Have your patients changed?

People have more disposable income than ever before, and as a result, are choosing to spend it improving their smiles. Dr Bhavna Doshi explains how to recognise this new consumer market to make sure you don’t lose them as potential customers.

Most patients will get used to the way you do things, and eventually see you in that fashion. So, when they notice or read about something new in dentistry e.g. cosmetic smile makeovers or whitening treatments, they will assume you are not providing this treatment and go elsewhere. Or they will assume that you are not dedicated to that area of dentistry. Patient assumptions can be very costly to you.

If you know and understand how your patients are approaching the subject of dentistry and are ‘in touch’ with the ever changing biases you have to various treatments, then you will be able to respond to these changes faster and be quick in enojy the opportunities they present.

True patient awareness will enable you to position yourself in the market so you are more noticed. It will allow you to tell your patients of treatments you can provide them, which the are looking for.

Before attempting to go out there and send messages to these new-age patients, it is important to understand them. By knowing your patients you are going to be in a better stead to be able to help them and provide the right treatments they are looking for.

There are five basic steps to take in order to assess and plan your strategies to evolve with the markets:

- Research your existing database.
- Gather information on the market you want to attract.
- Put the information together and ‘diagnose’ the new-age patient.
- Create a supercharged marketing plan guaranteed to hit the target.
- Execute the plan efficiently for optimum results.

Look at your database

The people already in your practice are a small representation of the bigger picture. They will be able to give you an idea of your consumer personalities and purchasing behaviours are changing. This will provide valuable information on how you need to change.

Very often dentists go about the business of dentistry without ever realising that their patients are constantly changing viewpoints and opinions about various aspects of dentistry. They continue to provide the service of dentistry in exactly the same manner as they did when they first entered the profession.

While the advent of the 21st century, consumer personalities and behaviours are radically changing. They are now enjoying higher standards of living than ever before and the hours of the property markets have escalated wealth and created greater disposable incomes. A portion of this wealth is being considered for dentistry. Patients want to look good, feel healthy and create a positive presentation of themselves—nice looking teeth become part of this portfolio. So are you geared up to reciprocate this attention?

The dental industry is slowing changing to a want-based service. This is because patients are more aware of what can be done, whether you provide the service or not. Also patients are nowadays more likely to shop around for the appropriate dentist for them. This has created the ‘new-age’ patient. They are more demanding and are constantly looking for something new!

Before attempting to go out there and send messages to these new-age patients, it is important to understand them. By knowing your patients you are going to be in a better stead to be able to help them and provide the type of treatments they are looking for.

There are five basics steps to take in order to assess and plan your strategies to evolve with the markets:

1. You will be seen.
2. You will get a greater response.
3. You will be making better use of your marketing money.

Message to market match

The closer you make your message to market match, the greater the response to your marketing campaigns will get you. You can only create a great message if you know your market!

One way of developing this ‘message to market’ match would be to simply ask your existing patients via a questionnaire of what information they require. You can ask at the same time take the opportunity to ask your patients what their concerns are about their mouths. For example, what they like and dislike about their mouths. This will provide invaluable information on what your current patient base is looking for in their dentist. And give you conversation stimulants to talk to your patients about their inherent concerns.

Questions to ask before designing a plan to attract the ‘new-age’ patient:

- An important consideration is what does our potential patient market look like?
- Who are the people we are attempting to attract to our practices?
- Where do these people like to go?
- What do their lifestyles involve and look like?
- What are the demographics of this type of patient?
- What does this patient like and dislike?

Understanding the market

There are several ways you can do this so that you have a clear understanding of how consumer thinking is adapting and adopting viewpoints. The media is a subtle representation of how the general public understand dentistry.

However, if you understand the market and know what they are all about, you will not only be attracting their attention but you will be able to position yourself in a place where you will be more likely to be noticed by the right type of people. You will in effect increase your chances of getting a greater response to your marketing.

Three reasons why positioning your marketing is so important:

1. You will be seen.
2. You will get a greater response.
3. You will be making better use of your marketing money.

Tips to get started:

- Develop a patient questionnaire.
- Understand the market.
- Strategise to position yourself to be noticed.
- Keep in constant touch with your patients to inform them of changes and innovations in dentistry.
- Stay focused and abreast of how you can attract the right patients.

Getting it right

As you can see if you properly diagnose the market, you will be investing correctly in your efforts to attract new patients to your practice. Also it will allow you to really understand the patients already in your practice and prevent them from leaving you to seek dental care elsewhere assuming you do not provide what they are looking for.

About the author

Dr Bhavna Doshi

is a senior dentist at The Perfect Smile Studios. She focuses on practice productivity, management and growth strategies. If you would like a free information leaflet on how you can maximise your existing patient base and attract more new patients to your practice, email your name and address to bhavna@theperfectsmile.co.uk

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