



Aim for Success

7 steps to improve your practice

As an orthodontist, you've excelled in your studies and become the best in your field. You are ambitious and were in the top 10 percent of your graduating class in dental school. Now, your success and future now rely on a steady stream of referrals from a network of affiliate dental practices. Your success is directly tied to them.

Yet, as the future of orthodontics continues to evolve, the likelihood is increasing that those referring dental practices may become your competition. While referrals should be a component of a successful marketing strategy, they should never be the main source of generating new leads. A successful patient acquisition strategy should be as diversified as your IRA. So how do you take control of your future?



"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it." — Michelangelo

Step 1: Identify your "why."

In his book *Start with Why*, Simon Sinek suggests that a person's "why" is the purpose, cause or belief that inspires them to do what they do. Determining your personal "why" is a critical first step in figuring out how to begin achieving the goals that excite you. Your "why" is often found at the intersection where your personal and professional lives overlap, and should be an integral part of your operations and marketing plans.

Step 2: Determine your value proposition.

A value proposition clearly defines, in the language of your potential patients, what problem you are solving for them. Ask your patients what specifically caused them to solicit your services over someone else's. A good value proposition often requires a lot of self-reflection, patient surveys, online review analysis and discussion. It should be concise and easy to understand, and immediately resonate with your patient base.

by Brad Petersen

Brad Petersen is the CEO of Sharp Edge Marketing Group, a firm that helps doctors maximize their strategic and financial



goals by monitoring and managing their patient bases. Sharp Edge's plans include lead generation and conversion strategies, real-time analytics and ongoing training and education.

Petersen has more than 20 years of experience leading companies, nonprofits and government agencies. In 2012 he was appointed by the governor of Utah to develop the new outdoor recreation division of the Office of Economic Development. He has also facilitated acquisitions for Intel, and founded and sold his own company.

Step 3: Go big.

When was the last time someone was inspired, or even excited about, aiming for 3, 4 or 5 percent growth? Avoid that next midlife crisis by going big. Studies have shown that nearly 50 percent of people are unhappy with their smiles and are looking for a solution. That means there's a lot of opportunity to grow your practice. A growth mindset of 10 percent or more requires a different perspective, vision and service partners. Your patient management software contains a wealth of important information to help you effectively determine your future goals.

Step 4: Diversify your marketing plan.

Once you've set an annual growth objective, it's time to invest in creating a marketing plan with specific goals, automatic source tracking and analytics. For most diversified orthodontic marketing plans, dental office referrals should generate up to 20 percent of new patient leads, with the remaining 80 percent resulting from a synergistic print, digital, awareness and internal marketing plan.

Step 5: Track your results.

Tracking all your marketing efforts—including your website, direct mail and referrals—will help you understand which marketing channels are bringing you the best cost per lead and return on investment. Unique dynamic phone numbers and landing pages help identify the source of each new patient and, ultimately, help refine your marketing plan.

Step 6: Develop branding consistency.

It's often said that McDonald's main product is consistency: A Big Mac ordered in the U.S., is supposed to taste exactly like one ordered in Greece. Similarly, your marketing campaign, patient communication and office ambiance should all convey the same feeling. By the time prospective patients arrive at your office, they should already feel at home. There's an immediate disconnect if the brand messaging and marketing aren't consistent with the office ambiance and culture.

Step 7: Surround yourself with qualified partners.

As an orthodontist, you have a very specific set of tools and skills that allow you to be great at your job. You wouldn't hire an accountant to do orthodontics, so why take on the challenges of managing all your marketing efforts yourself? Yet, without a successful marketing strategy in place, it's unlikely that your orthodontic practice will achieve its true potential.

You can't control the future of orthodontics, but you can take control of your destiny. Luckily, the tools and strategies to facilitate continued growth and success have grown proportionate to the industry challenges. It's time to take control of your future. ■