The 10th dimension... the power of 10

Ed Bonner and Adrienne Morris discuss the underrated art of listening

An oft-quoted expression is that we are give 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 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 spare ‘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 button-pushers, like waving a red flag at a bull. When we hear, words, such as ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘have to’, or ‘new contract’, ‘government’, ‘GDC’, 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) Glassy-eyed listening: Has it ever happened that you look intently at a person and seem to be listening intently whereas in fact your mind may be on something else completely? When you do this, you drop back into the comfort of your own thoughts and tune out on the speaker. When our opinions, pet ideas, prejudices and points of view are overthrown or our judgments challenged, we generally do not like this, and so what we do is when the listener starts talking in response, we become defensive and start playing an impromptu counter-attack – and of course this means we are no longer listening.

5) Too deep for me! listening: This is a variation of being glassy-eyed, but is brought on by having little understanding of what is being said and not having the wit to ask. There is the big risk here that our attention will not completely off and not listen at all.

6) Matter-over-mind listening: When our opinions, pet ideas, prejudices and points of view are overthrown or our judgments challenged, we generally do not like this, and so what we do is when the listener starts talking in response, we become defensive and start playing an impromptu 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 this to you, will you not be fooled, so nor will they?

8) Fact listening: Often when we listen to another 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 because we are stuck with the previous one.

9) Pencil listening: Trying to put down on paper everything said by a speaker can be quite a frustrating 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 distractions cluttering for our attention (TV, radio, music, someone else’s conversation), noise, movement etc., the hubbub distracts from what we should be giving total attention to.

Now you are able to identify exactly what kind of listener (or perhaps more to the point, non-listener) you are, you can go away and practice listening better and maybe even talking less.

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My day on ‘the other side’

Dentist Simon Thackeray details a BDTA Dental Showcase visit with a twist...

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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 Thackeray Dental Care tells us about his unique experience at the Birmingham 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 other 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 majority of the team at one time or another, I can say I don’t think there can be a more friendly, genuine, professional and thorough team in UK dentistry today (except me of course) They know the industry, they care about their clients, but they have an approachability that can completely 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 contract unfold and observed how it would potentially result in me losing control of my practice and preventing me from caring for my patients to the highest standards, so the verdict on converting was pretty straightforward.

I was through in my research when looking at the range of dental 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 maintenance. Practice Plan stepped in and provided me with a plan that would cater to my complex range of patients and the product they offered me was competitive, comprehensive and good value for money.

The continuous support I received from Practice Plan is fantastic, and I regularly review 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, referal packs, newsletters, customised stationery, 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, especially 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, Thackeray Dental Care in Nottinghamshire now runs an successful private practice with a reputation for delivering innovative and high-quality dentistry, especially the more complex type of work. The team are dental therapists, 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, advice 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 garner a bigger share of the market have 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 out to market and what 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 deserve 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 for free. Investigate the small print on professionally designed logos and investigate how much it will cost for your practice. 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 how you would 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, marketing also comes in all forms, shapes and sizes. You could call in help from a professional PR agency, 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/website etc 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!)

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.

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