Relationship marketing

By Bridget Conway, BA, RDH

I bet when you first glanced at the title of this article, you might think… “Hygiene, relationship marketing? Help me connect the dots.” Especially in our profession, developing a relationship — a rapport — is critical to our success and our patients. Think about the definition below and extrapolate it to the operatory. The emphasis is on the connection, not the production.

“Relationship marketing was first defined as a form of marketing developed from direct response marketing campaigns, which emphasized customer retention and satisfaction, rather than a primary focus on sales transactions.”

In general, this type of marketing differs from other forms in that it recognizes the longitudinal value of customer relationships and extends communication beyond interruptive advertising and sales promotional messages. If you’re good at this, your patients will come back again and again ask for you. Practiced correctly, relationship marketing creates an emotional bond, generates a memorable experience and increases customer engagement and loyalty.

In the dental office this might mean the extra time it takes to settle in a nervous patient or help a mom distract her children so she can get an exam. Make an effort to maintain good notes that are not only clinically correct, but have some personal detail that can demonstrate your interest and jog you memory so you can continue the conversation from the previous appointment. People want to matter and they want to be remembered. The genuine interest in your client/patient will help facilitate success on both your part and theirs.

If your interaction stems from a place of curiosity and kindness, your day tends to go much faster and you feel more effectively energized. On the contrary, if you approach a patient with much anticipated dread or inactiveness, it wears everyone down. In essence, if you practice relationship marketing in your operatory, for example, when you have a mishap or are running late, you are able to overcome these obstacles with a minimum of feather smoothing because you have established a positive connection.

This scenario is applicable from the moment a patient sits down in your chair. If all you do is proceed with the “robot prophy” and make no effort to talk to the patient and ask open-ended questions, you lose the opportunity to open the door to relationship marketing. When a patient does not understand a procedure or has a question regarding a specific product, you are the expert. This affords you a huge opportunity to be of service and also a source of information. This is an example of a moment where trust and rapport are established. Connection is a verb. Action is required. Demonstrate interest and curiosity and you may be surprised at the outcome. It really is in our DNA and makes us happier.

We’re hard-wired to connect
Not only do we have an innate desire to relate to other humans, our DNA practically compels us to tell stories about them. People will spout endlessly about who was on “American Idol,” should the government shut down, what’s happening with the royals, etc. Then there are people’s opinions about Tiger Woods. The Woods example is a strong one: Most of his sponsors pulled away because they didn’t want to be identified with his behavior and the fallout.

Having a human identity that people can identify your brand with makes your products/services intrinsically more remarkable — that is, intrinsically easier to tell stories about. On a smaller scale, your patients relate to you as the face of whatever you are representing. Most of all, you are representing yourself and the services you provide, and I urge you to do that with genuine authenticity.

Create positive relationships to get permission
Let’s explore another example of relationship marketing in action outside of the operatory. Maybe you can relate to the following scenario.

One of the most dreaded things for any sales representative is to enter an office and see people scatter like mice when the lights have been turned on. Wouldn’t it be nice if instead they came out from every nook and cranny to see you just because you were there? It is possible that people will seek you out for information; however you need permission. Is there any representative that you are really happy to see when he or she comes into your office? If so, step back a bit and reflect on why that might be.

My guess is that this person connects and enjoys it, and as a consequence of that effort, you feel appreciated and happy when you encounter him or her. This connection gives you the “permission.”

CREST ORAL-B announces second year of ‘Pros in the Profession’ awards

Crest® Oral-B® continues to recognize Registered Dental Hygienists who go above and beyond the call of duty every day with the second annual “Pros in the Profession” awards program.

The awards distributed through this program acknowledge the essential role of dental hygienists and the important part they play in their patients’ lives. In fact, many of the practicing dental hygienists in the United States serve on the front line of oral care at the dental office, providing patients with recommendations and advice that promote good oral health. “With the success last year when we launched Pros in the Profession, we recognized the need not only to extend, but to expand our commitment to honor dental hygienists for their dedication to improving oral health care for the public,” said Wendy Bebey, RDH, BS, P&G Dental Hygienist Relations Manager. “In year two of the program, we will continue to honor distinguished professionals whose passion and commitment to making a difference in patients’ lives inspires us all.”

