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INTRODUCTION

The goal of every dental marketing initiative – and the goal of this guide – is to help you drive new patients into your office. ***Top 5 Dental Marketing Mistakes*** was created to help you avoid common local marketing pitfalls, and to shed light on new tactics and strategies that can make a positive impact on your practice. The challenges and solutions discussed in this guide come from decades of experience in guiding marketing strategies for dental practices.

In today's economy, it's more important than ever to keep your office busy with a constant, reliable source of incoming appointments. In addition to the quantity of patients, you also need to pay close attention to the profitability of the procedures you're booking.

Think about the last few marketing programs you launched to find new patients. How much time and resources did they cost you? Were the results worth the effort? Did your campaigns pay for themselves many times over, as they should? How are those tactics working for you these days?

With those in mind, here are the top five dental marketing mistakes ...

#5 – TRYING TO BUILD A WEBSITE ON YOUR OWN

Your website is an important piece of your practice's local marketing efforts – today's customers expect that you'll have one, and chances are that you already do. But it can't just have a "nice design," some photos and list your services. Your website needs to do one thing well – convince visitors that you are the best dentist for their needs.

Many dental professionals create a website that **they** think is well designed, or purchase a template that is "customized" with their business information. It may seem like an easy solution requiring little time and effort, but in fact this step is as critical as choosing your office location. Just because it feels easy, doesn't make it so.

It's a science.

Enticing a website visitor to call your business is quite literally a science – something easily done incorrectly. Every word and image plays an important role and requires a specific skill set not commonly found in your average web designer or creative individual. Here are a few common website design pitfalls to avoid:

- Not making it clear what you want the visitor to do (i.e., make an appointment)
- Not using web-friendly copy – too much, brochure style
- Not satisfying various types of visitors (age, need, etc.)
- Not optimizing your website based on customer feedback, new services and usage data

What can you do to avoid the #5 dental marketing mistake?

We know it's hard to resist using free web design software, ready-made site templates or your tech-savvy niece or nephew to build your website. Resist the urge!

On the internet, people are easily distracted and are always one click away from visiting your competition. Every choice made with regard to headlines,

buttons, photography and colors can drastically alter its effectiveness. Help is available in the way of online marketing service providers that can ensure you're guiding as many people as possible toward calling or emailing you for an appointment. Unfortunately, most web designers, friends or family members don't know how to create a site that does this, robbing you of patients that could have been yours.

#4 – CREATING A SITE NO ONE VISITS

So, you spent lots of money and time creating the perfect website for your practice, but no one ever visits it! These days, there are many great ways to get people to your website. You can include your web address on your business cards, brochures, postcards, and display it in your office. These are all good ways to drive traffic, but what about getting prospective patients there – people who have never been in your office before?

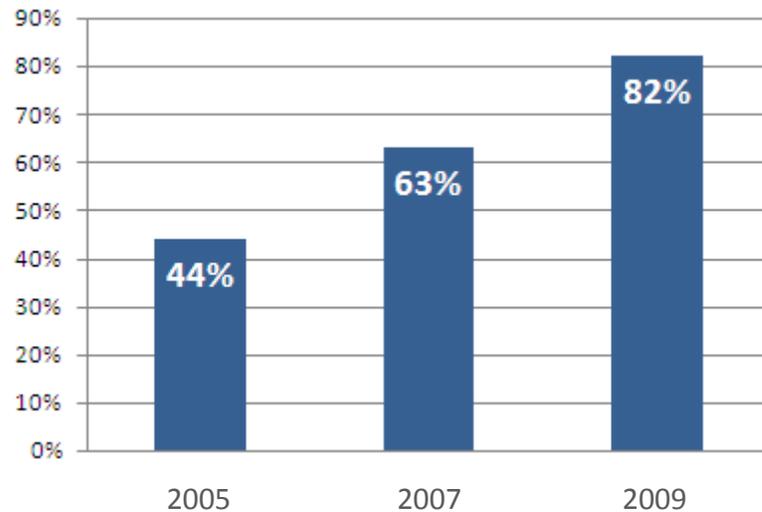
After all, these are the people who you want learning about your practice and coming to your site. If they do, it's likely they will contact you for more information and hopefully, become your patient.

