Listening to the market
This is the fifth in a new series of articles by Dr Ed Bonner

A modern adage: when you can see a bandwagon, you’ve missed it!

Market opportunities
Every business (and dentistry is no exception) needs to be able to identify new market opportunities. None can rely nor depend on present products or services, nor on the existing market lasting forever. Many practice owners may think that there are few opportunities to develop and renew themselves regularly, but this simply shows a lack of a strategic overview and a lack of belief in their own abundant strengths. In preparing a marketing plan, we need to listen carefully to what the public; about government thinking. We need all of this beget cannot possibly find the time to complete all the tasks that land on his/her desk. Keeping hold of minor tasks impedes your ability to deal effectively with more important issues. A top manager can be someone with a remarkably clear desk. Encourage people who claim to be overworked to log their time in – analysis of staff work time will invariably reveal spare capacity.

Under-use of delegation
Insecure managers who do not delegate underuse employees, which acts as a demotivator to others who know they can do the job at least as well as you at significantly lower cost. The cost of delegation should not outweigh the costs of non-delegation.

What is involved in delegation?
Delegation involves the loss of direct control but the retention of direct responsibility. The basic elements involved in delegation are autonomy and control. When delegating, ensure that the delegate is fully aware of the objectives, which should be stated clearly and concisely. Base the decisions on required outcomes.

Accountability
Accountability is at the very core of delegation, so it is essential that delegates know what their responsibilities are. All guidelines should be set in writing, delegate works best when accountability for any particular task rests with one individual.

Training
Delegation is an important part of the training process. Consider which skills need to be developed and taught to enable the delegate to be able to carry out the task. Delegating successfully will motivate the delegate and strengthen their self-confidence.

Feedback
Meet regularly, but not over-frequently, for feedback sessions. As a delegation proceeds, you should gradually reduce the frequency of meetings. When discussing progress always use questions in a positive way that is likely to bring solutions to problem areas rather than being overly-critical. Encourage delegates to provide their own solutions.

Provide backup
Ensure you provide enough support and back-up to each person delegated a task, especially when things go wrong. Don’t use delegates as scapegoats when things go wrong. Establish a culture that recognises success and avoids blame for failure. If delegation is not working, ask yourself: “What am I doing wrong?”

Gathering market intelligence
What dentists can do is involve themselves more actively in intelligence gathering. Market intelligence is everyday information about important environmental events, new laws, social trends, technological breakthroughs, demographic shifts and competitor manoeuvres. From a marketing perspective, the following questions need to be answered:

What decisions are we regularly called on to make?
What types of information do we need to make those decisions?
How do we get the information we need?
We can get this information in a variety of ways: here’s 10

1. Reading dental journals and magazines from a different perspective
2. Attending lectures, courses, seminars and workshops
3. Talking to dental representatives
4. Government publications
5. Through associations/organisations such as CODE
6. Reading adverts and advertising
7. Talking to your staff
8. Contacting patients/customers
9. Listening to the market
10. Searching the web.

The good news is that all the above are within our existing capabilities. The better news is that not one of the above list will cost you a single penny. What will cost you is not to do anything.

Planning from strength
Once we have the necessary information, we can plan either defensively, for example, re-