The 10th dimension... the power of 10
Ed Bonner and Adrianne Morris discuss the underrated art of listening

A n oft-quoted expression is that we are given two ears and one mouth and that we should use these in the same proportion. Put more simply, we should talk less and listen more. But even if we did ‘listen’ more, would we actually hear more or learn more?

An analysis of modes of listening would suggest very much the contrary. Consider the following ten types of listening, and how many of them do you apply to you:

1. **On-off listening**
It has been estimated that most people think four times faster than most people speak. This means that for every minute someone listens, they have 45 seconds available to think: 15 seconds on, 45 seconds off. This sparse ‘thinking’ time is used to think of personal affairs, trouble and concerns, sex or any other interests instead of attentive listening.

2. **Red-flag listening**
To almost all of us, certain words are red-flags, like waving a red flag at a bull. When we hear, words, such as ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘have to’, or ‘new contract’, ‘government’, ‘GDIC’, and a myriad others, we get irritated, annoyed, angry or upset. There is an automatic response: we stop listening and tune-out on the speaker.

3. **Open-eyed/closed mind listening**
Oft-times we decide that either the speaker or the subject is boring or does not make sense. In such circumstances, we may jump to conclusions about what the speaker knows and/or attempt to predict what the speaker will say. Either way, we have decided that there is no need to listen, because we will not learn anything new.

4. **Glasy-eyed listening**
Has it ever happened that you look intently at a person and seem to be listening incontrovertibly in fact as your mind may be on something else completely? When you do this, you drop back into the comfort of your own thoughts and not hav- ing by having little understanding of what is being said and not hav- ing the wit to ask. There is the big risk here that opportunities, insights and dreams may be missed.

5. **Too deep for me! listening**
This is a variation of being glassy-eyed, but is brought on by having little understanding of what we are being asked. It means that we leave someone speaking, but are not listening at all.

6. **Matter-over-mind listening**
When our opinions, pet ideas, prejudices and points of view are overturned or our judgments challenged, we generally do not like this, and so what do we do is when the listener starts talking in re- sponse, we become defensive and start playing the counter-attack – and of course this means we are no longer listening.

7. **Subject-centred Listening**
Sometimes we concentrate on the problem and not on someone doing the talking. Detail and fact about an incident become more important than what people are saying about themselves.

8. **Fact listening**
Often when we listen to an- other person speaking, we try to remember the facts and repeat them to ourselves over and over again to drive them home. As we do this, the speaker has gone onto new facts, which we lose.

9. **Pen & paper listening**
Trying to put down on paper everything said by a speaker usually means that we leave out some of it, because the person speaks quicker than we are able to write. We also lose eye contact.

10. **Hubbub! listening**
When there are any dis- tractions clamoring for our atten- tion (TV, radio, music, someone else’s conversation), noise, move- ment etc., the hubbub distracts from what we should be giving total attention to.

So now you are able to identify exactly what kind of listener you are, you can go away and practice listening better and maybe even talking less.

My day on ‘the other side’
Dentist Simon Thackeray details a BDTA Dental Showcase visit with a twist...

T his year’s BDTA Showcase was just a little different for dental plan provider Practice Plan, as it wasn’t just them manning their stand; some of their customers helped too! Simon Thackeray of Thack- eray Dental Care tells us about his unique experience at the Bir- mingham NEC Arena back in November...

Firstly, I have to say it was a privilege to be asked to represent Practice Plan at the recent BDTA Showcase. At first I wasn’t sure about what to expect, and never having experienced ‘the oth- er side’ of the BDTA before, it certainly was an eye-opener for me!

It was great to support a company that has helped me so much in the past, and I hope that I did the honour justice, by telling prospective customers the truth about my experiences with Practice Plan over the last five years.

Having met the major- ity of the team at one time or another, I can say I don’t think there can be a more friendly, genuine, profes- sional and thorough team in U.K. density today (ex- cept me too!) They know the industry, they care about their clients, but they have an appropriate and complete lack of ego that is so refreshing to see. They share the same values as I do, with regard to the care of patients and customers, and they never forget to make me feel like I am their most valued and important client.

Being on the stand was so different to visiting the show. I couldn’t believe how busy I was in the first couple of hours, and even forgot about taking some time for lunch until I was reminded! Throughout the day there were people who chatted to me about problems that they thought were unique to them, but who suddenly realised when talking to me that I had been through the same kind of situation, and that there was a way that Practice Plan could help.

People were interested to know what was behind my decision to convert to private practice and I explained that I had watched the developments of the new con- tract unfold and observed how it would potentially result in me losing control of my practice and prevent me from caring for my patients to the highest standards, so the verdict on converting was pretty straightforward.

I was thorough in my research when looking at the range of den- tal plan providers, I realised I needed some form of mechanism to allow my patients to budget for their treatment, but felt that those patients that had more complex treatments would have to pay more than others for their main- tenance. Practice Plan stepped in and provided me with a plan that could cater for my range of pa- tients and the product they offered me was competitive, comprehen- sive and good value for money.

The continuous support I re- ceive from Practice Plan is fan- tastic, and I regularly use all of the support tools that they have to offer. The Marketing Team has helped us with the design and print of our welcome packs, refer- ral packs, newsletters, customised stationary, and all our business and referral cards. A one-stop shop with someone who ‘gets’ what our practice is all about is invaluable.

And, it was these experiences I tried to share with the attendees of the BDTA, because I’ve been there and done it and know from experience what benefits working with Practice Plan can provide.