When publishing a website, a common misconception is that people will just show up. Unlike a personal referral or premium office location – where you can receive occasional walk-in traffic – over 100 million other websites are competing for site visitors. Unless you take action to drive traffic, the only person visiting your site will be you.

What can you do to avoid the #4 dental marketing mistake?

Online marketing could be your answer. Today, over 82% of people use search engines to find local services, like a dental professional. This audience also tends to be more affluent. Search engines are the only form of advertising where a potential patient tells you exactly what they want – giving you the opportunity to fulfill their need immediately. Not only do search engines drive considerable website traffic, almost every search-based visitor is looking for your specific services! What could be better?

Online Consumer Searches



Online searches by consumers looking for local businesses have almost doubled since 2005.

(Sources: Kelsey; Nielsen)

Given these statistics, now is the time to take the initiative and start marketing online before the rest of your competition does.

Focus on your practice.

You have a business to run and less energy to focus on decoding the mysterious jargon of internet advertising: terms like CPC, CPA, max bid, exact match, broad match or rich media. Unlike large national advertisers who hire expensive, dedicated staff members to guide them through the online world, you need a solution that is more cost effective.

Luckily, experts in the field of online marketing have begun offering unique services to local practices like yours. This takes the burden off of your shoulders and provides you with access to a virtually limitless source of potential patients.

#3 – NOT KNOWING IF YOUR MARKETING IS REALLY WORKING

Wait, you are already marketing your practice? Maybe you put an ad in the yellow pages, handed out brochures or made a big bet by sponsoring a local event. That is great, but you have to ask yourself a difficult question – do you know how many people visited your site or called or emailed your office as a direct result of these marketing tactics? If you are having trouble answering this question, don't feel alone – most other small businesses can't either.

Your local marketing efforts can easily be wasted when you don't know the number of leads and patients your advertising is generating. Larger businesses have also shifted more of their marketing budgets online for that very reason. Often, traditional media channels like print, television and radio are far more difficult to monitor and usually not as cost effective as their online counterparts.

What can you do to avoid the #3 dental marketing mistake?

There are many different techniques you can use to monitor the performance of your local advertising. You could use a different phone number in each ad, set up multiple web pages and track "hits," or ask people how they heard about you. These methods work, but take considerable effort to coordinate and won't give you the confidence to answer questions like:

- Should I continue spending money on this marketing activity?
- Will it scale? If a marketing activity worked well on a small level, will it be even more successful if I spend more money on it?
- Was it profitable? After accounting for fixed costs plus the price of advertising, did the amount of additional revenue earned add to my bottom line?

Again, beyond its effectiveness at driving qualified traffic to your business, the great thing about online marketing is that everything is measurable. The best way to avoid failure is to make sure that you have a system in place to track the source of all website traffic, calls and emails. You'll also want to put this information to good use by avoiding the advertising methods that are not cost effective and potentially spending more on those that are.

#2 – USING DIRECTORY AND REFERRAL SERVICES

Another marketing option that dental practices usually consider trying are directory services that charge for referrals and/or inclusion in their directory. On the surface, it sounds like directories can potentially reduce the effort of finding new patients. However, here are some insights into directory services you should know before paying that enrollment fee.

Market your practice, not a 3rd party or competitors.

Directory services need to drive a significant amount of patient traffic to their websites in order to satisfy the many practices that have paid an enrollment fee to be listed there. How do they generate traffic? Most advertise their “matching” or “referral services” using search engines.

Let’s ask the obvious, or perhaps not so obvious, question:

If these experienced dental directories are using search engine marketing to attract patients to their websites, doesn’t that make it clear that search engine marketing is a very effective method in attracting patients who are looking for dental services?

Certainly it does prove the value of marketing on internet search engines. But are their marketing efforts effective for you, as the client of such a directory?

When a potential patient signs in to one of these directories to look for a dentist in their area, the directory service then shows the patient a list of several other dental professionals in the neighborhood. Perhaps you are one of the dentists on their list. ***But so are your competitors!*** And all of you will be paying a fee to the directory for the privilege of competing with each other there.

That’s good news for the directory – but bad news for you. When a patient is “window-shopping” in such a fashion, what are the criteria they’re going to use to judge you versus your competitors? Pricing? Proximity? A nice-sounding business name?

Whichever dental practice the patient selects ends up being the sole beneficiary. What are the downsides?

