Hitting the jackpot

Most dentists are sitting on a potential gold mine, but don’t realise it. But with an effective strategy, your profits could soar, explains Dr Bhavna Doshi

Every day, we diagnose the need for certain dental procedures that will benefit our patients, which could potentially bring in more revenue. Every day we help patients with their pain and discomfort—whether it’s of a biological nature, of structural deterioration or to emotionally charge our patients with confidence. Every day, we provide solutions and answers to these maladies.

Why then, if we are doing so much good, aren’t we generating the revenue and productivity we desire? The answer lies in the need to develop strategies to uncover the wealth within your practice. If you were to take a closer look at your patient charts, you’ll discover there is a huge amount of dentistry you will have previously diagnosed. However, not all of this treated dentistry and hasn’t been transferred from your patient charts to the mouths of your patients. Why not?

The wrong focus

Most dentists concentrate on acquiring new patients and tend to use traditional marketing methods. By following this trend though, there’s only the opportunity to be 10 to 20 per cent better than your competitors. This is because most dentists are focused on improving existing strategies—this way they will only get improved results.

To make advances and see hidden opportunities you need to change the strategies for changed results. You need to step aside from traditional methods and seek out newer fresher methods and strategise them into processes that you can use to implement all the systems within your practice.

The first process you need to revise is how you can get patients to go ahead with the dentistry you have already recommended to them. You need to set up a filter system to determine what procedures are still relevant from your initial diagnosis and what ones are no longer needed.

It consumes less time, money, effort and energy to refocus on your existing patients than it does to reassemble a new market. Most dentists acquire new patients. Working on your existing database is crucial because you are already familiar and understand your patients. You already have a database to work from; it’s easier to find out what your current patients want than to explore new territories; you’ve already talked to them about the work they need; so you will just be reinforcing that need and supplying evidence to support why they should go ahead with it.

Effective selling techniques

To make this work, you’ll need to implement the strategies of internal marketing and use all the media available to you to get a greater level of case acceptance. For example:

1. Direct marketing
   a. Personalised newsletters or letters informing your current patient base on all the latest news in dentistry and what you are currently providing for your patients. The aim is to remain in contact with your patient family so that when they think of dentistry, they think of you and no one else.
   b. Show off your work by providing your patients with before and after photographs. You can display these in your practice or you can directly show an interested patient with similar wants in dentistry.
   c. Use a patient questionnaire to advocate any concerns the patient may have regarding dentistry. This can be sent to them in the mail or filled out in the practice and then marketing time allocated to discuss this. Often all patients need is time quality time spent with them.

2. Indirect marketing
   a. Any senior member of your staff can interview and spend time with your patients to determine any concerns the patient may have. This process can be made more effective if you were to go through a set of oral photographs. This will enable you to make the patients aware of the situation in their mouths. This will help patients to accept your recommended dentistry better.
   b. Put up pictures of other patients you have treated around your practice for patients to continuously be exposed to what you can do for them also.
   c. Customer service to all patients is king. Do whatever you can to make your patients’ life easy whilst they are in your care and with you. For example, offer them tea and coffee. Use your imagination to explore all the small things you can do to become a talking point for your patients later on. It could be simple gestures such as remembering their birthdays and having a little in-surgery celebration.

   We live in a service-oriented world and increasingly patients are becoming more used to being treated with care. Create a motive to treat all your patients like celebrities. This is how patients are more likely to refer other people to you and help you to grow that pot of gold right before your very eyes.

Get out there

You need to network. Networking comes in many guises, but the type you need to focus on initially is networking with your existing patient base. Here are some pointers:

   - Understand who your patients are. Find out where they like to go and what fills their an- cial lives. Are they in business or part of any local community organisations? This knowl- edge will allow you to commu- nicate better with them— you’ll be seen more as a friend and advisor rather than just their dentist. It will also give you the opportunity to be seen yourself at the same kind of events your patients attend, for example, charity shows or rotary club dinner. People like to buy from people they know and like.
   - Ask your existing patient base to refer you more patients who they feel will ben- fit from the types of services you provide. In return, give them small gifts such as tick- ets to the theatre, a bunch of flowers, or perhaps discounts on treatment.

   Imagine if every patient you currently have refers two other patients to your prac- tice by verbal recommenda- tion, how much growth your practice will experience in a very short time.

   - Ask for testimonials of their experience with you so that you can better inform other patients of the type of dentis-try you provide. Then display these testimonials to your ex- isting patient base in the wait- ing or lounge area. Indeed you can use these testimonials in all your marketing efforts.

   All the strategies we’ve talked about need associated systems drawn out within the practice that are understood by all team members. This way, it can become a joint coopera- tive, organised and measurable strategy to increase your rev- enues and benefit your patients. This can provide you with the power to find and grow your pot of gold.

If you have enjoyed the above article and would like to receive a free information leaflet on how you can maximise your existing patient base and attract more new patients to your practice, please email me with your name and address at bhavna@theperfectsmile.co.uk

About the author

Bhavna Doshi is a senior dentist at The Perfect Smile Clinic. She has a special interest in smile design dentistry and case presentations. She focuses on improving practice productivity, management and growth strategies.