There was a huge amount of fun on our stand too, espe- cially with the Cocktail bar, which is one of the great things about the ethos of Practice Plan - you can be totally committed to the customer and totally professional, but still have a good time.

I would certainly be more than happy to offer my time again if I were asked!

Thackeray Dental Care

Once nearly a 100 per cent NHS practice, Thackery Dental Care in Nottinghamshire now runs an successful private practice with a reputation for deliver- ing innovative and high-quality dentistry, especially the more complex type of work. The team, which consists of several dentists, six nurses and a therapist pride themselves in providing the very best dental care, whilst in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.
Hitting a high note

Here, Dr Solanki outlines how to make sure that your potential customers know you’re out there

The practice is looking fresh, the most up-to-date, modern equipment has been installed and the crack team that you have recruited to help you in your quest to provide a first-class service has now time to announce your arrival and get a steady stream of patients through the door.

If you are looking to spread the word about your services and your work, how can you ensure you’re not throwing money down the drain? Is there such a thing as a reliable marketing plan?

Define your services

The most efficient way of spreading the word about what you do is to firstly define what services you are going to put to the audience and what that will require them now or in the future. Capturing an audience or a demographic of people that find your services engaging and potentially a beneficial option that they would like to explore is how to turn marketing into money.

As discussed in parts one and two of this series, there are many factors that contribute to a successful marketing plan. If patients are going to invest considerable sums of money in your services, make sure that your practice image conveys excellence. This is both the aesthetic appearance of your practice and also the image of your literature.

Maintain professionalism

A few pounds spent on good-quality business cards, appointment cards and letterheads can make all the difference when you are dealing with potential clients. If you are wishing to attract patients who desire life-changing work, then your practice literature, treatments plans and welcome pack will need to reflect this.

What logo or image represents your work? The point of having a recognisable logo/brand is so that when patients view your practice image they will associate it with you and the care that you provide. You may already have a logo that you are happy with. If not, investing in a recognisable image or brand will more than pay you back in the medium and long term. Ask around and find out from your patients what images they would associate with your practice and also take advice from a creative agency. Describing your literature (in line with a corporate image or logo) will require you to employ a professional design agency. This may not be as expensive as you think.

Creating your literature

There are a few things to remember when you’re deciding on your

brand literature. Here are a few tips:

Keep it simple. This is the golden rule with your ALL your literature either digitally or on paper. Remember a great logo/image should be eye catching not cluttered with lots of information. If you are advertising will it stand out on the page if placed next to your competitor? Does your digital literature and online information pages (including your website) clearly display your telephone number?

Get the TOTAL cost from the creative agency. You don’t want to pay for amendments if you’re not happy with the ideas the agency has designed or the time they spent designing an image you are not happy with. Arrange a time to meet with the agency and invite them to come to your practice. The more they understand you and your services, the easier it will be for them to translate your unique selling points (USPs).

Shop around. A great logo doesn’t mean a great expense. Many up-and-coming designers will have an excellent eye for design and will be keen to get work. Tell the designers as clearly as you can your ideas and if you don’t have any, write down your USPs so they can create images for you. Have you seen an image recently that you quite like? The more information you give to the agency, the better chance you have of successful representation.

Making an effort

Consider this, would you spend thousands of pounds with someone who has guaranteed a beautiful aesthetic finish when their brochure is a printed Microsoft Word document?

In terms of content, your brochure should cover the practice philosophy and details of services available, opening times, maps and contact details etc. Providing patient testimonials and pictures of work that has been previously carried out is also a nice touch that instills confidence in potential patients.

As important as the appearance of your paper literature, your website should be smart, crisp and easy to navigate. More and more people use the web to buy and search for services online and it is now more important than ever to have an online presence. In creating a practice website you should clearly display:

• Your services
• Contact details
• A strong image of your practice
• Email contact form

If you are looking for new patients then enrolling on a reputable directory service is a great way to encourage online traffic to your site, and customers to your practice.

Nothing is free

Remember just as you are unique, your marketing also comes in all forms, shapes and sizes. You could call in help from a professional PR agency and marketing company to help you spread the word. Remember a few key things when spending money on any marketing ploy or with a company.

1. What is the heritage? Is the company established?
2. Who do they work for or who uses their services? Have the big guns employed them or advertised with them and if so have they given any testimonials as to their services? What do your colleagues say? (Although word of mouth is somewhat slow, it is an excellent marketing tool!)
3. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! If it’s free ask why?

• What do they need from you?
• What information do they require?
• If the service is performance based, what are the clear success indicators?

As the old adage goes nothing is for free. Investigate the small print and look into what you are being offered. You end up paying excessive amounts in the long run.

Remember marketing takes time and setting yourself realistic goals from your campaign is a great way to measure your marketing activity. Have you received any exposure? Are the companies you have employed helping to extend this exposure by investigating opportunities for you or just spending money on advertising for you?

Is there more online activity on your website?

A marketing plan will take some time to build up steam, but with the right plan in place, you will benefit from a raised profile and an increased profit margin.

To find out more about anything within this article visit www.cosmeticdentistryguide.co.uk.

About the author

Dr Solanki studied medicine at the University of Oxford followed by a PhD. Having come from a business-oriented family he followed his passion of starting up a dental marketing company with its strengths in online search marketing in early 2007. Since then, he has undertaken extensive search engine optimisation (SEO) training from some of the world’s leading experts in this field and continues to do so. He offers advice on SEO, business consultancy and strategic marketing campaigns for his clients. He is also the founder of www.cosmeticdentistryguide.co.uk. Dr Solanki now offers dedicated marketing strategies for practices on a referral-only basis.