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."1

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 and 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 behind, 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 prophylaxis” 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. There is a possibility 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 throughout 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

Year one Pros in the Profession winners, from left, Trudy Meinberg, Ann Benson, Mary Lynne Murray-Ryder, Sharon Stall and Linda Maciel (Photo/Provided by P&G)
Permission marketing

“Permission marketing is the privilege (not the right) of delivering marketing messages to some personal and relevant messages to people who actually want to get them.” 2 You’ll be amazed at how much easier and fulfilling it is to talk with someone who is “warmly interested.” You won’t convert everyone and you don’t need everyone. Why not cultivate real relationships with your would-be and existing 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, however, there are patients who will be receptive to your message. This is the recognition of the new power of the best consumers to influence 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 cultivate 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 must make a promise. You say, “I will do X, Y and Z.” I hope you will give me permission by listening.” Next is the realization of the other person is a great way to persuasively anticipate his or her objections and move forward to better, more enjoyable job performance from everyone. Finally, “be a product 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 community. Make your website a 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 effective and free.

For example, how about giving every patient who visits your practice three-referral coupons to give to friends and family for a discounted exam? The patient’s name is written on the coupon so that when it is redeemed, the patient gets a $25 credit to her account for her next visit to the practice. This is likely going to be easier to share these referral coupons, and you 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 could submit ideas for the design of a new office logo.

After community members critique it and vote on it, many may become new (and likely very loyal) patients. As a result, they have a vested interest and a sense of ownership in what the practice gains. 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 community and engage them to participate 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 transformational benefits.

First, the quality of your understanding of your patients’ needs and expectations will increase exponentially. 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 officially on the path of relationship marketing.

References

3. Ibid.
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, has continued its 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 prevent 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 renowned 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 out to underserved communities and school oral health programs across the country.”

This year, Plackers is also sponsoring the first Smiles Across America Innovation Grants, an OAH-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 Harman, 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 flosser 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 retailers worldwide. For more information, visit www.plackers.com.

About OHA
Oral Health America is a national, charitable non-profit dedicated to connecting communities with resources to increase access to oral health care, education and advocacy for all Americans, especially those most vulnerable. For more information, visit www.oralhealthamerica.org.

An Orange County-based charity that puts smiles back on the faces of underprivileged kids in need of major orthodontic care is the first charitable organization featured as part of a unique social media campaign designed to inspire people to get involved with nonprofits. And they tell their story virally using social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

“Every charity has a voice, but not every charity has a stage,” says Benton. “By providing people like Mike and Kim Robertson and organizations like Share A Smile with a platform to tell their story and amplify their message to people around the world using social media, we hope to plant a seed that ignites a movement.”

“Smiles are infectious — unless it is painful or embarrassing to have one,” says Mike Robertson, founder and CEO of Ocean Media, an independent media planning and buying agency based in Huntington Beach, Calif., with an office in Los Angeles.

“Adam’s Inspire Good Tour” provides a global stage from which we can connect about the good things Share A Smile does for kids and hopefully inspire people to get involved in our effort, learn about other charities, or share the story of their own favorite cause.”

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

‘Share A Smile’ founders, volunteer dentists featured in inaugural ‘webisode’