

101 Top Marketing Ideas for Your Office

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The key to practice growth is to differentiate your services from others and to create value. Value is achieved when patients' expectations are exceeded. Word of mouth remains the primary means for patient referrals.

Subsequently, internal marketing can be the most important avenue to sustain practice viability in any economic environment. Below is a list of top marketing ideas for your practice:

CHILDREN

1. Children can be one of the best ways to build a practice. Treat them right and the family will follow. First the child comes in, then the mom, then a referral from the mom, and finally the dad comes in with a toothache.
2. On a first visit, let young or apprehensive children experience a "happy" visit where they can be introduced to you and the office.
3. Children love toys. Have a special prize box with unique and interesting prizes from which they may choose. Reward with double or triple prizes for especially good behavior. Have monthly drawings for larger prizes. You can do this for your adult patients also.
4. Give a child a gold dollar after treatment or give the coin to the parent to place under their pillow after an extraction. Learn a few magic tricks to entertain the kids during treatment.
5. Provide a children's play area complete with video games, books, and a television.
6. Have a camera available to take pictures of young patients and let them post the photos on a wall.

GIFTS

7. Give away a coffee mug with your name and logo on it filled with goodies such as toothpaste and floss. Have it shrink wrapped by a local organization such as Easter Seals.
8. Send to or give patients magnets embossed with your logo and phone number that they may place on their refrigerator.
9. Remember your most important asset. Treat your staff to a surprise shopping-spree at Christmas time. Offer only two rules—they have to spend the money on themselves and you get to keep the change. Provide additional perks and benefits throughout the year.
10. Keep dinner gift certificates on hand to give to patients when you are running late or to celebrate a special occasion.
11. Hand out Starbucks or similar gift cards to patients whenever needed.
12. Arrange fresh flowers in the waiting room. Give the flowers away to a patient to celebrate an occasion.
13. Provide toothbrushes with your name imprinted on them to all recare patients. Also, hand out these toothbrushes to schools, civic groups, etc.
14. Buy multiple copies of a motivational or special book and personally give to patient after treatment.

CONTACTS

15. Make care calls to patients who were treated earlier that day. *This is one of the most important practice builders.* Address any concerns and begin any conversation with "I just wanted to see how well you are doing."
16. Set up and maintain a quality website. Keep the information up-to-date.
17. Provide and distribute an office brochure. Personalize it so patients can make a connection.
18. Send postcards to patients to stay in touch and to celebrate holidays such as Thanksgiving and New Years. For many patients, you will be like the fire department. They will not need you until an emergency.
19. Acknowledge birthdays. Send a birthday greeting to each patient in a format which lists what happened on the day they were born. Excellent software is available from Spectrum Unlimited at www.clientbirthday.com.
20. Have a box of greeting cards on hand to send to patients such as Congratulations and Happy Anniversary.
21. Send out thank you cards or letters to acknowledge patients for their referrals. Consider doing something special for multiple referrals.
22. Have each staff member handwrite one thank you note each day to a patient that they met thanking them for the visit or whatever special moment they shared during their time together. This can be wishing them a safe vacation, congratulations on their new grandson, or a new recipe they should try. Seek to build a relationship with your patients that differentiates your practice.
23. Get email addresses and cell phone numbers from your patients. Send out reminders, announcements, or e-newsletters. This information can be integrated with some web site companies such as Dental Sesame (www.sesamecommunications.com) to communicate via email or text messaging.
24. Always try to keep your name in front of the patients. Send out a newsletter several times a year. This can be done via direct mail or electronically.
25. Send out a new patient packet including a welcome letter to all patients before their first visit.
26. Offer your home phone number to patients who may need it, especially after difficult procedures.
27. Send out post-treatment letters to your patients.

