

Developing a Post-Pandemic Marketing Plan

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As the COVID-19 curve flattens, communities across North America are cautiously lifting restrictions, and health services are among the first to resume in most regions. Odds are, your dental practice recently reopened, or you are preparing to do so soon. However, the new normal does not look anything like the old normal. While your first concern is undoubtedly safety, you also have a business to run.

Managing an unpredictable caseload

Some people have been living with painful dental problems for weeks, and they are eager for relief. Some are not too concerned about coronavirus and simply want to resume their lives, including cosmetic or elective procedures. Others are in high-risk categories or simply cautious. They would rather suffer with a toothache than risk a dental appointment.

Which type of patient is the majority? That is difficult to predict, and it will probably change as the situation evolves. Ideally, the number of people ready to return will match your capacity, and demand will grow as you are ready to increase volume. Realistically, that probably will not happen. Instead, you will have an overwhelming backlog, or a lack of patients, or both at different times. How can you adjust your marketing strategy accordingly? Here are some tips:

Ramp up your teledentistry programme

Some dentists view remote services as a stop-gap measure, which is no longer necessary once in-person visits are possible. That is a mistake. While the perimeters may change as temporary regulations expire, telemedicine will always have a place in dentistry. If that place is not your office, it will be someone else's.

In the short-term, remote consultations can help you clear the patient backlog more quickly and boost revenue, while keeping the number of people in your physical office to a minimum. In the long-term, your reputation and business will benefit from being an early adopter of a quickly growing trend.

Focus on marketing emergency services

Some people have postponed cosmetic and non-urgent care due to official mandates. Others choose to do so out of caution; those people will not return until they feel it is safe – except in emergency. Therefore, urgent

care will likely continue to be a lifeline for your practice for some time.

Emergency dentistry is not only a vital community service, but also an excellent way to acquire new patients even during the best of times. Marketing these procedures is a great long-term investment.

Invest in SEO (search engine optimization) now

You might not need or want many new patients at the moment, as you have a backlog of appointment requests. That does not mean you should pause marketing. Just the opposite, it is a great time to focus on long-range marketing goals, because there is temporarily less pressure for instant results.

SEO is an investment in the future of your practice. In many ways, it could be compared to building a professional reputation. A dentist earns the respect of colleagues and others in the industry gradually, with consistent professionalism and a growing list of achievements. Similarly, a website gradually establishes authority, acquires backlinks, and builds keywords with regular additions of fresh content.

Communication is key

Which procedures pose the most risk? Are surgical masks adequate? Is nitrous oxide equipment safe? The questions are endless, and the answers are sparse. You and your team are almost certainly overwhelmed – and possibly confused – by inadequate, conflicting, and improving information about COVID-19. Just imagine how patients with little to no clinical knowledge of dentistry must feel. That is why direct communications with patients as well as messaging on your website and social posts are vital.

People are nervous. Some are worried about infection and wonder if dental treatments are too risky. Others are unconcerned about coronavirus, and therefore frustrated with delays and lack of access to care. Silence only exacerbates both problems. Instead, keep your patients and followers in the loop. Help educate them about the latest facts, explain what precautions your practice is taking and why. Position yourself as a source of reliable information and – more importantly – as a trustworthy professional looking out for your patients' safety.

Adapting to a new normal

Will dentistry ever return to what it once was? Probably not – but that is not necessarily a bad thing. Although it has not happened yet, most experts in the field expect a reliable COVID-19 vaccine at some point. When that happens, if not before, the need for excessive social distancing will fade away. In other words, you will not be limited to a few patients a day and checking them in the parking lot forever. However, some of the changes we have seen will be long lasting, or at least mark the beginning of a new era.

Much of the safety and sanitation protocol commonly used in dental offices today was developed decades ago, in response to HIV. Of course, those measures protect dental professionals and patients not only from HIV, but also from a wide range of bloodborne pathogens. Unfortunately, current protocols are scant on protections from airborne and respiratory pathogens, such as coronavirus. While new safety measures will require some adjustment (not to mention the short-term challenges of obtaining PPE), they are likely to benefit the dental community in the long term.

Beyond new safety concerns and procedural changes, how will the new normal be different? The answer is technology. From social media marketing to teledentistry, the virtual world has taken on a whole new level of importance that is not likely to fade as the pandemic passes. In reality, the world has been going digital for years. After experiencing the ease of video consultations and text communication with doctors, many people will not want to go back to the old way. Expect trends such as going paperless and online communications to continue.

Conclusion

In the midst of chaos, you are necessarily focused on the here and now. However, you do not want your dental practice and financial standing to be in a permanent state of chaos. Therefore, it is necessary to look past the crisis, and make smart choices now with an eye on long term success and future growth.

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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