

8 Tips from Colorado's Practice Management Consultants for Generating New Patients

If your practice struggles to bring in a steady stream of new patients, it's time to revise your marketing plan. Even in today's challenging and competitive environment, your practice can boost its new patient numbers. Luckily, nine Colorado consultants, who also happen to be members of the national Academy of Dental Management Consultants, meet quarterly to network, brainstorm, share, and solve the problems your dental practice faces.

Follow these eight easy-to-implement marketing ideas to generate new patients:

Focus on your internal marketing plan first to increase new patients by 20%. The foundation for new patients and growth begins with creating strong and trusting relationships with your existing patients. "WOW" them with great telephone skills and a thorough new patient exam. Don't forget to acknowledge patients who prove to be ambassadors for your practice. *Amy Kirsch, practice management consultant, www.amykirsch.com*

Learn to talk less and listen more to discover what attracts patients to your practice. Listen carefully during patient phone calls and as you build your patient relationships. Use any discovered advantages – such as your office's convenience – in all of your internal and external marketing pieces to promote your practice's benefits. *Lynda Kizer, practice management consultant, www.lyndakizerandassociates.com*

Create referrals by holding lunch-and-learns to educate pediatricians, family practice physicians, and obstetricians about the importance of all children having a "dental home" by age one to prevent early childhood caries. Recom-

mend that doctors and their staff ask parents, "does your child have a dental home?" during normal assessments and then offer a referral to your practice.

Julie Weir, practice management consultant specializing in pediatric dentistry, www.julieweir.com

Take advantage of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Having a Website is essential, but being on Google's first page is key to attracting new patients. Search engines rank Websites based on content, so on-page and off-page optimization are critical. Use dental-specific marketing companies that can assess your Website, add content like blog posts, and improve search results for your practice. *Janet Steward, practice management consultant, www.janetstewardconsulting.com*

Take a leadership role and use teamwork to convey your practice's marketing message. Marketing is communication and everything in your practice communicates something to your patients. Your online presence, a patient's first telephone call, the technology you offer, the look and feel of your office, and the "5-star" service you deliver to patients all impact how patients perceive you and the care you offer. Take a leadership role, get your team on board, and communicate wisely. *Kim McGuire, practice management consultant, www.fortuneofcolorado.com*

Low cost consistent internal marketing can quickly generate new patients. While there are countless marketing ideas you could implement, find methods you're comfortable with and build a plan around those tactics. Great starting points include scripting patient interaction and role-playing with your staff in various ways to ask patients for referrals. *John Abrams, D.D.S., practice*

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First impressions are key. Give every new patient a tour of the office including the asepsis area. Explain how instruments are processed, packaged and sterilized for their protection. Open sterile packages or cassettes in front of your patients. These simple steps contribute to your first impression. Make sure it's one that welcomes your patients into your office and alleviates their stress. *Annamaria Phillips, clinical consultant and educator, www.optibridge.com*

Use a major change in the practice as an opportunity for positive communication with your best marketing audience – your existing patients. A major change in the practice, such as adding an associate dentist to your team, provides an excellent opportunity to ask for patient referrals. Remember, the best referrals come from your best patients. *Susan Spear, practice transition specialist, broker/business intermediary, www.sas-transitions.com*

Marketing your practice can seem overwhelming, but you can create an easy, manageable, and effective plan. Marketing isn't a science, but rather a strategic approach to utilizing the most current resources available. Start building your plan with these eight tips, and you will be on your way to increasing new patient numbers and improving your bottom line. ■

The group of practice consultants listed above, which also includes Rita Zamora (see her article on page 26), established the Colorado study group of The Academy of Dental Management Consultants (ADMC) as a way to collaborate and share ideas to better support Colorado dentists.