Throughout the year, Crest Oral-B will reward six deserving professionals, as nominated by their peers, who truly make an impact on patients and for the oral-health cause.

Winners will receive a $1,000 monetary prize, a plaque, an all-expense-paid trip and recognition...
Permission marketing

“Permission marketing is the privi-
lege (not the right) of delivering au-
tonomous, personal and relevant
messages to people who actually
want to get them.” You’ll be amazed
at how much easier and fulfilling it
is to talk with someone who is
“warmly interested.” You won’t con-
vert everyone and you don’t need
everyone. Why not cultivate real rela-
tionships with your would-be and exis-
ting patients? Build your tribe and make
an effort to genuinely connect to
your patients.

As this applies to the dental office,
be genuine, you won’t convert
everyone to be a life-long flosser, but
with the help of your patients you will
be receptive to your message.

This is the recognition of the new
power of the best consumers to
say no to marketing. It realizes that
treating people with respect is the
best way to earn their attention. You
can convert previously disinterested
patients by connecting to them from
a unique perspective

You can use marketing to cul-
tivate and grow relationships, but
there are some important guidelines
to follow. Electronically, don’t send
out “spam” because it won’t be read,
and don’t info dump because it won’t
be digested.

In order to get permission, you
make a promise. You say, “I will do
X, Y and Z. I hope you will give me
permission by listening.” Next is the
hardest part: that’s all you do. You don’t
assume you can do more. An exam-
ple in the dental office is sharing
an article on a specific procedure
and product a patient is interested in
learning more about.

You don’t sell the list or send
special offers to patient’s e-mail. This is
disengenuous sales practice that is
used for self-advancement, regard-
less of how it works for the patient.
Patients are quick to detect and judge
you as insincere, so do everything possible to avoid coming across this way.

“Real permission works like this:
If you stop showing up, people
complain, they ask where you went.”
The point is, you want to establish
such a positive relationship with
your patients that they miss you
when you’re gone.

Permission marketing vs.
interruption marketing

It all funnels into the same idea:
Create a stronger emotional connec-
tion with existing patients and you
will turn them into loyal advocates.
Not only is this more fun, it’s much
more profitable. Selling to someone
who knows, trusts and likes you
takes more resources than selling to
strangers. I came across some best
practices that distill this concept
down to concepts that are applicable
on a daily basis.

No. 1: Be in the groove

Be open minded to the ideas and
opinions of others. Ideas come
from all kinds of sources and being
open and non-judgmental are key
to expanding your creativity in the
workplace.

It may be a challenge to pitch
your idea to the dentist. Some of
that may be your mindset. Coming
at something from the perspective
of the other person is a great way
to persuasively anticipate his or her
objections and move forward to bet-
ter, more enjoyable job performance
from everyone. Finally, “be a pro-
duct of the product,” which means
you need to believe in the message
you are delivering. Be real.

No. 2: Make a marketing a
conversation

Any marketing for a dental practice
should be part of a conversation, but
don’t take yourself too seriously. In
other words, skip the hard sell, or
any sell, when using social media
tools to interact with your commu-
nity. Make your website patient
friendly and human. So, connect
and join by all means, then make it
meaningful.

No. 3: Make your product your
marketing

Make your office a place people
look forward to coming to. OK, maybe
they just look forward to seeing you.
That’s how much power we all have
in this.

What are the ways to make your
product or service interesting
enough for people to talk about to
others? Being remarkable is being
interesting enough that someone is
remarking about you. This is
the best kind of marketing, word of
mouth. In a positive light it is effec-
tive and free!

For example, how about giving
every patient who visits your prac-
tice three referral coupons to give
to friends and family for a discounted
exam? The patient’s name is writ-
ten on the coupon so that when it is
redeemed, the patient gets a $25
credit to her account for her next
tooth. To the practice. This is
likely going to be eager to share
these referral coupons, and may
even share the fact that she has
them on sites such as Facebook and
Twitter.

