All under one roof – a Unique Selling Point with a family feel!

*Dental Tribune* speaks to Dr Jaz Kalsi about establishing his new dental practice under the same roof as his brother’s optometry business

It is a sad fact that in this age of recession, starting out on your own is a very risky prospect and the concept of a Unique Selling Point could be the difference between success and failure. Dr Jaz Kalsi, principal dentist at Aquila Dental, has not only a great USP for his recently-established practice but also a great business model to help ensure success.

Aquila Dental, situated in the High St in Billericay, Essex and conveniently located near to the rail station on one of Essex’s busiest commuter routes (2.84 million used this station according to the 2007/08 Office of Rail Regulation statistics), has made its home above Aquila Optometry. The optometrists has been established in Billericay for more than 25 years. The business was acquired by Jaz’s brother, and when they saw that there was space upstairs which was lying dormant, the idea for Aquila Dental was formed.

"Aquila Healthcare for the whole family, dental care and optometry combined," says Jaz, "people can come and get their eye test done and their dental check up and be good to go for the next six months to a year!"

Jaz is primarily a GDP with an interest in the cosmetic side of dentistry. “We cater for most needs; we do general dentistry right up to the more complex cosmetic treatments, which is my speciality. We also do facial rejuvenation treatment – Botox, fillers etc – so we have quite an array of services available and it is nice to have that mix of patients so it isn’t just those who haven’t been to the dentist for a while. In addition, as I am the only dentist here, there is a degree of continuity for the patient – they know they are going to see the same guy and they get to know who their dental professional is”.

“I really do think we should make it as easy as possible for patients – that was the idea behind establishing Aquila Dental. The concept is not new – in the past it has been tried under a corporate brand with the availability of checkups for both eyes and teeth. But I think it wasn’t a success because it was so corporate and lacking in the personal touch or the family friendly atmosphere. It’s about patients being happy with the level of service and the practice going above and beyond; reminder calls about appointments, phoning patients after they’ve had tricky procedures to see if they’re okay; just trying to do as much as you can to fit in with the patient's lifestyle”.

To fulfil this ambition, Jaz had specific ideas on what he wanted for his practice. The challenge was making these ideas into reality. To manage this he chose SPS Dental to do the fit out. “There
was a lot of mechanical work to be done, wiring, plumbing etc. We used a company called SPS Dental. I already knew the ‘head honcho’ Chris Knight (Managing Director of SPS), whom I got to know at a practice where I used to work in Bishop’s Stortford over a year ago. When I left there I kept Chris’ details and things just went from there. Chris and his team genuinely seem to enjoy what they do and care about the customer. Also he and his team have a long background in dentistry – many of these types of companies have one guy who knows a little bit about dentistry and how practices work etc, but the rest of the team don’t. The whole team at SPS have been involved in the dental field in some capacity for many years. This gives you confidence when you are about to spend a lot of money with someone.

“The largest room that had to be gutted was the actual surgery, the electric and plumbing put in, new flooring and units...this was all sorted out through SPS. I basically told them what I wanted and they went through everything with me and made sure everything was high spec, including the cabinetry and the worktops.”

“For the dental chairs we chose the Clesta II from Takara Belmont. It’s one of the newer chairs, but based on my experience from previous practices, the thing you learn very quickly is that as a brand, Belmont chairs are reliable as anything. They are easy to look after, they look good, they feel good and are easy to work with. On some other brands of chair the design and ergonomics are a bit ‘arty-farty’ and can look a bit weird to be honest with you. They’re also prone to breakdown which is the last thing I wanted in my new business!”

“With the Clesta II we have an intra-oral camera integrated into the chair, which is fantastic as I often use it to show patients before and after shots. You also have the extra options on the chair, such as the ability to programme the handpieces to do specific things. The way I see it, if you are going to set up a surgery you are expecting to work there for 20-30 years, you need to be happy about the quality of equipment you are using. With the upholstery I went for a really funky kind of cyan blue colour which looks great!”

Jaz’s advice to anyone looking to set up on their own is, “Be realistic in what you are trying to achieve and have a five year plan – people think that to be successful you just have to open your practice and patients will come. But you have to work hard, especially in the recession. The one thing that worried me slightly was starting up this venture in the middle of a recession. But I think that I have created an environment in which I can work in the way that I want to work, use the materials that I want to use and just practise dentistry the way I want. The lure of that was far stronger than any financial insecurity.”

Jaz chose the Clesta II chair from Takara Belmont for his new surgery.