

## **Patient Referral Marketing**

### **By Laura Jamison**

"You've got a gold mine buried in those charts!" How many of you have heard this from your office manager or a dental consultant? Do you know why the baker gives an extra donut in a baker's dozen? Because it costs a lot less to keep a customer than to gain the interest of a new one. It is true. If you paid as much attention to the patient of record follow through as you do to new patient marketing, you would have better results. So let's break this down and examine what is going on here.

Admit it. Doctors, you are avoiding the problem. What's the problem? You are not comfortable with asking the patient for a decision to do treatment or asking the patient for them to refer their friends. What you may be comfortable with is sending out a direct mail piece, advertising in the yellow pages, placing an ad in the newspaper or on a park bench. This way you personally don't have to sit before the patient and ask them to make a decision and risk that they will say, "No." Hopefully you are not uncomfortable with some form of practice promotion also because then your practice is really struggling.

Help is out there. Your team wants to help. Marketing can be the most fun aspect of practice development. Just get over yourself and learn to be proud of what you do (in a humble kind of way). Here is a sampling of what is available to you out there to make your life and your breathing easier.

- Ask patients of record for referrals. There is now an exciting tool called A Reason to Smile™ available. This is a cd brochure that is fully customizable for the purpose of giving your patients the tools they need to give their friends the information about your practice that will enable them to find you. This product is well done and rates an A+ in my book. To request more information about this product contact the manufacturers of this terrific tool at [www.areasontosmile.net](http://www.areasontosmile.net) or call 1-877-258-3771.
- Do not leave asking for referrals to chance. Decide who you would like to ask in the morning huddle. Each team member should feel comfortable asking one patient each day. Do not forget to give the patient something that equips them to educate their friends.
- Reward patient who refer. Do not offer rewards as an incentive. Once they have referred a patient however keep a record of ways that you reward these patients. Some examples can include: handwritten note cards by the doctor, gas cards, lotto scratch cards, savings on future dentistry, Glamour Shots, dinner on you just to name a few ideas.
- Conduct a semiannual tour of your office through the patient's eyes. Discard old posters that are falling off the walls. Wallpaper or paint areas that have become worn. Replace garbage cans that can not keep all of the waste contained for one day. Keep cd brochures and/or business cards accessible throughout the office. Look up and see the ceiling from the patient's eyes. Do not scrimp on the cost of accessories. Furniture may need to be replaced periodically but accessories can be kept for years if they are of good quality. Invest in Dental art throughout your

- public areas. Discus Dental offers a nice selection in black and white. They can be researched at [www.discusdental.com](http://www.discusdental.com).
- Examine your verbal skills. It is not what you say but how you say it that counts. Are you asking open ended questions to determine what motivates your patient? Do you document the patient's interests? Are these interests referred to when you discuss treatment with them. How are your listening skills? Are you familiar with how to present benefit statements to present the treatment plan? Learn how to handle objections.
  - You make an impression within the first seven seconds. Is it one that is professional and trustworthy or disorganized and unclean? Ask for honest feedback about this doctors and also be prepared to give open feedback to your team members about this issue. Take a look at how you are dressed and groomed. Does your team look like they work together? Can patients call your team mates by name? Patients are more likely to refer to a practice that they feel a connection with.
  - Are financial options being offered? To be rid of insurance dictated treatment, it is more necessary than ever to inform patients of outside financing alternatives. I recommend Capital One Health Care Finance to all of my clients. They offer the best rates, the best plans and the best customer service to the patient. What more can you ask? The best discount rate to you. You got it! Contact them at 1-877-559-5050 or on the web at [www.capitalonehealthcarefinance.com](http://www.capitalonehealthcarefinance.com).
  - Once you have encouraged the patient to make a decision about treatment, do you save time on your schedule for longer, more productive appointments? By doing this, you ensure that the patient who is ready to start their procedures is not kept waiting unnecessarily. This is called preblocking.
  - Not all of your patients are able to proceed with treatment at once. Follow up with the patients by phone in several weeks or months with their permission. I consider this a service that we offer to the patients. They know they want the treatment. They have postponed for good reason. By calling them, you make it convenient to schedule at some point in the future.
  - Lastly, do not underestimate the influence of your hygienist. The hygienist can reinforce your treatment recommendations, reassure your patients that they are in the right practice and encourage your patients of record to refer their friends.

So if you truly do have a gold mine in those charts, consider what can be done to improve what you have already before spending tens of thousands of dollars on a marketing plan; a marketing plan that may vaguely blanket attract anyone in your community including the patient who wants you to do the dentistry for what the insurance will pay, stay late, accept what they can pay or tell everyone they know that you will do all of these things for free. No wonder the baker gives an extra donut in a baker's dozen.