

# When it comes to marketing, be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater

By Sarah Arnold



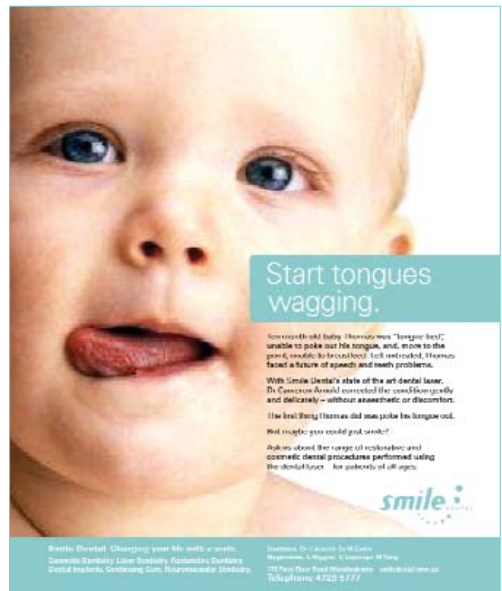
*“for me... the most important aspect of differentiating your practice is personalising your story...”*

*What makes dental technology great for our patients is very different from what makes it great for us. Sarah Arnold recounts her presentation to the World Clinical Laser Institute 2007 Asia Pacific Symposium, and demonstrates how getting personal gets results.*

**M**y marketing column this issue is ostensibly about marketing that state-of-the-art, must-have, whiz-bang gizmo-gadget of the dental practice - the dental laser. But the column is really about babies. Yes, babies. Well, it's about communicating the benefits of a product or service in a manner that creates an emotional connection with another human being - as opposed to telling your target market consumer how amazing you and your product/service are.

You see, at the time of writing this column, I'm 39 weeks and three days pregnant with child number five. Back in May - when I was a mere 33 weeks thus endowed - I gave a presentation at the World Clinical Laser Institute's 2007 Asia Pacific Symposium in Cairns. Contrasting wonderfully with the buff blokes in bespoke suits around me, I had the audience's undivided attention. And I was particularly well prepared for the story I had to tell...

A few months earlier, we had a random enquiry from a somewhat anxious young woman named Alita, asking if we have a dental laser. We had no idea what she had in mind, but confirmed that, yes, we do in fact have a dental laser. Alita then goes on to explain that her Baby Thomas has a tongue-tie and is unable to breastfeed. Doctors have told her that fixing the problem will require surgery and a general anaesthetic. And to make matters worse, there's a two-year waiting list to have the procedure performed in hospital.



The young mum was casting around for a second opinion. Could a dental laser, Alita asked, provide a solution? Our principal dentist, Dr Cameron Arnold - who, incidentally, doubles as my husband, and is the person I hold responsible for my current state - assured her that yes it could.

Baby Thomas was quickly booked in. Cameron performed a lingual frenectomy - quickly and easily and without anaesthetic - using the dental laser. As a sign of a job well done, Baby Thomas immediately poked his tongue out at Cameron. This was the first time Alita had seen her baby poke out his tongue. There wasn't a dry eye in the house!

Nor in the lecture room at this point. I went on to explain to my captivated audience that, although lingual frenectomies are not an everyday

procedure, the story of Baby Thomas created a wonderful opportunity for communicating the human benefits of the dental laser at our very state-of-the-art, whiz-bang practice.

With Alita's permission, we prepared an advertisement and media release around the following theme: "The dental laser - so gentle, it wouldn't hurt a baby. Just ask Thomas!" (Pictured here.) We didn't need to use any technical or medical jargon, or cite any clinical research. We just told the story as it happened. We concluded briefly by adding that we use the dental laser for a range of restorative and cosmetic dental procedures - for patients of all ages. We directed readers to our website for more information.

My brief for the conference presentation was to "reinforce the importance of differentiating your practice from that of your competitors, with emphasis on marketing your skills and technological advances in patient care to your patients"... Or something like that. I think I met the brief. And I think I conveyed

what for me is the most important aspect of "differentiating your practice" - personalising your story.

By personalising, I not only mean focusing your practice image and communications on your patient and the personal benefit. I also mean tailoring your image and communications so they uniquely embody and reflect your particular practice and your particular market. The marketing materials that we're inundated with from dental technology companies (often American or European) have little relevance to our consumer markets here in Adelaide, Broken Hill or Townsville. And what impresses and appeals to our patients is very different from what impresses and appeals to dentists. Patients don't care too much that a laser can give their dentist more time on the golf course.

I've tried to convey the importance of a different approach to marketing. And don't just rely on advertising and PR. Nothing beats good word of mouth and first-hand accounts. Host an information session in

your practice, and invite patients who've had the procedure you're promoting. Ask your patients for a testimonial or if you could feature their case histories on your website. Of course marketing is as much about communicating to our existing patients as well as our potential ones.

The story of Baby Thomas captured the hearts and minds of our market, and my audience at the clinical laser symposium. But right now another baby is doing an equally impressive job of demanding my undivided attention. And, alas, I'm yet to hear of a clinical laser that can make childbirth any easier. Cameron darling ...

### **About the author**

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**Update:** *It's a girl! Sarah have birth to a 7lb 5oz baby girl on Friday July 13. Mother and baby are doing fabulously.*