



Marketing Your Practice During and After a Pandemic

Temporarily closing your dental practice was stressful for you, your employees, and patients alike. Reopening has likely created even more stress for you and your team, as you adapt to new protocols, new PPE, and new schedules. Marketing may be the last thing on your mind.

It would be natural, with everything going on, to return to what you were doing for marketing before the pandemic; running the same internal initiatives and resuming whatever external efforts you had in place. Will this work? While we don't know for sure, considering patients may be hesitant to return to care quickly, the possibility of a resurgence of the virus, and the fact that ALL dental practices will be competing for patients – signals a change to your approach may be in order. Even if your practice has pent up demand now – marketing is vital to what happens in your practice 3-6 months from now. Creating a road map for your practice's marketing efforts will help you implement recommendations to ensure your practice stays on track.

Plan Your Work and Work Your Plan

We encourage you to have an overarching strategy for your approach. This is not the time for disjointed efforts. Consistent messaging is key.

Who is Your Target Audience?

Once you know your audience, craft content that is consistent with what they want to know. Appealing to your overall community? You might want to show your social responsibility as a dental practice and business. Appealing to current patients? Consider content about safety and cleanliness. Looking for new patients? Discuss convenient hours, virtual consultations, safety procedures, and readiness to serve.

As part of your plan, consider:

- What are your business growth goals for the rest of 2020?
- Re-visiting your marketing budget for 2020 (normally 3-5% of revenue)



- What marketing already exists that you can leverage?
- Outlining the new initiatives you want to focus on
- Measuring your results
- Re-evaluating your efforts quarterly

You should have an external and an internal focus to your marketing efforts – all sharing consistent messaging, designed for your target audience, all linked so you are marketing smarter and using resources wisely.

External Marketing

Website

Your website is a powerful platform that forms the bedrock of your marketing efforts. All other marketing efforts should lead a patient and prospective patient back to your site. Ensure this by:

- Updating your site, if it is not responsive or loads slowly. Prospective patients will move on to the next practice. According to StatisticBrain.com, website users' attention spans lie somewhere around 8 seconds.
- Maintain or enhance SEO efforts to keep your organic search optimization high. (Are you in the top 5 listings in a search?)
- Un-pause any pay-per-click and Google AdWords you were previously utilizing.
- Consider a live chat feature that will let your patients contact you quickly and feel connected. If not feasible, ensure there is some working method of communication through the site.
- Audit the content on your site. Write unique content, and update images, if needed. Focus on your homepage, and navigate through the site as a patient might.
- Consider adding a Safety page to your site; detail what your practice is doing to keep patients safe.
- Add an FAQ page spotlighting hot buttons for patients right now: convenient practice hours, teledentistry offering, your membership plan, payment options, and treatment to support a job search like whitening.
- Make necessary changes to ensure easy navigation to find your office hours, phone number, means to schedule, and a bio for the doctor(s).
- Check your links to make sure they are visible and robust, including links to Facebook, Google, Instagram, and YouTube.



Social Media

- Post 1-3 times per week on the top two platforms in dental - Facebook and Instagram. Keep these posts positive, real, personal, forward-looking, and fun.
- When you post, be sure to include your branded hashtag and a “follow us on” any other platforms the practice is on.
- Social distancing has prompted a higher social media engagement from people searching for social connections. Consider boosting your Facebook posts. Boosted posts are an inexpensive way to capitalize on the higher-than-average social engagement during this time.
- Remind viewers to follow any guidelines regarding social distancing. You are an oral healthcare authority; your patient base expects such advice. Consider using some of the posts provided by the DTA as well, for your campaign: <https://postsformypatients.com/>
- Create a virtual waiting room on social media. Post short videos on YouTube, linking them to your FB page and website. For example, send a link to every patient waiting in their car for their appointment, detailing everything you are doing to keep patients safe.
- Communicate why it is good for your patients to **keep** their dental visits from a health and wellness standpoint.
- Continue to network your dental practice. Facebook has added back the feature that allows your practice page to like, follow, and engage with other local businesses. Find your Practice FB Business page feed: Facebook.com/Your Page’s Address/pages_feed
- Avoid space-filling fluff or reposting content that is readily available elsewhere.
- Create a plan for your social media presence, and assign a staff member to post content and respond to comments.

