



What high tech means for our practice

BY SARAH ANOLD

As a progressive, modern dental practice, we aim to be at the forefront of dental technology and patient care and provide our patients with the most advanced procedures available. It's a commitment that demands unprecedented and escalating levels of investment - in both financial and human resource terms. But it's one we must make. Dental practices are increasingly technology-driven. They're also increasingly aggressive and competitive in their marketing. And technology is one way we seek to set ourselves apart from the rest in our market's mind.

I believe that a good dental practice brand represents the facilities as well as the service and ethos behind it. Technology is a huge part of the future of dentistry. But it will only build your business if you promote and communicate it correctly.

As dental practitioners, we want to make things easy, accessible and appealing for our patients. Patients want to know that their dentist has the latest and greatest, and keeps abreast of the times. Some technically-minded patients do love to know the ins and outs of the latest equipment, but they're usually in the minority. We need to communicate the benefit - what's in it for them? Precision treatment, successful and long-lasting results, quick recovery.

It's the relationship we have with our patients, and communicating the emotional benefits, that count. Our performance management consultant, Kathleen McKellar from DDS, has always stressed that dental technology will not build our practice; that too many dentists invest too much in the latest gizmos, and not enough in marketing and communicating the benefits to their patients - the real end-users or consumers of the technology.

At Smile Dental, when we commit to new technology, we regard the marketing as as important as the training. Just as important as teaching our staff how to use it, is teaching our patients what benefits it will offer them. When we invested in a dental laser, for instance, we heralded its arrival with a patient information brochure,

website content, advertisements in local lifestyle magazines, and random show-and-tell-type demonstrations in the practice - all communicating the benefits for the patient. We promote the benefits of the dental laser to the patient in terms of comfort, efficacy and efficiency. Less time and discomfort for the patient is a serious motivator.

For our hygienist, Laurelyn Higgins, the benefits of technology fall into several categories:

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- Convenience - making our job easier;
- Productivity - working better;
- Peace of mind - confidence in our work;
- Status/image - being perceived as professional and progressive; and
- Enthusiasm - user satisfaction/enjoyment.

“Thanks to the internet and television, the general public - our patients - are more informed than ever before” Laurelyn says. “A survey of 7000 dental practices in America identified the main reason for the increased demand for cosmetic dentistry was media coverage. They equate technology with the skill level of the dentist as well as the image of the practice. Patients need proof that what we're doing is working. That is, cues and clues. So intra-oral cameras for example are a necessity, not a luxury.”

But the latest technology also means more to our dentists and support staff than just improved patient care and productivity. Let's face it, dentists love gadgets. Look at

the most popular stands at the trade exhibitions; look at the biggest advertisements in this journal. In their downtime, our dentists can be found playing with the latest practice gadget, or scanning the industry journals and internet for the latest breaks in dental technology. Our noticeboards are strewn with ads, articles and print-outs on emerging technology.

For our practice principal, Dr Cameron Arnold, dental technology also works to stimulate the enthusiasm of staff. “As a dentist, I want to keep my interest levels high and maintain my enthusiasm for the job. This enthusiasm rubs off on patients.”

Cameron highlights the impact the CEREC unit had on the practice and patients. “When we got the CEREC, there was a high level of enthusiasm. We involved the patients in the treatment by showing them how it worked - showing them the restoration milling. Acquiring new equipment and increasing our skills help us enhance our service and build patient confidence. The excitement of working at the cutting edge, as well as the productivity improvements it brings, contributes to the bottom line.”

But, as I'm sure many of you will agree, keeping in touch and in step with technology ain't easy. When yet another new piece of whizbangery is set to revolutionise dentistry, we need to weigh up if and when we'll take it up, and take on the burden of investment, training, marketing and maintenance. Objectively assessing emerging technology is difficult. Industry journals such as this one are essential in providing objective assessment and peer review.

We live and work in a high-tech society. We're impressed with what technology can do, and the benefits it can bring to our lives and lifestyles. But we need to remain focused on the benefits as much as the obligatory bells and whistles.

Oops... Gotta go... My Blackberry's beeping!

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