My complete conversion

London lingual orthodontics provider Dr Asif Chatoo describes his navigation of digital technology

My professional journey has no end or destination. If I ever felt satisfied by one system and applied it in the same way without acquiring new knowledge or discovering more advanced technologies and materials, I would consider myself ready for retirement, which I am certainly not.

My voyage through digital technology, however, has just reached a natural conclusion. I realised recently that I had progressed through all aspects of digital technology as it relates to orthodontic treatment and I had completed a circle (Fig. 1).

My journey started with photography some years ago, but the process accelerated, and in recent years, everything has gone digital, including radiography, re-treatment, treatment planning, and the manufacture of brackets and wires.

Over the course of my digital conversion, I have tried several different systems, all of which have delivered important benefits. The system I have used most as I completed the digital circle over the last two years is sure-smile (OraMetrix). It is a treatment management system and among its benefits is that I am able to provide a highly customised service in a shorter space of time, saving on average six months of treatment time per patient.

I have had a digital scanner for some time, but this month I acquired an updated 3shape TRIOS scanner. It is extremely fast and allows my team to take completely accurate and detailed records of patients’ upper and lower arches. In the past, the process took half an hour, but now it is immediate.

Adult patients are particularly grateful not to have impressions taken, and the orthodontic nurses are delighted to avoid this most trying aspect of record-taking. It was invariably messy. Being impression-free has brought more value to the team than going paperless.

It goes without saying that a key benefit of digital technology is the integration of the orthodontic processes and records. For instance, a scan of the patient’s teeth can be superimposed on to a photograph, which I can then turn into a grid that I can show the patient his or her teeth and bite and I can provide him or her with a visual simulation of the difference that treatment will make. The patient can then ask questions. My vision for the finished result may not be the patient’s vision and being able to manipulate the outcome on screen means one can be absolutely sure the patient understands the treatment planning. The patient can influence the treatment if he or she wishes, and if he or she changes his or her mind towards the end, the technology allows for last-minute nuancing.

In order to convey how this approach differs from other treatments on offer, I compare it to the difference between an off-the-peg suit and going to a tailor in Savile Row. Many of the patients I treat at my practice are referred by leading dentists. Their expectations are high. Sometimes orthodontic treatment is just one part of an interdisciplinary treatment that in its entirety will cost in excess of £20,000. Patients expect perfection — in so far as it is possible in an ageing dentition — and they expect a high level of service. Sure-smile allows me to deliver both. Rightly for a West End practice, many of the benefits of sure-smile relate to communication and the care of patients with high expectations, but there are also personal benefits for the clinician.

In my case, there is one that surpasses all others. Bending archwires at the end of treatment is almost always inevitable and it is an aspect I dread. Why am I so hung up on this? The reason is that, if one bends a wire on one tooth, one will affect all the other teeth. This will increase the chair-side time. The solution is the robotic wire bending that is central to sure-smile.

I aim to deliver several things to my patients: an aesthetic result, a functional occlusion and an occlusion that is comfortable at rest. More than anything, I want them to be wowed by their experience. I believe sure-smile delivers that wow factor.

I have gone 360 degrees and am now fully digital, but this is only the first navigation of new and evolving technology. My orthodontic journey continues and I suspect a few more digital revolutions await.

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