

Anatomy of a successful practice: Strategies for marketing your practice

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The simple question is: How do dental patients find a new dentist? There are basically two ways. First is a referral. Your existing, happy patients are a great source of new ones. But what about everybody else? People who haven't been to a dentist in years and now have to find someone? Families who moved and are looking for a family dental practice? Someone who needs a dental specialist?

Dental marketing goes digital

Marketing where the lead finds the business when they have an active need is called inbound marketing. Studies show that 90 percent of people looking for a new service such as a dental practice will begin their search online. People once used the print Yellow Pages, but when you've got a mini-computer in your back-pocket, why bother?

Two challenges face your dental practice with digital inbound marketing:

1. **Visibility.** When someone does a search, you have to show-up on page one or you will lose business to practices that are there. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) gets you in the very top positions based on a bidding platform. This is essential as an early traffic driver and to garner more traffic from mobile searches. Organic SEO gets you free clicks and ties into location, but takes longer to rank on page one.

2. **Convertibility.** Your online ads and website are far more than just online listings. They are your most important marketing collateral and your first-tier salesperson.

Prospective patients will literally compare your website side-by-side with your competitors. You have to persuade them you are the best choice. Value, trust, convenience, price, experience, reputation... all of these are part of a strong web presence that converts.

5 strategies for success

Strategy No.1: Have an optimized website

Eighty-eight percent of consumers who search for a type of local business on a mobile device call or go to that business within 24 hours. Eighty-one percent of consumers research a product online before buying. Yet in the United States, more than half (52 percent) of small business owners do not have a website. Google recommends the following to get better rankings in your search engine:

1. Make pages primarily for users, not for search engines.
2. Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links. Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link.
3. Create a useful, information-rich site, and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content.
4. Use keywords to create descriptive, human-friendly URLs.
5. Make it mobile.

Having a website isn't enough. Search engine optimization, Google AdWords campaign, or social media marketing are needed to drive traffic to your website.

Strategy No. 2: Search engine optimization

Google's research into local search behavior reveals that local searchers are poised to take action. According to its findings, "50 percent of consumers who conducted a local search on their smartphone visited a store within a day, and 34 percent who searched on computer/tablet did the same." This means ranking in local search has a direct impact on in-store traffic. Mobile-friendly websites have seen a 10.8 percent increase in traffic since Google's Mobile-Friendly algorithm update. SEO provided the



highest return on spending over all other channels for both dental practice case studies, offering over a 10-to-1 return on marketing spending. Things to consider about SEO:

1. Complete your Google My Business profile & make sure that all information is accurate
2. Submit your business to local directories such as Yelp, Google+, HealthGrades and Yellow Pages
3. Encourage online reviews of your business
4. Integrate local keywords in your website, including: URLs, headings, titles, descriptions & page content
5. Ensure your NAP (Name Address, Phone Number) is consistent across your website, ads & all social channels
6. Include valuable local information on your website such as: opening hours, directions to your store, testimonials
7. Make sure your website passes Google's mobile friendly test, if not invest in responsive web design.
8. Speed your website up (Mobile users expect fast-loading websites, especially when on the go).