Review Sites/Reputation Management

Update review sites (Google, Yelp, HealthGrades, and Facebook) with open announcements, stressing steps you have taken to keep patients safe. (The opportunity to complete a review on Google was turned back on at the end of April.)

- Ask for reviews. A recent survey showed that almost 70 percent of customers are willing to provide feedback when requested. “Your opinion matters to us and other patients, so we’d appreciate it if you’d take a few moments to review your experience,” or “Do you read online reviews? We do, and so do other patients. That’s why we’d love it if you take a few moments to review your experience.”
- Put direct links to your review profiles in multiple places, for example, in a thank you or follow-up email.



- Focus on your average ratings (4.5 and above is key), getting recent reviews, and getting more reviews.
- Respond to reviews, positive, neutral, and negative. Prospective patients need to hear the voice of the practice as well as the reviewer. Keep responses to negative reviews short by inviting the patient to call in, so you can help resolve their issues, while respecting HIPAA laws.
- Practices have the potential to get 1-2 new patients per day from the strength of their Google reviews¹
- As many as 82% of patients read reviews for local businesses before making a purchasing choice.¹

Internal Marketing

While marketing efforts often focus on gaining new patients, some of your current patients could be considering a change in dentist due to a change in benefits, job, or perceived lack of care or safety measures from your practice during the pandemic. Be proactive and be sure to re-connect with current patients. They are the most reliable revenue source for you right now.

Connect with patients

Call or email your patients personally, to connect. This will leave a lasting impression. If you have a large patient base, contact those with outstanding treatment first, long-term patients next, followed by the remaining patient base.

- If you are unable to call, connect via email and text through your patient connection software. Messages ending in *"we are looking forward to seeing you again; call for an appointment"* will leave your patient feeling cared for.
- You may have postponed community events. Take this opportunity to test digital alternatives to stay in front of current patients, referring dentists, and community groups.
- Email newsletters – This format has a 25-30% open rate right now.¹ Constant Contact or Mailchimp are easy and inexpensive online marketing platforms to use.
 - Assign a person on your staff to be responsible for assembling and sending the newsletter on a regular schedule. Monthly is a good cadence.
 - Be sure content is informative on topics your patients care about.
 - Avoid space-filling fluff or reposting content that is readily available elsewhere.
 - Include profiles and stories about staff members.



- Link the newsletter to your website on your blog page.
- Provide an “unsubscribe” option, as required by law.
- Promote your social media accounts in email signatures and at your front desk (but only if you are active!)
- Send a hand-written thank you note to new patients that gave you opportunity to provide their oral healthcare.

Ask for Referrals

- Now more than ever, your entire team needs to be personally asking for referrals.
- Carve out time at a team meeting to share times and ways to ask.
 - “We so appreciate you. You are always (prompt, conscientious about your appointments, so much fun to talk with, etc.) We would be happy to have many more patients just like you. If you happen to know anyone who is currently looking for a new dental office, please send them to see us.”
 - When a patient compliments the office... “Thank you. We really appreciate your feedback. We are accepting new patients, so if you have a friend or family member who’s looking for a new dentist, we would love to see them.”
- Send a hand-written thank you note to patients who have referred to you.

Patient Experience

Future referrals depend on creating a patient experience that leaves patients feeling as though they are well cared for by skilled, caring professionals. Review your patient experience and make any needed changes. Solicit suggestions from your team, review other practices’ websites and social media for ideas.

Above all, consistent focus on your marketing efforts and consistent messaging should empower your practice to not only rebound, but slingshot to greater success. If you’d like professional support with your marketing, we have vetted referral sources. The Practice Support Team will be standing by to support you.

¹ WEO Media webinar, 5/14/2020