

Cosmetic Dentistry

Mihnea Strugurescu¹

¹ D.D.S., D.M.D., D.H.C. Visiting Professor, Associate in Dentistry, Faculty of Dentistry, University of Toronto Dental Clinic, Toronto, Canada.

Abstract

This 'In my Opinion' paper is written from a North American perspective. However, the principles described are common throughout the world.

Key Words: Cosmetic Dentistry, Marketing, Management, Communication

Introduction

With patients expressing a growing interest in cosmetic dentistry, dental clinicians have the opportunity to pursue an area they may enjoy more than regular, need-based dentistry. Patients can see the results of a cosmetic procedure immediately, creating a high degree of satisfaction that greatly increases the chances that they will refer others to the practice. A dentist is very likely to receive referrals as a result of every successful cosmetic dentistry procedure performed. Adding these patients to the practice means opportunities to perform even more cosmetic dentistry, thus contributing to the practice's income. For dentists wishing to build their cosmetic practices, the following steps are recommended:

- Target the right markets.
- Assess cosmetic fees.
- Internal marketing.
- Create "WOW" customer service.
- Find the right dental laboratory.

Target the Right Market

No matter how slick the logo or how catchy the slogan, no marketing campaign is going to resonate if it does not reach the right market. This holds true in dentistry, too. An American Association of Cosmetic Dentistry survey suggested that, in 2004, North America, 96% of patients who request cosmetic dentistry are females, and more than 70% of patients are between the ages of 31 and 50 [1]. Logically, this defines the target group.

The key is, of course, how to reach this target group. In North America, a popular method is to obtain through various list brokers the mailing

addresses of affluent households within a certain distance radius of your practice. Explore well-read local metro magazines and newspapers in your area as possible advertising avenues. Just make sure to examine readership demographics first.

Although many marketing tactics are available, none will work if they do not reach the right target.

Assess Cosmetic Fees

Setting higher fees in order to become a purely cosmetic practice is risky at best. A recent survey [2] found that the way practices become most profitable is to offer a mix of cosmetic services with other basic dental procedures. Although the fees are certainly higher for cosmetic dentistry procedures than they would be for their need-based counterparts, keeping the fees to a level that a patient perceives as reasonable will ensure a steady patient flow, increased referrals and greater production, all of which increase the profitability of a practice.

Remember, the critical factor in the practice is not what the fees are: it is the amount of profit generated so that the dentist can run an efficient, healthy practice while enjoying a high quality of life. By reducing the fees for a cosmetic procedure such as whitening, the likelihood is that you will increase the number of those procedures performed, increasing production and profitability.

Internal Marketing

Internal marketing efforts begin from the moment that a patient walks into your waiting room and continue until the post-care follow-up calls. Create an office/practice atmosphere that represents who you are as a dentist. Are you all about the latest

Corresponding author: Professor Dr. Mihnea Strugurescu, 745 Danforth Avenue, Suite # 309, Toronto, Ontario, M4J 1L4, Canada; e-mail: michael.strugurescu@utoronto.ca

technology? Do you have a soothing, spa-like atmosphere? Do you treat children? Whatever your niche, make sure the decor of your practice embodies your unique character. This will help differentiate your practice (office/cabinet) from the run-of-the-mill practice down the road.

Of course, an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere does not seal the deal when finalising an expensive elective case. Here is where customer service enters the picture. Make sure that the patient is treated like royalty. Follow-up personally with a telephone call to make sure that patient restorations are comfortable and pain is minimal. Offer patient-financing options to make patients think that their individual treatment plan is achievable and affordable.

Person-to-person referrals offer the best potential for bringing optimal cases to your practice.

Create “WOW” Customer Service

Exemplary customer service can be accomplished with the following.

One hundred per cent participation all members of the dental team (the receptionist, the dental nurse/chair-side assistant, the dental hygienist and the dental technician). A good team always displays enthusiasm.

No one likes to walk into a place of business to be greeted by unsmiling faces. For example, it is not for the staff member to thank patients for selecting the practice. The dental team must do it the right way, sincerely and enthusiastically. Simply going through the motions reflects poorly on the practice. Cosmetic dentistry is about making patients feel good about themselves. That requires an enthusiastic, friendly team that provides a high level of customer service. “WOW”ing patients means increased case acceptance as well as recommendations to friends and family. It also means that patients will keep returning to the practice for other services and procedures.

Candidates for cosmetic dentistry deserve to receive the best patient experience possible. For the most part, those cosmetic procedures that patients are considering are not mandatory. From an oral health standpoint, patients are not going to suffer any ill-effects if the procedure is not done. For this reason,

they should receive the most outstanding “WOW”-level customer service that your practice can provide. Cosmetic patients represent an extra revenue stream beyond the need-based procedures and regular check-ups that your practice provides: without question, cosmetic dentistry can drive production and profitability of the practice to new levels.

Find the Right Lab

The dentist’s relationship with the dental laboratory (good or bad) will have a noticeable effect on both quality and practice profitability. Poor laboratory relations can lead to lower quality care for patients, frustration for the dental practice team, and disruption of the daily schedule: all reasons that could cause the patients to leave the practice. When dentists do not have cases returned to the office/practice on time, when they have cases that do not fit properly or work for the patient, when they have cases with problematic shade compatibility, or have to take extensive patient production time to talk to the dental laboratory, there will be confusion, frustration and disruption. Frequently, dentists tend to blame the laboratory rather than focusing on the best way to solve or altogether eliminate these types of problems. Certainly, eliminating problems is highly beneficial to everybody involved. Excellent communication with the dental technician concerned is essential at all times.

Conclusion

Practice profitability can be greatly enhanced through an increased emphasis on cosmetic dentistry. A satisfied patient is very likely to become a permanent member of your hygiene- and need-based practice. Excitement and motivation through patient education are the practice’s building blocks for greater cosmetic case acceptance.

Today’s consumers are inundated with marketing messages from every possible product and service out there, including cosmetic dentistry. To complicate matters, discretionary financing is often limited. However, success for your practice is attainable by using the right marketing mix to bring patients in the door, and providing impeccable customer service to keep them with you for years to come.

References

1. American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, *North American Survey: The State of Cosmetic Dentistry 2004*. A Levin Group Study commissioned by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry [file in PDF format]. Accessed [2009 Feb 2] via: <http://www.aacd.com/press/releases/2004%20National%20Survey.pdf>

2. American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, *AACD 2007 State of Cosmetic Dentistry Survey* [file in PDF format]. Accessed [2009 Feb 2] via: <http://www.aacd.com/press/releases/2007%20AACD%20Study%20Final%20Results.pdf>