

## Dental Practice Marketing: The Key To Success

by Mary Groll, President, Mary Groll Marketing

Today, dentists faced with challenging economic times increasingly turn to marketing to build their practices. They know that **if they are not actively involved in marketing, their competition is**. To be successful, they must participate as well.

**The marketing process begins with branding.** Consumers are familiar with brands—Starbucks or Crest toothpaste, for example. Each company makes a promise to reproduce exactly the same experience with its product every time. Starbucks' coffee may not be the greatest coffee, but the Starbucks experience is consistent and reproducible. Crest delivers its self-proclaimed “cavity-fighting toothpaste” in every single tube. In each case, consumers buy the experience they know they can count on. They buy the brand.

**A dentist's product is his practice. He must select as his brand the one or two things about it that set it apart from its competition.** Then he must reproduce them with every contact his patients have with his office.

Dentist X elects to brand his practice as “patient-friendly.” There are numerous attributes with which he could have branded his practice: cutting-edge equipment and techniques, aesthetic values, creation of the perfect smile, decades of experience, pain-free treatments.

He has, instead, selected the “patient-friendly” atmosphere of his office as the distinguishing aspect of his practice for which he wants to become known. Although he cares about the other attributes listed above, he has not chosen to brand himself with them. Patients seeking a nurturing environment will seek **him** out.

**Everything flows from Dentist X's brand concept. It shapes the total experience his patients have with his practice.** The more he reproduces that experience, the bigger his brand grows. His logo expresses it. His letterhead and business cards reflect it. His website is an extension of it. His office culture reinforces it, and his dental treatments fulfill its promise. Branding is the first step in a Marketing Plan.

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Next come logo creation, letterhead and business card development, and website design. **“Websites” are almost a buzzword today.** Everyone is talking about them. Everyone seems to have one. Why?

Consider this: Jane Doe has just moved to a new community and needs a dentist. She can ask her friends for a recommendation. In which case, marketing begins with satisfied patients. Or **she can surf the web** (which she will probably do anyway to make sure that she has made the right choice.)

**More and more, the internet is the pathway into a dentist’s practice.** If Ms. Doe can’t find Dentist X’s website, he doesn’t exist. And if that website isn’t professional-looking, easy-to-navigate and informative, she will doubt the professionalism of his practice.

In any case, to maximize the likelihood of a prospective patient’s choosing him, Dentist X must also have in place systems for building solid relationships with patients and with other referring dentists.

**The true heart of any Marketing Plan lies in its strategies.** How will Dentist X build the trust in his patients that increases the likelihood of their accepting his treatment recommendations? What can he do to retain his current patients? Increase their referral of friends and family? Build other dentists’ referrals? Attract the kinds of cases he enjoys? Build his revenues and profits? Help more patients? A good Plan sets in place systems to address these questions.

Once strategies and tactics are established, marketing materials must support them. **Most Marketing Campaigns today rely heavily on e-marketing:** monthly e-blasts to stay in touch; informational fact sheets on pertinent procedures or techniques; newsletters featuring introductions of new staff, new locations, reviews of interesting cases, comments on local and national dental news stories.

**There is still, however, a need for more traditional marketing materials.** To educate patients to the full range of his services, a dentist must provide reception room brochures or fact sheets. Otherwise, a patient needing implants, endodontic work, etc., may go elsewhere not recognizing her own dentist’s expertise.

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For new patient acquisition, **it is important to establish a target market.** Print advertising and direct mail should be directed to populations that reproduce the same demographics as the dentist's current patient roster.

Less conventional avenues of marketing include offering educational seminars, writing informative articles in local publications, and volunteering services when needed.

Finally, when a dentist has a unique case or a human-interest story to tell, a news release mailed to local papers or distributed on-line can be invaluable.

**Producing bottom line results, dental practice marketing serves as a risk reduction system.** Handled well, it eliminates the haphazard development of a practice and sets it on a **course of systematic growth for the future.**

*Mary Groll has been in the marketing field for 30 years. Her company, Mary Groll Marketing, has particular expertise in the marketing of medical and dental practices. [www.marygroll.com](http://www.marygroll.com).*

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