



## Word of Mouth Marketing

*Joel Harris, CEO of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing, shares internal marketing insight on the importance of your patient enjoying their experience at your practice.*

For decades, most dentists and dental marketing experts have had strong opinions about word-of-mouth marketing. In fact, it has become such a prevalent concept in the business world in general that there is now an association called WOMMA, or the “Word of mouth marketing association”. As most dental professionals know, the dental industry has created it’s own unique title for word of mouth marketing. We call it internal marketing.

Outside the dental industry in the general business world, word of mouth marketing has many new-age definitions that get re-purposed and re-packaged every so often. Usually, the new terminology is attached to a best-selling business book or seminar series that makes the author millions, but has very little new substance. Word-of-mouth marketing has been called, buzz marketing, viral marketing, grass-roots marketing , community marketing, evangelist marketing, guerilla marketing, influencer marketing, cause marketing, conversation creation, and referral programs.

For those of you who have been tempted by the hip packaging and powerful claims that these books make, and would love to implement the exciting principles in your practices, let me save you a lot of time and money. I’ve read most of these books and



I’ll summarize them all in one short paragraph later in this article.

First of all, world-of-mouth marketing isn’t new. And, it’s not the “the next big thing” like most of these books and seminars claim, especially in the context of a dental practice. A third-party endorsement or patient referral has always been the best way to grow a dental practice.

What’s different today is that the bar has been raised. An otherwise good patient experience won’t generate a referral like it used to. For word of mouth marketing to take flight, your practice has to be remarkable at some level, and I don’t mean free toothbrushes. The public in general has become very

fickle in their buying habits because as consumers, they are catered to like never before. The shopping or buying experience is spilling over with luxury items, upgrades, and premiums that have made consumers numb to anything that doesn't scream of excellence. In the 70's we had nitrous oxide and we thought that going to the dentist would never be better. Now we have dental spas! What will patients expect next?

There's no way to control the evolution of consumer expectations. However, you must get into the game. Your office décor, your equipment, your team, your location, your communication skills, your technology and on and on are the things you will be judged on. The way you prep a crown may be important to you clinically, but consumers will base their experience and ultimately their referral on all of the external things that they get at Starbucks and the Lexus dealership. I'm not here to tell you that clinical excellence is not important, but my job and my expertise is getting patients in your door. And, it is a difficult job if the practice is not remarkable or extraordinary in the important areas where consumers form their opinions.

As I promised earlier, I'm going to sum up every word of mouth and internal marketing strategy every written about in one simple paragraph. Here goes.

To be extraordinary or remarkable in some way is the basis of every word of mouth strategy and book ever written. Forget everything you've ever heard about how to create an effective internal marketing program and remember that for the most part, if you deliver the best experience possible, the word of mouth will happen by itself!

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Krispy Kreme donuts never had to worry about creating a word of mouth marketing program. The donuts did all of the talking. Nobody at Apple can take credit for the success of the iPod because of a well thought out internal marketing program. Every consumer who ever bought an iPod told everyone they came in contact with how cool it was.

Word of mouth marketing is just another tool in your marketing arsenal. It's critical to have a way to get your dental practice talked about by your patients. But you're going to have to surround it with a lot of other effort, including, external marketing tactics and excellent case presentation skills. Unfortunately, you just can't buy referrals the way you can buy advertising. And

patients will stop talking about you in a flash once something else cooler and better comes along to talk about.



*Joel Harris is a co-founder and President of ADA 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.*