Yes, you can recover lost referral sources!

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

As an endodontist, you’re very aware of how important your referring doctors are to the success of your practice. Every year, hundreds of thousands of dollars in production are referred to your practice by these doctors. Therefore, when a referral source starts slowing down, or stops referring altogether, it’s a major cause for concern. What to do about lost referral sources is one of the most difficult questions I am ever asked about managing and marketing a practice.

Why referral sources are lost

Most specialists have friendships, or social relationships with their top one, two or maybe three referral sources who are general dentists. They’ll regularly talk to these individuals on an almost weekly basis. Beyond the top two or three referral sources, there is a huge drop-off in the amount of time and attention paid to the remaining referring doctors. When questioned about these other referral sources, endodontists admit their contact with them has fallen off. It’s no coincidence that these referring doctors eventually feel inclined to respond to invitations from other practices.

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The importance of tracking referral sources

I repeatedly hear that it took approximately six months before the doctors even realised that the referral source had been lost. It is essential to know as soon as possible that the referral source has stopped referring. The earlier you know, the better your chance of recovery. Although most software programs will indicate which referral patterns, these reports are often underutilised. Levin Group recommends that you scrutinise your monthly referral marketing reports and analyse this year’s performance versus last year’s. It would also be helpful to evaluate monthly performance compared to the same month last year. In addition, recommend creating reports that reveal the drop-off rate of your set of lost referral sources.

Relationship-building with referring doctors

Further steps should be taken with referring doctors whose referrals have dropped or ceased altogether. These steps are recommended:

1. Increase contacts to enhance the relationship. Normally, referral sources leave endodontists because someone else has paid more attention to these dentists, or a competitor began marketing more aggressively. During this time of relationship-building it will be critical to use more than one referral marketing strategy.

2. Emphasise education and a commitment to the general dentist’s practice. Discuss specific patients that have been referred over the years and the service you offer. Asking how to improve the level of service to this doctor’s patients will create a discussion that helps the individual begin to reframe his or her view of your practice.

3. Bring illustrative clinical cases to meetings when appropriate. Demonstrate quality, but talk about service. Most general dentists are equally concerned about both. They want excellent care for their patients, but also want their patients to be treated extremely well.

4. Emphasise that your practice schedules patients in a timely manner. Levin Group recommends follow-up within seven to 10 days with consultations with new patients referred over the years and the service you offer. Asking how to improve the level of service to this doctor’s patients will create a discussion that helps the individual begin to reframe his or her view of your practice.

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- Bring illustrative clinical cases to meetings when appropriate. Demonstrate quality, but talk about service. Most general dentists are equally concerned about both. They want excellent care for their patients, but also want their patients to be treated extremely well.
- Emphasise that your practice schedules patients in a timely manner. Levin Group recommends follow-up within seven to 10 days with consultations for patients referred to your practice. This helps to keep the level of patient motivation high. We also recommend that endodontists design a schedule with time built-in for consultations with new patients (one to three slots per day).

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is founder and chief executive officer of Levin Group Inc., a dental practice management consulting firm that provides a comprehensive suite of lifetime services to its clients and partners. Since 1985, Levin Group has embraced one single mission—to improve the lives of dentists.