NETWORKING

28. Schedule lunch or a meeting with several physicians or other professionals in your area and let them know that you are accepting new patients.
29. Introduce yourself to several area pharmacists and let them know that you are available for emergencies.
30. Hairdressers are some of the best referrals. Get to know several shops and send over lunch.
31. Print business cards for your staff and encourage them to hand them out in all their daily affairs.
32. Sponsor local sports teams. Advertise in church bulletins or school sponsored activities.
33. Let patients know that you are accepting new referrals.
34. Always market internally with your existing patient base first and foremost.
35. Send flowers to a special patient for any reason at work. This will surprise them and impress their co-workers.
36. Sponsor a local food drive or other event. Commit to a charity and get your practice involved.

SERVICES

37. Furnish a business area in the waiting room with a phone and computer.
38. “Wow” your patients at every opportunity. Be creative! Use your imagination and ingenuity.
39. Provide a warm towel to patients after treatment. More information is available at www.whitetowelservices.com. After difficult procedures, provide your patient with a reusable ice pack with your logo on it to take home.
40. Have umbrellas available to give to patients when they leave during a storm.
41. Have pillows and blankets available for patient comfort.
42. Make sure you have a wide array of up-to-date magazines. Provide general interest books such as *The Guinness Book of World Records*, *The Far Side*, or *The Top 10 of Everything*.
43. Provide the daily newspaper along with *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* in your waiting room.
44. Offer to copy magazine articles or recipes for the patient. Give the entire magazine to the patient.
45. Place flat screen televisions in the operator for patient enjoyment and education. Provide cable or show movies. Furnish a list of movies or such to choose from.
46. Provide state of the art stereo headphones (noise reduction), CD or MP3 players, and music for your patients.
47. Instead of silence on the telephone, place an on-hold message system or music for your patients while they are on hold.
48. Have a makeup area with a wall mirror available for patients that they can use after treatment. Provide hooks in the operator where patients can hang coats or other items.
49. Designate a spot in the waiting room to be the refreshment center. Serve coffee and refreshments. Provide bottled water with your logo on it.

EDUCATION

50. Provide painless injections (and this means painless). Develop the proper techniques if necessary. This is one of the most important marketing skills.
51. Use analogies to which patients can relate. For example, “These fillings have 100,000 miles on them and may only go another 20,000 miles, not a lifetime.”
52. Provide patients with a tour of your office including the sterilization area. The patient can best measure your sterilization techniques by office cleanliness and appearance. Take the time to sit in each dental chair and notice what the patient sees.
53. Place a strong emphasis on patient education and have numerous items such as videos, models, books, and pamphlets on hand. Consider programs such as Caesy, Guru, or Dr. Christensen’s *Simple Patient Education for Every Practice*.
54. Always explain. Let your patient know what to expect and be available for questions. For example, tell the patient the tooth could be sensitive for a few days.
55. Offer the patient treatment options including alternatives, advantages, disadvantages, costs, risks, and doing nothing. This is an important part of informed consent.
56. Let the patients know that they are in a state-of-the-art environment. Inform them of courses you have taken or honors that you have received. Promote your continuing education. Give the patients the confidence that they are in the hands of a skilled practitioner!
57. Hang your diplomas in clear view for all the patients to see. Frame all your accomplishments.
58. Find groups in your area that welcome speakers such as a Diabetic Association, PTA, or civic club and offer to make a presentation on a pertinent dental topic.
59. Participate in community activities such as health fairs.
60. Offer to visit schools for presentations during Children’s Dental Health Month.
61. Take before and after pictures of your patients. Ask for patient testimonials about their treatment. Make these available to show your patients and for those considering similar procedures. Place on your website.

PATIENT RELATIONS

62. Whatever it takes—make the patient feel important. The acronym used in business is MMFI—“Make Me Feel Important.”
63. Inform the patients if they are left waiting. Patients appreciate that the Doctor acknowledges the patient’s time. Do something special if they have to wait too long.
64. Keep a sheet in the patient’s chart identifying things such as where they lived, went to school, hobbies, special events etc. This will help remind you the next time you see the patient and can serve as a good “ice-breaker.” Patients enjoy your connection.
65. See the patient as a person and remember to remain in the moment with the patient. Understand the patient has only one experience in your office.
66. Have fun while working with the patient in the operator, but always include the patient. Avoid conversation that does not involve the patient.

