



Three Best Practices

Joel Harris, CEO of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing, shares three essential concepts to building a more successful practice.

I just arrived home from the ADA Annual show in San Francisco. I was able to speak on two different days and participate in an expert panel on dental marketing. At the beginning of the panel I was asked to summarize my three best practices with regard to effectively marketing a dental practice. At first I thought it would be difficult to keep my list of best practices to only three items. However, after some quiet time on the airplane I was able to condense my thoughts into three basic concepts that will make a huge difference in the success of any dental practice.

Best Practice #1 - Remember that image is everything

When building a dental practice—and struggling with patients, cash-flow and employees, focusing on artsy matters might seem like a huge distraction. But as any celebrity publicist will tell you, image is everything, baby! That doesn't mean you need to be developing detailed brand marketing campaigns when what you really need in the short run are a few more patients. But it does mean you need to pay attention to things like your company name, logo and basic marketing materials, such as your Internet site. It also means that you'll have to focus on the image of your facility, your equipment and even your own teeth.



To begin the process of creating the perfect image for your practice, think about your patients' priorities. Do they most value speed, quality or price? If the potential patients in your demographic area appreciate quality above the other two attributes, your marketing plan and image should reflect this—right down to selecting a name. If, on the other hand, you believe your ideal patient values cheerful service above speed and price, everything about your image should embody those priorities. Their core values should be reflected in your customer-service policy, your logo, Internet site, signage, and every “touch-point” your patient has with your practice.

Best Practice #2 - Differentiate your practice by being remarkable

At the end of the day no amount of great marketing

will cover up an otherwise poor patient experience. In fact, if a dental practice focused their energy on truly creating a remarkable patient experience, the marketing problem would take care of itself and I'd be out of a job.

Best Practice #3 - See marketing as an investment, not an expense

This concept is best illustrated using a short parable. It perfectly explains my philosophy of seeing marketing as an important investment that must be made continually, not just when the schedule is empty.

There once were two friends who were fisherman. For many years they had fished in the same part of the sea and had fed themselves and their families from the fish they caught and sold at market. Once, during a terrible storm, the two fisherman were separated and washed out to sea many miles away from shore, each in his own small boat. Neither fisherman had any extra food and both had very little water. However, each man had a few dead minnows that they used to bait their fishing lines. As each fisherman became more and more hungry they realized that catching fish to eat was the only way to survive the long journey back to the safety of land.

Both men tried without success to catch fish using their small ration of bait minnows. The first fisherman being very wise, realized that he must continue doing his best to catch a fish, so he carefully conserved his bait minnows until finally he was able to catch a fish on his last try with his last minnow. After eating his fill, this wise fisherman used part of the fish he caught for new bait and eventually caught several more fish. He was able to make it back to shore because of the energy he received from the fish he caught. He lived a long and prosperous life

and learned not to go out to sea without being prepared for a storm.

The second fisherman was not a wise man and kept trying to catch fish with no success. When he saw that his bait minnows were dwindling he decided that the only choice he had was to eat the bait minnows he had left. He did not have the faith and wisdom of the wise fisherman and he eventually died of starvation while attempting to row his fishing boat back to land. His family never found his boat and they found it very difficult to provide for themselves for many years.

I wrote this little parable to help explain in simple terms how important it is to invest your "bait" or money into marketing your dental practice. If executed properly, it will bring you a much greater return for years to come. Don't ignore this wisdom. Don't wait until it is too late and don't be tempted to eat your bait.

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Joel Harris is a co-founder and President of Intelligent Dental Marketing located in Salt Lake City, Utah. His company provides powerful marketing tools to help dentists grow their patient base, increase the profit and improve their image. Joel is also the author of the book, Breakthrough Dental Marketing.