Strategy No. 3: Reviews

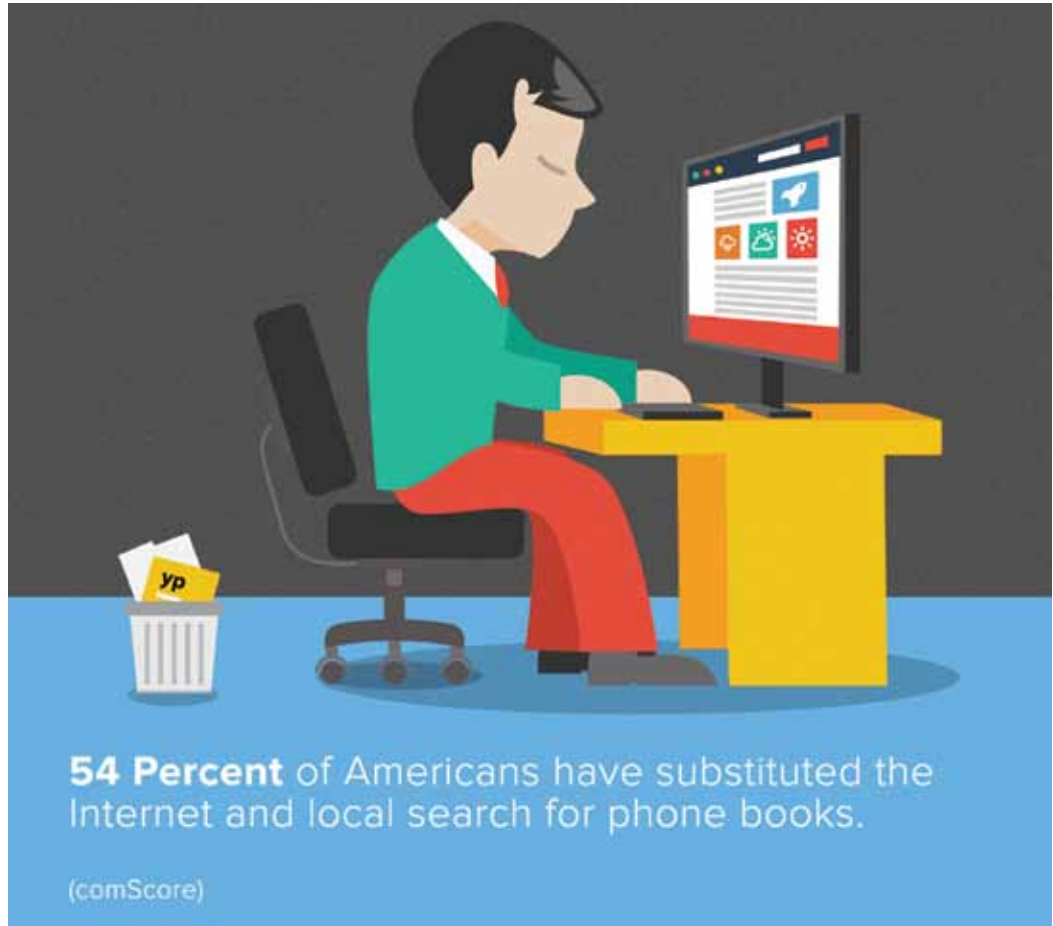
Why does my practice need reviews? Because 88 percent of your customers read reviews to determine the quality of your practice. For nearly nine in 10 consumers, an online review is equally as important as a personal recommendation. What patients say about you – both to friends and in online postings – is now a major component in marketing. People today have

more lines of communication and more platforms to share their opinions. Those opinions are, literally, marketing material for your dental practice. Every aspect of your service and medical results affect word of mouth/mouse. Exceptional work pays off here, but the core of this is your reputation, and that's in your hands. Things to consider about reviews:

1. Integrate into business processes. For a business, saying you will do something versus actually doing it, is a matter of the process being easy for employees and a required part of the internal procedures. This may require employee training and perhaps new procedures to be sure that they ask for reviews.
2. Regularity. Reviews are like traditional testimonials. If they all occurred last year or the year before both potential clients and the search engines are going to wonder what's up.
3. Diversity of review sites. Putting your eggs in one basket is never a good strategy. Being in a range of places protects against both eventualities.
4. Plan for the bad review. Even if you run the best business in the world, you will sooner or later get a bad review. Decide ahead of time how it will be handled and who will handle it. Ending up in argument on the front of the customer is a no-win situation and some thought put in how you are going to respond will avoid the worst outcomes.

Strategy No. 4: Pay per click

There are several places to purchase online ad-



vertising: Facebook, Twitter, display ads and Google Adwords. Adwords offers results at a lower cost and the best place to start. With paid reach, you can get your practice in front of potential patients without them looking for you; instead you go to them. Adwords can help speed up your SEO, increase your geographic reach and track patient leads. Things to consider about pay-per-click

1. Setting up your PPC Accounts. Consider hiring a company to help you to set-up and manage your campaigns. Their help is invaluable in helping to track sources of business and developing campaigns that work.

Strategy 5: Social media/Facebook

Your customers are social and so are your competitors. Your customers meet in these online channels like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Yelp, Google, YouTube, blogging and others to share content and spread the word. They also spread their influence, discussing and sharing what interests them. Things to consider about social media

1. Listen. Immerse yourself into the conversations. Read consumer commentary on dental services listed on Yelp or Angies list. Join the forums like LinkedIn.
2. Build your brand, create your personality and

presence online. Create a voice that others will be interested in following.