PATIENT RELATIONS (Continued)

67. Always give the patient more than they expect from the time they first call the office to when they leave the appointment. This more than anything will create value.
68. Use humor with your patients. It helps to provide a connection between the doctor and patient and can relieve stress.
69. Compliment your patients and staff whenever possible. Everyone likes to be complimented.
70. Always greet your patients with a friendly handshake, a warm smile, and even a hug. Address patients by name.
71. Always maintain a caring attitude toward your patient and show genuine interest.
72. Acknowledge all patients at all times, whether they be in the reception area or operatory.
73. Allow the patient to rest during long procedures. This will allow you free time for a hygiene check or a phone call.
74. Always have someone walk the patient to the front desk or restroom.
75. Have the front desk person occasionally greet new patients by walking into the reception area. The doctor can do the same if he is available.
76. Introduce the assistant to the patient as their personal concierge. Make the patient feel special.
77. Encourage and promote an enthusiastic staff. Create an energetic environment.
78. Support your patients' businesses.
79. Clip out newspaper articles about your patients and send it to them with a warm greeting.

DÉCOR

80. Make sure your office décor is pleasant, comforting, and up-to-date. Schedule a time when you and your team can go out into the parking lot and walk in through the front door and observe the practice from the patients' point of view. Notice everything and simulate the experience from the waiting room to the operatory and back to the front desk. Offer any changes or recommendations or suggestions.
81. Have every operatory decorated with a different theme or idea. One could be a sports room with sports memorabilia and another could be a French garden. The assistant could ask the patient which room he or she would like to be seated or simply say, "Mr. Jones, today we are taking you to Paris."
82. Put some thought into decorating the bathroom and make sure it is clean at all times. This is one area of the office that patients are alone and should have high impact.
83. Decorate the office for special holidays.
84. Have your office sign visible from the street if possible. Make sure it is lit at night.
85. Have your staff coordinate aesthetically pleasing uniforms.
86. Allow your team to wear name tags.
87. Place photos of you and your team on the wall in a common area or in the waiting room.
88. Use aromatherapy. Even consider baking fresh bread in the break room as an added bonus.

PERSONAL

89. Find a reason to celebrate each and every day.
90. Show confidence in everything you do in front of others, especially patients. Exude passion and commitment.
91. Believe in yourself. Carry with you the motto from the movie *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, they will come."

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

92. Have a consistent and strong financial policy. At the same time, offer patients financial options.
93. Offer a sequential or gradual treatment plan for patients that cannot afford it.
94. Phase treatment. Do treatment sequentially over a period of months or years. Treatment planning is always easiest when you ask yourself one question and one question only, "What would I do in my own mouth if I were the patient?"
95. Offer free prophies or whitening to a bride or spouse to be. Offer this for other special occasions as well.
96. Don't charge your patients for many services. This will go a long way to building a long-term relationship. Try to build a patient for life, not for the moment.
97. Don't be afraid to redo something at no-charge or a reduced fee. Don't a la carte everything you do. Patients will appreciate it more than you realize.
98. Provide varied and convenient hours. Work at times when other dentists may not be available such as Friday afternoons, Saturday mornings, or one evening a week.
99. See all emergencies the same day and be available 24 hours a day. This can be an important practice builder.
100. Go slow, introducing low-budget front-end cosmetic procedures such as whitening or bonding.
101. Utilize an intra-oral camera system.

Will these ideas change your practice? Maybe. But consider this: In baseball, a .270 hitter is often considered average amongst his peers and yet a player who hits .300 can be a superstar. What is the difference between the two? *1 more hit in every 20 at bats.* The Superstar has to be successful only 5% more often. Moreover, in any professional sport, nobody is ever close to being twice as good as anybody else. In golf, for example, Tiger Woods has dominated the sport often winning by just one or two strokes. In auto racing, after hundreds of miles, the winner may finish just a few seconds ahead. *In essence, all you have to do is be a little bit better than your competition.*

The same is true for dentistry.

I'll conclude with one of the simplest marketing tools that was ever given to me. An older dentist sat me down early in my career and summarized it in one simple sentence, "Give them good, honest treatment...and they'll be back."