

# Changing Course: Steering Your Dental Practice to Post-Pandemic Success

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Where do you see your practice – and yourself professionally – in 12 months? What about in three years? What are your longterm business goals, and are you on track to achieve them? You probably could have answered those questions easily a few months ago. Then COVID-19 struck, and everything changed.

Your previous projections and goals for the year are likely no longer achievable. With plans derailed, it seems everything took a sharp turn in an unknown direction. Planning and goal setting might seem impossible and impractical right now. However, it is as important as ever, if not more so.

## Start with a plan

For many businesses, including dentistry, the pandemic was akin to encountering a massive roadblock on a well-planned journey. Imagine you are on a road trip and all routes become impassable, your destination suddenly unreachable, and you are forced to take detours through unknown territory. Would you throw out the map, compass, and GPS? Probably not.

In practice management, your business plans and goals are your navigational tools. They define where you are going and how you will get there, providing a guiding light if you veer off course.

Instead of discarding your now-irrelevant plan, revisit and revise it. Set feasible short- and long-term goals, based on the best information you have at the moment. Be flexible and willing to make adjustments if needed. As time progresses, if you find your practice missing short-term goals, you know you need to adjust course in order to stay on track for meeting long-term goals.

## **Adjust your marketing**

Some dentists and other business owners mistakenly view marketing as an optional expense, which can be paused during hard times. Then they find themselves wondering how it is possible to plan for growth under current circumstances. In reality, marketing is an important part of the answer.

The new normal might not resemble the old normal in many ways, but some things never change. One of the enduring facts of life is that people need dental care. That means there will always be potential patients out there looking for the right dentist. If they do not find you, they will find your competitors.

Marketing your dental practice is as important now as ever, but you might need to adjust your strategy a bit.

- SEO (search engine optimization) is the cornerstone of modern marketing. However, COVID19 has changed search patterns. More people are seeking virtual consultations, inquiring about the safety of potential procedures, and looking for information about new protocols. Additionally, some people are postponing major treatment and using the delay as an opportunity to research. Check regularly for new potential keywords.
- Social media has been gaining importance in digital marketing for many years. With people seeking to stay home as much as possible, many are turning to social networks to stay in touch. Now more than ever, you need a strong presence. Do not just set up a profile, but post engaging content and respond to comments or messages. You want to be part of the conversation.
- Do not overlook marketing to your existing patients. Email newsletters are a great way to stay in touch, and patients who have subscribed want to hear from you. However, if your newsletters are low-quality or lacking in content, they will seem more like spam to the recipient. If you make the effort to create value, subscribers will keep reading.

## **Strengthen patient relationships**

Relationship building is the foundation of patient retention. In the wake of COVID-19, it is more important than ever for two reasons. First of all, as people return to dental offices, they do so cautiously. They want to feel confident in your ability to mitigate infection risks while still providing quality care. Secondly, some people are not ready to come back. The longer it has been since they have seen you, the less they will think of you as “their” dentist – unless you have a strong doctor-patient relationship.

- **Stay in touch** – As many patients take a hiatus from dental care, your practice could be “out of sight, out of mind.” However, you can maintain a strong line of communication, even without seeing them in person. Keep patients updated about changes in scheduling, new policies in your office, and availability updates. Follow up with a call or email after procedures. Add new content to your blog.
- **Personal service** – Before the pandemic, how often did you hear complaints about dental and medical care being too impersonal? The answer is probably frequently. Now, as safety precautions require minimal face-to-face interaction, the feeling of disconnect is likely to grow. However, less in-person service does not have to mean less personal service. Patients need the reassurance of a friendly, knowledgeable voice when they call, not a cold voice mail message. They want timely replies to their messages, and compassion when they express concerns. In the chaos of reinventing your workflow, be careful that customer service does not fall by the wayside.
- **Earn patient trust** – You need to educate patients and prospective patients about new protocols in your practice. That does not simply mean informing them about masks, social distancing, and other changes they need to make. It also means explaining the great lengths that you and your team are going to in order to ensure patient safety. Let them know that you are staying current on the latest developments and implementing the latest recommendations.

## **Embracing technology**

Virtually everyone agrees that COVID-19 will change the world in countless ways. While many of those changes remain shrouded in uncertainty, we can be quite confident that society’s newfound love of technology will endure. In reality, it did not begin with the pandemic. Life has been going digital for quite some time, with very practical reasons such as convenience and cost savings. For those reasons, we can expect the technology trend to continue.

As you map your new course, remember to steer toward the high tech, from digital marketing to virtual consultations. Position your practice for success when we emerge from the pandemic fog in a new, high-tech normal.

## **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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