

Differentiating your practice in the marketplace is not as difficult as most dentists think. The problem is that most dental practices today have become “commoditized” in the market. That means that in the eyes of the public one dentist is as good as the next. We all know that’s not true. Examples of commodities include gasoline, milk, bottled water, etc. Most people don’t care what brand they buy and the vast majority of people think one is as good as the next. While challenging, commoditization also creates an opportunity for savvy dentists to differentiate themselves.

Rochester, Buffalo and Syracuse and, in fact, most of New York State are sluggish markets. We are not experiencing the population growth other cities and states have seen. Further, some markets are relatively saturated with great dentists and most patients don’t know what makes a dentist great. Whose fault is that? It’s certainly not the patients. Today we have a more informed health care consumer than ever before. Patients are demanding more and better procedures, including profitable aesthetic procedures. And many dentists are offering these procedures, but doing nothing to capture the loyalty of their patients or differentiate their practices in this crowded marketplace.

Competition for dental services is real. Smart dentists recognize that a good marketing strategy is as important as having the best dental technology. Don’t say there’s nothing unique about what your office brings to the market. There’s always something. If you’re selling procedures and not the total experience, then you’re missing the mark. If you’re running tactical, run-of-the-mill ads without strategy, you’re missing the mark.

Case in point. Recently, we worked with a practice located half way between two of the major markets this magazine serves. The owners of the practice were obviously excellent at what they do having invested heavily in technology, equipment and staff. Gradually, they became aware that despite their seemingly good standing in the community, they were not attracting new patients and the wolves were at the door. So, they decided they needed to market themselves and promptly went out and bought TV commercials from a well-meaning ad rep. Good idea in principle, except they bought a campaign targeting the wrong demographics (18 year olds don’t make dental buying decisions) on the wrong TV station—\$9,000 worth of “bad” advertising. Further complicating matters, they had no real marketing strategy or message. In other words, the practice didn’t know what differentiated them from their competitors because they had not done their “branding” homework.

On a more positive note, recently we began working with a dental practice with two locations—excellent facilities, great staff and a caring dentist. They’d tried every form of advertising known to man—some marginally successful, but most not so successful. Upon engaging us, we developed a comprehensive marketing strategy to re-brand the office as a destination for cosmetic procedures. Then, we created a creative ad campaign using humor and a play on words to make light of patients’ natural desire to avoid going to the dentist to drive their hygiene business. The jury is still out on the results as this magazine goes to press, but we can say with confidence that the office has a marketing strategy that differentiates itself. Further, their new advertising message is compelling, memorable and fun—factors that with time will drive results.

Differentiating dental practices through effective marketing strategy and tactics in highly commoditized markets like Rochester, Buffalo and Syracuse is the best investment a dentist can make in his practice. Making a market involves more than just hanging out your shingle.

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