



Your most valuable market... and how to reach them

BY SARAH ARNOLD

Your existing clientele represents your most important market and offers the greatest potential for your business. And the dental hygienist holds the key to reaching that market.

Marketing, by its nature, is invariably directed at luring “new business”. However, when it comes to an established and successful organisation, your existing clientele can represent as much potential as any new business you’re likely to drum up.

For the established business, marketing is as much about communicating with and educating your existing clients as your potential ones. This is especially so in an industry such as dentistry where advances in science and technology are constantly delivering new treatments and procedures.

Looking after the clients you already have is vital. We want our patients to hear about new treatments and procedures through us - not their friends or Oprah.

Dental practices these days provide a menu of services that rivals the local café. To put these many services to work for our patients (in providing comprehensive dental care) and for our practices (in building profitability) requires effective education and communication.

Whether you’re servicing your smile, your car or your laptop, a new procedure can be daunting. And a never-ending list of services can make us feel overwhelmed. Lack of knowledge, or fear of the unknown, is a major impediment to new treatment acceptance. Communicating the facts and benefits of our many services to our clientele is therefore essential.

One of the most effective mediums for communicating with our existing patients isn’t the information brochure or website. It’s the dental hygienist. As a key figure in patient relations, the dental hygienist is central to communicating your services and marketing your practice. Most importantly, the dental hygienist is central to promoting treatment acceptance.

Education and motivation provide the key to treatment acceptance. While we have an extensive array of information brochures, nothing beats face-to-face communication. With the regularity and frequency of ongoing



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continuing care appointments, the hygiene department is an ideal forum for educating and motivating the patient. In the long run, the patient values dentistry and makes an informed choice.

We conduct workshops at Smile Dental on the role of the dental hygienist and how to make the most of this position within the dental practice. We highlight marketing as one of the roles of the dental hygienist, exploring the potential to:

- Enhance customer service and the patient experience;
- Promote and extend the capabilities of the practice;
- Increase patient confidence; and
- Increase treatment acceptance.

Laurelyn Higgins, our dental hygienist here at Smile Dental, and the workshop planner and presenter, says the dental hygienist plays an essential role in marketing the dental practice. “The 1906 dental hygienist was a scale and clean girl. The 2006 dental hygienist is an ambassador of marketing total oral health - and marketing your practice in the process.”

Repeat business is the backbone of your business. We must never take our patients for granted. We need to keep the relation-

ship alive and fresh. Communication and education provide the key to caring for our existing clientele, and increasing the level of service and care that we provide. And the dental hygienist is central to this. Around 40% of our dentists’ production is referred via the hygiene department. The practice in turn has a role to market the hygienist.

Focusing on new patients at the expense of your existing ones is the surest way to turn your practice into a revolving door. Focusing on your existing patients is the surest way to secure and build your clientele, and grow your business. And the dental hygienist is the key.

Sarah Arnold is Marketing and Practice Manager at Smile Dental in Townsville, Queensland, and a guest lecturer in marketing at James Cook University. The practice is in the process of licensing its identity and practice program.

Smile Dental’s next dental hygiene workshop is scheduled for 31 March - 1 April 2006. Attendance is limited to 15 participants. For bookings or more information, contact Sarah Arnold on (07) 4779-4533 or sarah@smiledental.com.au