Embracing the digital transition

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_Setting the precedent_

Dr. John Hagen came from a family of blacksmiths where you practiced a certain trade. In those days, college was generally not the path, but for him, his motivation was to go to college. Having taken an aptitude test from the advice of a high school science teacher, John moved on into dental school, which set a different precedent for his future lineage.

Knowing his family’s history of blacksmiths but also seeing his father break away from that history to become a dentist, Dirk Hagen had always been intrigued by John’s dental work while growing up. Although he didn’t know from the beginning, dentistry was Dirk’s lifetime calling from high school on.

When you hear about a hometown dentist who has been in practice for more than 60 years, you think of a dentist who is comfortable in his old ways with the tried-and-true formulas of traditional dentistry — but this is not the case at all for John. John is a forward-thinking dental professional who continues to integrate new technologies into his practice. Together, John and Dirk push their practice, Opera House Dental, to great heights of productivity and profitability with digital dentistry to better serve their patients with the best that dentistry has to offer.

_History in the making_

With 95 years of experience between the two, John and Dirk have both seen the dental industry evolve from a focus on materials to technologies, but very little of the techniques and products that either of them were taught or used in dental school are still utilized today. With new technologies on the rise, clinical approaches have changed over time. This in turn affects the patients they see, because they want to continue providing them with the best restorative materials.

Opera House Dental has evolved over the years and continues to follow the tech curve. The practice has progressed from slow-speed belts to electric handpieces, rotary equipment, digital radiography and computer-operated operatories. Having started this practice from the ground up, John has kept up with current technologies in the industry, setting the stage up for Opera House Dental to continue moving toward a digital workflow environment.

While John has always been interested in CAD/CAM technology, cost was a major concern of his. About one year ago, Dirk went to a Planmeca PlanScan event and heard Dr. Mark Morin speak on the technology. “It really took me over the edge and got me thinking that this is where the future of dentistry lies. After hearing about the superiority of the materials and that same-day service was a possibility for our patients, I knew it would fit right in with our practice,” he said. “I was convinced it was time to take Opera House Dental to the next level.”

Excited with anticipation of this new technology, Dirk returned to John with the proposal. With an open-mind, John encouraged him to move forward. In December of 2014, they purchased the full Planmeca FIT open CAD/CAM system (PlanScan, PlanCAD, and PlanMill 40).

_The pay-off_

Integrating this new technology has been a lot more complex than just installing new equipment. Juggling patient schedules with their workflow has been a bit challenging, especially because this concept is completely different than what they are...
practice growth _embracing change

As part of the Planmeca FIT family, John and Dirk have both been very well-supported by the Support On-Site (SOS) team at Planmeca, clinical and technical experts who provide remote support to FIT customers throughout their digital transition. Having gone digital for less than eight months, Dirk has sent only one prep over to the laboratory.

He started his digital journey with onlay cases and has moved on to full coverage crowns. "I really love the idea that I get to be in control of the restoration. I can be more (or less) conservative with not having to remove too much tooth structure," he said, one of the major selling points for him.

Dirk occasionally cuts into John’s daily workflow by creating restorations that he would rather see created digitally in-house instead of sending them off to the lab — this helps cut costs and reduce fees. For those patients, John educates them on the workflow beforehand. "We have a system set up in the office where I bring my patients back there to show and explain to them the digital process. We tell them basically what it is, and a lot of my patients are already in the high-tech industry, so they understand computer-aided designing and manufacturing. This just puts the icing on the cake because they are already interested in having same-day restorations with a metal-free mouth," John said.

John’s patients are especially happy with these services because the patient expectation for quality and a restoration that fits perfectly is very high — both of which are key benefits of owning Planmeca FIT.

"Older patients value the convenience of having their teeth restored in a single day," John said. "They love it because not only is it a much more comfortable experience, but they are also able to continue their daily life routines without any disruptions."

He continued: "We are both very pleased with the final restorations’ strength and esthetics, as well as the results of same-day dentistry. So while we continue to learn more about optimizing our practice to the digital workflow, we see the possibilities and benefits of going completely digital, including less dependency on the lab, having more control of the final restoration and being able to continuously reduce extra costs."

Together, both John and Dirk continue to work toward all of these goals to provide the best dental experience for their patients.

_Open mind, endless possibilities

John has always been accepting of new changes within the practice, especially with new materials and technologies. While the Hagens would not describe their practice as "cutting-edge," they do believe that they are working closer toward that with the implementation of chairside CAD/CAM dentistry.

Dirk added: "Patients realize that we are trying to keep up with current technologies in the industry, and we pride ourselves in the fact that we do look ahead toward the future of where dentistry is going to provide our patients with the best experience, restorations and care."

John is excited to see how digital dentistry will continue improving for more advanced cases and is very eager to take more advanced classes at Planmeca University to further provide new techniques for better dentistry. His advice? Make sure you and your team all have an open mind and that you are whole-heartedly committed to this modern technology before making the investment. "Everything else will fall into place when you have support behind you," said John. Both John and Dirk look forward to seeing further innovations from Planmeca to continue their digital journey with the latest and greatest.

So when you hear a dentist tell you that he or she is too close to retirement to see the value of investing in CAD/CAM technology or that his or her practice and team are not ready to take the next step, John and Dirk Hagen can tell you otherwise. The possibilities of digital dentistry are endless and worth it, especially when you can create an environment for your patients that allows them to leave your office comfortably to eat, talk and smile.

"That’s a good thing, because not only does it help them but your patients will love you for it," John said.

_about the dentists

Dr. John Hagen has been practicing dentistry for 61 years. He received his DDS from Temple University dental school and served in the United States Navy for two years before he opened his own practice, Opera House Dental, in Parkesburg, Pa., where he continues to practice today. Dr. Dirk Hagen, Dr. John’s son, has been practicing for 34 years. He also received his DDS from Temple University and then joined his father in practice.