3. Be intentional. What you post and how often you post is crucial.
4. Be relevant. Social media is all about what will resonate now. Start with topics that relate to dentistry, your business or your customers. Consider posting things like developments in dental technology that your practice is adopting or a new service.
5. Be consistent. Much like having a website, having at the very least an active Facebook page is essential in presenting yourself as being in business and trustworthy

A word about reporting

This is one where you work with your marketing group so you know what the marketing data is really saying. Many dentists or office managers shy away from understanding analytics and digital marketing data. This is a mistake. You don't have to know all of the intricacies of Google Analytics (your marketing group should do that for you), but you do need to have an idea of what the data signifies. If you don't, you can't have a constructive dialogue with your marketer about modifications and improvements.

about the author CAD/CAM



Cody Baird started developing online campaigns in 2004, launching Milkmen with Shawn Baird in 2011. In his work, he tries to reflect his passions and values: attraction to originality, affinity for simple design, appreciation for well-made things and a belief that companies should try to make their communities a better place.

Case study No. 2: South Park Family Dental, San Antonio, Texas

Challenges

South Park is a multi-office practice owned by Dr. Shiva Izaddoust. Izaddoust needed to find more patients. And she needed to do it with a smaller budget. Izaddoust wanted a mobile website that better represented her practice. A website that would rank in the search results. At the time, she only ranked for searches with her practice name. Or in other words, the practice didn't rank for non-branded searches like dentist or dental implants.

Each practice operated under a different name. Having three different businesses operate on the same website is a big SEO problem and part of reason she wasn't ranking. She had to decide between a re-brand to consolidate names — staying with one website or splitting sites and keeping the names of each office.

The decision was made to keep each office name as is because patients were familiar with those brands. Izaddoust was opening a fourth office.

Solutions

Customized responsive websites: launched (4) new custom, mobile-friendly websites for each office. Optimized digital profiles: Claiming and verifying the Google+ Local, Bing Local, Yahoo Local, Yelp, Health Grades and 30 other digital profiles. Implemented review strategy and training how to ask for reviews and surveys were implemented.

Results

South Park has seen steady growth in patient revenues every year through budget reallocation from Yellow Page ads and AdWords to optimized website and SEO. At the same time, South Park has reduced its spending by almost \$20,000 in two years. It has increased unique website visits from 50 per month to 700 per month, a 1,300 percent increase. South Park ranks for 705 keywords. South Park's search engine traffic was worth \$4,181. Meaning, Izaddoust would have to spend \$4,100 dollars on AdWords to get the same traffic that her website is now generating for the cost of optimization.

Increased office call volume by 82 percent. Average calls in 2015 were 187. Average calls in 2016 were 340 a month. Total calls in 2013 were 329 for all three offices. South Park office received that many calls alone in March 2016.

South Park's monthly budget has gone up from \$650 per month for hosting and SEO campaign to \$2,650 month for hosting, SEO, PPC and retargeting ads. Cost per call is \$7.79. Average annual value per patient is \$1,860.

Customer perspective: Dr. Shiva Izaddoust, five locations in San Antonio



Dr. Shiva Izaddoust,
South Park Family Dental,
San Antonio, Texas

Website: In order to be accepted, recognized and be known, there is a need for a website. The lack of a website can actually be detrimental to a small business. Society is geared toward social media so a website serves a connecting medium between a business and its customers. Without a website, there is no interface and any marketing is dead in the water before it takes off. With that being said, though, too much information can also be the kiss of death.

SEO: You need an SEO group to help determine what and how much info is necessary and to keep up with search changes on a weekly and monthly basis. Each SEO group has a different approach. Interviewing different SEO companies is imperative.

Reviews: I do not go to any trip, hotel, hair salon etc. without checking online reviews. I'm sure all my patients are doing the same about my office. If I want my small business to be competitive, then I need to make sure my future patients know why they should come to my office instead of the guy next door and that will be with reviews from my existing patients.

Retargeting: This allows you to spend money on ads that will target people who have visited your site. It allows you to narrow your marketing campaign to people who are interested in the services you provide. I haven't done long-term retargeting to see the benefits yet.

Adwords: As much as websites and reviews are important, there is a need for a way to inform new patients that you exist. Your practice name and website are already linked to certain words that allow a patient to find you when they are searching for a dentist. With AdWords, you can increase the number of words that can be linked to your name and make you more visible to more protective patients. Picking which words and how many is important.

Social media: Many articles praise Facebook, blogging etc. I have a Facebook but I can't say I've received extra phone calls or patients because of it. It's good for keeping in touch and informing existing patients. Much like brochures and newsletters that we used to do. All forms of getting your name out is advantageous, and social media is the best way to do that. But you have to make sure you keep up with changing material on a day-to-day basis and keep it interesting and upbeat.

Reporting/call tracking: Reporting is an important tool to keep track of how beneficial your marketing campaign is to your business. Call tracking has allowed me to determine how well my staff handle phone calls and the amount of time it takes for them to make an appointment and, therefore, train them to become better listeners and be efficient in handling prospective patients.