- You still have to pay for the referral, even if you can't take the patient due to scheduling conflicts, a shortage of resources, or if the patient cancels before coming in.
- If you aren't able to respond quickly, the odds of getting the appointment decrease significantly.
- The individual looking for your services is more likely to judge you more critically, due to all of the other competing dentists they are reviewing.

What can you do to avoid the #2 dental marketing mistake?

Get to the source! You can take control by leveraging a system that promotes your dental services directly to local prospective customers on the most popular search engines like Yahoo!, Google and the many dozens of other sites that patients search to find the right dentist. Rather than learning about you and your competitors through a third-party, prospective clients can be directed to your website instead. According to industry experts, this is the optimized way to convert website visits into calls and customers.

#1 – NOT TURNING CALLS INTO SALES EFFECTIVELY

Generating qualified inquiries to your practice will get you close to success, but you or your staff will need to take it the last mile and close the sale. Managing dozens of leads, following up and scheduling can be a challenge. However, when it comes to getting a return on investment for your marketing activities, sales effectiveness is critical.

Please pick up.

You've done it. You managed to turn your carefully spent marketing dollars into a phone call from a qualified prospect ready to learn more about your services. What's more, you are so excited that you are only 36% likely to answer the phone! That's right – as reported by FastCall411 in April 2007 with a test of 5,000 local businesses – two-thirds didn't answer their phone. Moreover, a study by market research Synovate found that four out of five Americans regard “immediate availability” by phone as an “important” or the “most important” factor when selecting a local service provider.

Missed calls are going to happen at every business and will never be avoided completely. However, missing a call is a sure-fire way to drive your potential patients to keep researching and find your competitors instead. If you can't answer, you have to think about a system to help you manage all your incoming inquiries to ensure you are making the most out of your marketing efforts.

Another big reason local businesses don't answer the phone is that your prospects are calling the wrong number. How is this possible? Did you change your phone number or move locations? Your prospects may be searching in an online or offline directory that is not updated regularly, or referring to a brochure with your old phone number. Either way, if they can't reach you, you are missing out on a potential patient. As the owner of a practice where every appointment counts, you have to control what prospects see and have the ability to make changes to your contact information, quickly and easily.

Don't let your patients manage you.

It's a great problem to have until you have it. The problem, of course, is having to juggle and respond to so many leads that it becomes difficult to track and ensure follow-through with all of them. There are several reasons this could happen:

- Instead of pacing your marketing efforts, you launch one large campaign causing a rush of activity.
- No systems or tools are in place to help manage your incoming leads and ensure timely follow-up.
- You are not using call recording to track your conversations with patients and prospects.
- A system is not in place to aggregate leads from multiple sources such as web forms and phone calls.
- Your receptionist is not trained or evaluated for his/her ability to further sell prospects on the benefits of your services.

What can you do to avoid the #1 dental marketing mistake?

Now is the time for you to upgrade your systems and control how your potential patients are contacting you. Competition with larger practices is difficult enough without having the advantage of a lead management system. You have the opportunity to level the playing field by investing in a system that can be your single source for superior appointment-booking effectiveness. It's very easy to believe your situation is unique and that no other dental practices are experiencing the same challenges as yours, but such problems are common and simple solutions exist.

Also, working with experts in local dental marketing to build or enhance your website can empower you to update your information real-time and ensure that you are not missing out on potential patients.

BONUS – NOT PRIORITIZING YOUR MOST PROFITABLE SERVICES

This may be one of the most overlooked aspects of your dental marketing campaign – and yet, one of the greatest opportunities to provide your practice a true strategic advantage.

Simply put, the vast majority of dental marketing options provide an almost random method of attracting patients to your practice. For example, if you advertise general dentistry services, your brochure or traditional media ad will likely bring you a wide range of inquiries, from routine cleanings to emergency fillings to more advanced services.

Of course, the procedures you perform have various fees associated with them. If you're an orthodontist, you're going to charge more for attractive invisible braces. If you're a pediatric dentist, you would charge more for an emergency visit on short notice, versus a routine checkup that perhaps doesn't result in a filling or anything more than a cleaning. It's true for every dental specialty – some procedures are simply more profitable than others, especially when cost of labor and materials are factored in.

Don't just get calls – get the *right* calls.

If you had infinite time and marketing resources, you would be happy with all the inquiries you could get.

