Tapping into a Promising Market: Targeting the AdultWhitespace

By Debby Hartman, USA

Two years ago, the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) kicked off its first-ever national advertising campaign targeting adults. Why? According to Dr. Michael B. Rogers, president of AAO, there are many adults on the fence when it comes to receiving orthodontic treatment, making it increasingly important for the AAO to educate the adult audience on the benefits of braces.

Recent AAO statistics reported by The New York Times show that from 1994 to 2010, the number of Americans 18 years and older getting braces—or some type of teeth-straightening treatment—from an orthodontist has jumped 58 percent, from 680,000 annually to 1.1 million. Furthermore, those same statistics show that adults undergoing treatment account for 22 percent of all orthodontic cases— that’s more than one in every five patients.

Another study commissioned by the AAO reports that one-third of American adults are unhappy with their smile. Out of those adults, 56 percent believe they would have a better social life if they had better teeth.

This sentiment is especially true among young adults, as 48 percent of Americans ages 18-24 have untagged a picture on Facebook because they didn’t like their smile.

With such vast potential to treat the adult whitespace, orthodontists can increase their practice revenue by better understanding this untapped market and effectively promoting the latest treatment methods proven to deliver exceptional patient results. To help, I invite you to explore the following tips that offer insight into the growing audience of adult orthodontic candidates.

Start with Mom

Most doctors know the importance of targeting mothers—typically the key household decision maker. It is widely reported that women make or influence the majority of all purchasing decisions.

But did you know that according to consultancy firm Girl Power Marketing an astounding 80 percent of healthcare decisions are made by women? Furthermore, the nextweb.com states that 64 percent of moms ask other moms for advice before purchasing a new product. Therefore, doctors who market adult treatment options to moms will have the best chance to treat parents and their children. Education is the best way to kick off your targeted adult marketing efforts.

Educate Adults

While many parents seek orthodontic treatment for their children, the majority of them may not realize the benefits of straight teeth for themselves. In fact, there are approximately 25 million U.S. adults who are interested in improving their smiles, but don’t seek treatment due to lack of education, according to a study from the Millennium Research Group. The same study indicates that adults are more likely to seek treatment after reviewing educational materials that showcase the benefits of orthodontic treatment, as well as advancements in the treatment experience itself.

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To learn about the benefits of Damon Clear from a patients' perspective, visit www.damonbraces.com – Ormco's consumer education website with a Damon Doctor Locator.

With this in mind, it's important to ensure that your practice website, lobby and consultation rooms resonate with the adult audience by featuring photographs of adults in treatment and adult patient before-and-after photographs.

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Dent al tribune Middle East & Africa Edition | November-December 2015

including URLs to those profiles in all of your marketing collateral, such as business and appointment reminder cards, posters, t-shirts and mailers. When you’re ready to post content via your social media profiles, make sure it’s interesting and relevant to the adult audience, and engage with patients by encouraging them to comment, retweet or “Like” your posts. It’s also important to remember that social media isn’t just about pushing information out to potential patients, but fostering two-way engagement that will build trust, educate and ultimately drive patients through your door.

Discuss Third-Party Financing

A recent research study conducted by the Millennium Research Group found that the cost of treatment is the No. 1 barrier holding adults back from seeking orthodontic care. If parents are already investing in their child's braces, they often wonder how they can afford it for themselves.

Offering flexible financing options is a good way to ease financial concerns. Orthodontists should investigate available third-party financing plans that enable them to offer patients more affordable monthly payments over longer periods of time. This is especially helpful as treatment costs increase and treatment times decrease as a result of technologies such as self-ligation and digital solutions. Offering financing options helps increase case acceptance and cash flow, while decreasing accounts receivables.

Remember the “Why”

A common question doctors often hear from adults exploring orthodontic treatment is, “Why should I invest time and money in obtaining a better smile? I’m too old.” But the fact is orthodontics has come a long way from when adults were kids, thanks to decades of research and development. A good way to mitigate these questions is to stress the positive long-term effects orthodontic treatment can have on their lives. Nearly one-third of Americans say the first aspect of someone’s face they typically notice is his or her teeth. Underestimating the power of a smile, a recent perception study from market research consultancy, Kelton, found that when looking at images of other people, American adults perceive those with straight teeth to be 45 percent more likely than those with crooked teeth to get a job when competing against someone with similar skill sets and experience. Furthermore, the same study found people with straight teeth were 58 percent more likely to be successful, and wealthy.

Most doctors know the importance of detailing the oral health and self-confidence benefits of a better smile, but it’s equally as important to stress how an improved smile can help potential patients increase their chances to excel in the workplace and live more fruitful lifestyles.

Remember, it’s never too late for your adult prospects to look their best.

Ormco, AAO and You

The eligible adult treatment population represents a lucrative and largely untapped opportunity. Doctors who are motivated to understand what appeals to this particular market segment will see more patients in their chairs and increase profitability. The emerging trend of adults seeking orthodontic treatment is not slowing down, and orthodontists have more support and resources to treat this patient population than ever before. By leveraging marketing assets and advanced treatment solutions from Ormco, as well as materials from the AAO’s recent campaigns targeting the adult market, you will have a significant opportunity to demonstrate your dedication to improving the smiles of adults and make your practice even more successful.

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About the Author

Debby Hartman
Director of Marketing, Ormco Corporation

Debby Hartman brings more than 20 years of marketing experience to her position as director of marketing at Ormco.

Over the past eleven years, Debby has overseen Ormco’s global brand development, D reassure™ System marketing for doctors and patients, the Ormco graphic design department and practice marketing support programs.

Prior to joining Ormco, she served as tooth whitening marketing manager for Discus Dental, senior marketing manager at Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, and held marketing positions at TBC advertising agency and Legg Mason investment firm. She earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration from the University of Delaware.
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