

The dos and don'ts of dental marketing

Dr Grant McAree discusses the advantages of in-house marketing and advises what to do and not to do to succeed

Many dental teams struggle with marketing, and it's no wonder. Traditionally, dentists weren't allowed to do any marketing. In my dad's day, you put a gold plaque up on the wall, and that was it. Even when I started out in dentistry, there were massive restrictions on marketing in terms of what you were and were not allowed to say and do.

The message that marketing was a "dirty word" and inappropriate for the dental or medical professions fed down through the ages. But times have changed. Today, marketing is an important part of running a successful practice. So why are people still shying away from it? The main reason is fear.

Understandably, people are frightened to spend money on something they think they don't have a clue about. The fear of not knowing and losing money on the not knowing is what holds them back. It's worse than putting a bet on red or black at the casino because at least then you've got an outside chance. If you put a rubbish advert out there, your whole business can go down the pan. But there's no need to fear marketing. It really is much more straightforward than many people think.

One of the things I teach in my courses is the concept that marketing "ain't rocket science"; you don't have to outsource it and can easily do it yourself.

The benefits of doing your marketing in-house

What are the benefits of doing your marketing in-house? Well, the first one is cost. It is far more cost-effective to do your marketing yourself.

The second benefit is that an external person won't understand you and what your unique selling points are as well as someone from within your team. You, or someone who works with you, will be much better placed to put out relevant content than someone who is doing it blindly.

I've always done my marketing myself because I enjoy it, but you can take a team approach to it. There might even be certain people within the team who are interested in taking ownership of it. On my courses, we get everyone from managers and treatment coordinators to owners.

Eventually, I think more dental practices will start employing someone in-house specifically to do the marketing. That's the next stage on the run. But, for now, I advise making it a team exercise.

Begin at the beginning

To start doing anything, you just need to "begin at the beginning", as the saying goes.

So, here are some of my key marketing dos and don'ts for those of you starting out on your marketing journey.

DO: Try to see your marketing through your patients' eyes

The first stage is to look at how people are looking back at you and your business. If you can see it from the perspective of your patients, you are halfway there.



DON'T: Fall into the trap of thinking you don't need to market

Many people think they don't need to market, but we should all be marketing, even when busy. As dentists, we sometimes imagine patients flying through the window with their mouths open and their wallets out. That's not the case. You shouldn't just step it up in the quiet times because you will always be playing catch up. Marketing is usually six months to a year behind, so what you are doing now you will be benefiting from in the future. I think it's a big mistake only to market when you are quiet.

DO: Be consistent

Consistency is key when it comes to marketing. If you think about brand awareness, the first thing is your logo, so if you put an advert out, people know it is you. I make sure that I include the same information on any post I do: my website details, telephone number, what the treatment is, and the area I work in. I have always done that. Don't worry about people getting bored of your adverts if you put out consistent messaging. The people who are getting bored of your adverts are the people who don't want your product. The people who want your product will never get bored of your adverts. I'd also do daily photographs, making sure they are believable, as that builds trust.

DON'T: Use imagery that will scare your patients off

Don't have any instruments in your marketing imagery. This is important. Also, don't use claustrophobic imagery, where you are leaning over patients or where they look restricted or tied down. I think that's dreadful. And don't use too much red! That conjures up the image of blood, and that's the last thing you want to be putting in any potential patient's head.

DO: Follow your passion

There are five passions in life. A passion to feel, a passion to bond, a passion to acquire, a passion to learn and a passion to defend. You've got to find out what your passion is. Then, you put out adverts that mean something to you rather than any old marketing material that doesn't mean anything to anyone.

If you have got a passion to learn, you should be putting things out like blogs that educate people. If you have got a passion to acquire, which is more a financial thing, then put out "before and afters" and talk about the treatments people can book in for or the offers you have. If your passion is in line with your advert, it will work.

DON'T: Make it difficult for people to get in touch with you

One of the big no-nos, something that really winds me up, is when you go to a website, and it's not got a clickable phone number. You then have to cut and paste it into notes in order to call them, and most people won't bother. Also, not having your address on the homepage above the phone number. It takes two minutes to add a plug-in; even if it's not a mobile-friendly website, you can have a plug-in on it.

DO: Make sure your patient journey backs up your marketing messages

It doesn't matter how much you put into the marketing budget, if the rest of it falls apart, you just wasted all your money. You have to put a good advert out, but also, when the patient picks up the phone, it needs to be answered. The reception has to book them in and get them through the door. Patients need to be looked after. They need to see the clinician, and you need to have a good

conversion rate to keep them as a patient and so that they give you a testimonial that encourages another patient to book in and so on. You must have that entire journey licked, and if you don't, you are wasting your money. There is no such thing as a bad lead.

While on the topic of responding well to enquiries from the public, I feel strongly that many clinics need to work on reception sales.

I have completed 150 mystery shopper experiences across the UK, and 148 of them failed. Even my own reception failed. It was a bad day. The person answering the phone was new to the business and hadn't been appropriately trained. So, front of house team members need to be constantly updated, monitored and trained. They need to build rapport, ask questions, be friendly and approachable, use the person's name, all that sort of stuff. You want to go somewhere and feel welcome, and if you don't feel welcome, you won't go there.

The bottom line is you've just got to give it a go. Don't bail out too soon. Let it run for a little while. You can't spend £5 a day, say on Facebook or Instagram, and expect to get £50,000 in business on the first day. You've got to give it a fair run. If you give it a go and can't do it, then bring in the big guns and pay someone else to do it. But you will never know how rewarding doing your own marketing can be unless you try. ■

About the author
Dr Grant McAree is an award-winning dental marketer who has owned and sold a dental practice for £1.3m. Experienced dental practice owner ready to help you grow your dental business.