But no one has infinite time, nor infinite resources. Whether you pay per publication you advertise in, per brochure printing, per lead or by some other measure, every incoming call has some dollar value you can attach to it – the cost of your marketing spend divided by the number of contacts you receive.

Not to mention the cost of your time – if a hundred calls came in from some successful marketing campaign, you couldn't possibly service all of them right now. If you book appointments in "first come, first serve" order, you are certainly not maximizing the revenues to your practice. You could hire additional personnel to accommodate more patients, but that's an added cost and besides, it's not an immediate solution.

Your office can only hold a certain number of people, and your time is valuable. You have revenue goals to meet and bills to pay. If you could focus on attracting patients specifically for services from which you make higher earnings, you would! This way you could maximize the return on your investment, and increase the profit you are earning for the time you spend in your office.

What can you do to avoid the BONUS dental marketing mistake, and in so doing, maximize your profitability?

Unlike any other marketing option available today, the beauty of advertising on search engines is that you can selectively target the kinds of dental services you are wishing to promote.

That's because search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, and many others, allow the prospective patients to laser-focus on the specific service they are looking for. Sure, there are some people who just search for "dentist" and see what comes up, but in general, the majority of people looking for a local business – now over 82% of adult Americans – use a search engine to do so because they can search for exactly what they're seeking, using "keywords".

Here are some of the specific, profitable dental services that thousands of people are searching online for, by keyword, every single day. Do you provide any of these services, or other specific, high-profit services that you wish new patients could call you for?

- Cosmetic Dentist
- Dental Implant
- Emergency Crown
- Invisalign / Invisible Braces
- Laser Dentistry
- Orthodontist
- Pediatric
- Sleep / Sedation Dentist
- Teeth Whitening
- Veneers / Lumineers

CONCLUSION

You've made it through all five (actually six!) dental marketing mistakes... hopefully you've thought about how to apply them to your practice and your various marketing activities. We've discussed strategies for building and driving traffic to your website, and how to measure campaign performance to drive future marketing decisions. And we've explored some of the downsides to working with a pay-per-referral directory and the importance of sales effectiveness and profitability.

If we tried to get one point across, it's that you don't have to go it alone. Companies like Yodle have helped countless local businesses like yours to generate calls and clients with a single system, dedicated account manager, and industry expertise.

ABOUT YODLE

Yodle provides dental practices and other local businesses with a simple way to get more patients and phone calls using online marketing. Yodle has created an effective platform and offers services that ensure you will avoid all of the dental marketing mistakes you've just learned:

#5 - Trying to Build a Website on Your Own: Yodle's websites are built with a single goal in mind - to send phone calls and patients to your practice. Your website will be built by experts in local online marketing and can be up and ready to start receiving traffic in days instead of weeks. And if you already have a website, we'll give you a free Website Assessment so you can make the most of the assets you already have.

#4 - Creating a Site No One Visits: Using the major search engines, such as Yahoo!, Google, MSN and many others, Yodle places your office in front of prospective patients in your area. We make sure that your advertising shows up in the right place, at the right time across dozens of high-profile local search sites.

#3 – Not Knowing if Your Marketing is Really Working: Yodle provides your business with state-of-the-art measurement tools to track results and review your return on investment.

#2 – Using Directory Services: Unlike patient referral services that use your hard earned dollars to market their own comparison services and simply list your practice in a directory, Yodle only promotes **your** practice.

#1 – Not Turning Calls into Sales Effectively: With Yodle’s advanced lead management system, you can actually listen to all your incoming phone calls, even those that come in after hours. You can use the recordings to review how professionally your staff answers calls, make improvements to your sales process and finally determine who is turning calls into new appointments.

Bonus – Not Prioritizing Your Most Profitable Services: Here Yodle especially excels in maximizing your revenue, by consulting with you to determine precisely which services are the best to promote, and which are not worth your time or marketing resources. We can laser-target your advertising selectively by the profitability of each type of service, reducing nuisance inquiries about dental services you don’t offer or don’t find worthwhile to market.

Yodle will work together with you on an ongoing basis to enhance your campaign by a variety of factors, according to the performance of every keyword, every geographic region targeted, the profitability of your services, and the quality of the leads you receive. Simply put, Yodle will be an invaluable marketing partner, constantly focused on the continuing success of your practice!

To find out more about Yodle, contact us at:

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See how it works! Watch our Intro at www.yodle.com/intro