



Feature

When Marketing Goes Wrong: Four Fatal Mistakes to Avoid

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You probably know that time and money spent marketing your dental practice is one of the wisest investments you'll ever make – if it is effective. However, these marketing missteps can render your efforts ineffective, or worse.

Legal and Regulatory Violations

When most marketers discuss “rules,” they are referring to Google requirements, social media best practices, or something similar. These things are important for success, but you won't lose your license or go to jail for an infraction. However, in dental marketing there is another set of rules, which can have much more serious consequences.

Applicable laws and requirements of licensing boards vary depending on your location and specialty. It is surprisingly easy to commit a HIPAA violation or other infraction, especially when responding to negative feedback online.

When someone leaves an inaccurate review, you want to defend yourself. If your patient voices a legitimate complaint, you want to apologize. Don't. In either situation, your response would inadvertently confirm that the person was a patient, which violates HIPAA as well as patient privacy expectations.

What can you say? Public responses can only contain general information and statements, such as “We treat all patients with respect” or “Our clinicians are well-trained and experienced.” Nothing in your response can address any detail of the patient's individual experience, or refer to that person's treatment. However, you can contact the person by private, secure methods to discuss the details of his or her complaint.

Beyond HIPAA, dentists must be mindful of local regulations and dental board advertising requirements. Depending on your location, you may not be allowed to use superlative and comparative terms – such as “I’m the best dentist in town,” or “my practice is better than others.” Similarly, beware of terms implying you are a specialist, if you do not hold the applicable board certification.

In any advertisement or public statement, if you are in doubt, consult with your lawyer. A few mistaken words could damage your reputation, incur costly fines, or even endanger your license.

Targeting the Wrong Market

What are the demographics of your target market? Can you describe your ideal patient? These are simple questions, but a surprising number of dentists find them difficult to answer. You might consider everyone as your target market. After all, anyone who rings your phone can help fill your appointment calendar. The problem is, marketing designed for everyone isn’t likely to resonate with anyone. When you make a campaign universal, you also make it generic. Furthermore, when you do succeed in attracting patients who are not a good fit for your practice, they are more likely to be dissatisfied, and less likely to return.

Consider these points to identify your market:

- Location – There is a wealth of marketing data available, but most of it is national or international. Every region, town, and neighborhood is different. Find out the demographics of people who live in your area, those who are close enough to visit your office. Their ages, incomes, lifestyles, and health needs determine the available market for your service.
- USP (Unique Selling Proposition) – What sets you apart from the competition? Why should people choose your practice? What is unique about the services? Once you have defined exactly what you are offering, it will be easier to find the right market.
- Planned growth – Determine which procedures are most profitable, and which you prefer doing. Think about what aspects of your practice you want to increase. For example, if you are not seeing enough cosmetic cases, then you will need to research the best market for those procedures.

Once you know exactly who you want to reach, you can begin targeting your marketing efforts with laser precision. Anticipate the needs and interests of your ideal patient, and address those points in marketing materials.

Inadequate Online Presence

You probably know the importance of making a good first impression. In the internet age, first impressions rarely occur in person. Most people will see your website and social accounts long before they meet you. They form opinions and judgements about your character, skills, and work ethic, based on your online presence. The most common mistakes include:

- Low quality websites – Your site should be professionally designed, mobile friendly, and include valuable content. If it is shoddy, low quality, or appears to lack credibility, people will associate those qualities with you, and your work.
- Outdated information – When there are changes in practice information, such as staffing or office hours, update your site and online profiles promptly.
- Incomplete profiles – Make it easy for patients to learn about you. Don't leave blank spaces when completing profiles on social media, review websites, or any other public platform.
- Lack of social media policy – You want your posts to go viral for the right reasons. An offensive post or violation of patient privacy could have dire consequences. Always restrict access to social accounts, and provide clear guidelines for those who are authorized to post.

In-House Issues

Marketing does not stop when the phone rings or a patient walks through the door. The next step is converting leads into appointments, and converting new patients into returning patients. Your advertising efforts will be largely wasted if your team is not ready to, and trained to, follow up. Does your office suffer from these issues?

- Lack of customer service training – Ideally, your front office team should be friendly, personable, and efficient. However, even the most outgoing individuals will not understand the nuances of customer service without proper training.
- Overscheduling – Your patients are busy. When they are left waiting for extended periods, they feel like you are wasting their time. Therefore, the patient has formed an unfavorable opinion of you before an examination even begins.
- Poor intra-office communication – Does the receptionist know the details of the special offer you just published? Does the hygienist know that you want to promote teeth whitening? Marketing is truly a team effort. Every member of your staff should be familiar with your marketing plan, and able to answer questions about current advertised promotions.

- Not asking for reviews – Positive patient testimonials and reviews are among the most powerful tools for building your reputation. Additionally, the best way to combat a bad review is with a flood of good reviews.

About the Author



Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dentists. With a team of 180+ full time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps dentists who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.

