating your budget, don't consider marketing as money spent, but rather money invested. Similar to a personal retirement plan, your current situation might not allow as large of investment as you would like. However, as you see growth, you will have more to invest, leading to higher returns.

What you spend today will come back to you (several times over) in the following weeks and months in higher new patient numbers, and therefore higher revenue. If marketing is truly depleting the bottom line, you don't need a smaller budget, you need a different 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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