No. 4: Empower your customer

If you empower your patient, more
often than not, the benefits outweigh
the risks. Include your community
in certain aspects of your business.
Maybe people in the community
would submit ideas for the design of
a new office logo.

After community members cri-
tique it and vote on it, many may
become new (and likely very loyal)
patients. As a result, they have a
valued interest and a sense of own-
ership than selling to strangers. Use
your imagination and extrapolate
to fit your business. There is likely
some aspect that patients could have
input in creating.

No. 5: Act human

Authenticity is non-negotiable for
anyone selling anything, be it a
pair of shoes or a tooth whitening
procedure. It’s about treating your
patients as you’d want to be treated.

Employees should speak to patients
in a voice that is truly theirs, but
also represents the company.

Engage the community

Turn your patients into a commu-
nity and engage them to partici-
pate in many aspects of your office’s
operations, including product
and service development. For example,
you could conduct an online survey
asking which days patients would
prefer that you have earlier or later
office hours. Involving patients in
this change will carry two transfor-
mational benefits.

First, the quality of your under-
standing of your patients’ needs and
expectations will increase exponen-
tially. Second, patients will change
how they view your dental practice.
They will shift from viewing you
as a “supplier” of products/services
to a practice that offers relevance,
personality and even friends with
whom they choose to communicate
over time. This sets you and your
staff clearly on the path of relation-
ship marketing.

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Plackers and Oral Health America team up to fight oral disease

Providing access to care, education and dental products to underserved children and treatment partners

Tooth decay is one of the most common yet preventable chronic childhood diseases in the United States, and according to the reports from the U.S. Surgeon General, children from low-income families are twice as likely to suffer from this disease. If left untreated, oral diseases in children may lead to serious general health problems and significant pain, interference with eating, overuse of emergency rooms and lost school time.

To help combat the negative effects of tooth decay among America’s underserved children, Plackers — maker of the first disposable dental flosser and a leading brand of consumer oral care products — announced on Aug. 23 its continued partnership with Oral Health America (OHA), a national, charitable non-profit dedicated to increasing access to oral health care for vulnerable Americans.

Through their partnership in 2010, the two organizations were able to help provide access to dental care, services and products for thousands of children across the United States. This year, they plan to help even more children in underserved communities through OHA’s nationally recognized oral disease prevention initiatives, Smiles Across America (SAA) and Fall for Smiles.

“Plackers’ contributions allow OHA to provide essential community programs that help provide uninsured and underserved children with greater access to oral disease prevention services, oral health products and education,” said Beth Truett, Oral Health America’s president and CEO. “We look forward to another great year with Plackers, and we are grateful for their continued support in helping us reach fellow underserved communities and school oral health programs across the country.”

This year, Plackers is also spon-soring the first Smiles Across America Innovation Grants, an SAA-affiliated program that awards monetary grants to five SAA community partners in recognition of their innovative methods for delivering oral health preventative services to children at increased risk of oral disease.

“Plackers is thrilled to continue supporting Oral Health America’s Smiles Across America and Fall for Smiles programs,” said Tom Barman, director of marketing for Plackers. “Partnering with OHA is a natural opportunity for us to get involved and help support community outreach programs that help broaden and raise awareness of dental health issues in the United States.”

In addition to providing financial support for OHA’s Smiles Across America and Fall for Smiles programs, Plackers will donate more than 100,000 Plackers Micro Mint dental flossers to help support OHA’s programs and community partners.

Plackers Micro Mint Rosser features its patented Super Tuffloss, which is engineered not to stretch, shred or break during use, and has been clinically proven to remove more plaque than nylon and PTFE-based floss.

About Plackers

Plackers, a leading brand of consumer oral care products, is a pioneer in dental flossers and other consumer oral care products. Having patented the first disposable dental flosser, Plackers is committed to developing high-quality, affordable oral care products with innovative features that include a comprehensive line of dental flossers, dental accessories and dental night protectors, including the Grind No More Dental Night Protector.

Plackers holds more than 20 patents and is sold in major retail-ers worldwide. For more information, visit www.plackers.com.

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