Choosing the right designer is one of the most important decisions you’ll make when rebranding your practice. Yet you may not know where or how to begin.

First steps
As with other services, personal recommendation is always a great place to start, although bear in mind that design is very much a matter of personal choice and what may suit one person may not work for another. Still, at the very least, a positive referral should indicate who is professional, efficient, reliable and pleasant to work with.

Over years or recent months you may have admired the logo, literature or website of other practices, so you may like to find out who the designer was and investigate further.

Google is there at your disposal and it is easy to view design portfolios online. Spend time looking at the work designers have produced for other people and make a note of what you like. You should also check the designer’s credentials to see if they have the necessary qualifications and experience. You are looking for someone who is a trained designer (more accurately, a graphic designer) and one who has worked for several years in the dental industry as a specific discipline. Dentistry is a business unlike any other and your chosen designer must know it inside out in order to fully appreciate your requirements.

Check out the designer’s testimonials and don’t be afraid to make contact with anyone who has been quoted for a more detailed appraisal.

Do beware of people or agencies offering too much of a multi-disciplinary ‘we do absolutely everything’ approach – you will rarely have the budget to do everything at once and besides, you want real expertise not a ‘jack of all trades’. Remember that it is your right to be selective. As with dental products, laboratories and related services, it is wise to choose your providers individually rather than buy from a supermarket-style one-stop shop.

Make a connection
This stage is vital. After admiring their work you must also have a conversation with your selected designer to see if you have good rapport. Whether this is face-to-face or over the telephone, it is always best to speak with the person who would actually do the design work not just the MD or a sales person. This way you will be able to see whether you ‘connect’ and feel comfortable communicating and expressing your requirements.

You could think of this as the sort of conversation you have with a patient prior to a treatment plan, where both of you discuss the options prior to agreeing on the desired outcome and chosen route. The designer should, first and foremost, listen and then ask lots of pertinent and searching questions.

If you feel blinded by jargon or ‘marketing-speak’, be justified in being put off! Direct communication is key to a good working relationship and there is nothing weirdly mysterious about the design process – a good designer should answer anything, you, anlay (and simplify) rather than complicate matters.

By the end of the conversation, you want to be totally confident that the designer has fully grasped your vision – in other words that they really ‘get it’. The degree to which you ‘connect’ with any designer you speak to
will enable you to confidently commit to the particular person who is right for you. Just as in other professional relationships, you should instinctively know when the chemistry is right.

Agree the budget
Get clear on your budget from the outset and ask what the fees are so you know what to expect. Just as you charge a reasonable sum for the work you do based on your skill and experience, so do designers. It’s an ancient adage but still very true: pay peanuts and you get monkeys. Set aside a reasonable sum as the budget and think of it as an investment. Remember, patients chose your practice based on your sign, your welcome pack, your website etc long before they sit in that hugely expensive chair you’re tempted to buy!

Sit back and relax
Once you’ve chosen the right designer for your practice, agreed the cost and given them a comprehensive brief - let them get on with it. Again, there’s a parallel with you and your patients.

Just as you expect your patients to let you get on with the job once they’ve made a commitment, don’t be tempted to interfere with the design process. You will be consulted throughout and if you’ve chosen the right designer who you know you can trust, rest assured that they will do their absolute best for you. Relax and look forward to being thrilled by the result – as you surely will be.

In the next article, I’ll write about how to woo prospective and existing patients directly, immediately and with minimal effort.

OSSEINTINTEGRATED IMPLANTOLOGY COURSE

Sunday 11th September - Friday 16th September 2011 Inclusive
Sunday 27th March – Friday 1st April 2011 Inclusive

This intensive format is ideal for delegates who wish to participate in a course over 6 consecutive days – Fee £2200

Topics covered include:
• examination and treatment planning
• dealing with the patient within the practice
• anatomy, physiology, biomaterials, sterility
• surgical templates, surgical techniques (to include bone augmentation and advanced surgical techniques)
• implant impression techniques
• jaw registration
• articulation, periodontal considerations (to include maintenance protocol and guided tissue regeneration)
• Connecting teeth to implants
• Detailed literature review.

There will be guest speakers on the following subjects:
Dr Joe Omar on ‘Medical Emergencies’
Dr Alan Cohen on ‘Medico – Legal Aspects’
Mr Sean Goldner on ‘CT Scanning’
Mr Keith Rowe on ‘Laboratory Techniques’

There will be hands-on session on the surgical, prosthetic and laboratory phases, and the delegates will attend a CT scan appointment with one of the patients on the course.

This course is suitable for the application of all different osseointegrated implant systems. Delegates who complete the course are eligible for the ICOI Fellowship, without further examination. This course carries 36 hours of CPD accreditation.

Course accredited for MFDS, MFDS, and FFDS. Colleagues are welcome to arrange to come and view our practice.

For more details please contact our Practice Manageress.

About the author
Cathy Johnson specialises in design for dentists and will design your practice image, stationery, welcome packs, referral packs, external signage and website to raise the profile of your practice and attract the patients you are looking for.

She also writes and produces a biannual patient newsletter, branded for you to send to your patients. For more information contact Cathy Johnson Design, Telephone: 020 7289 1215 Or you can email Cathy at: cathy@cathyjohnsondesign.com. Additionally, visit: www.cathyjohnsondesign.com

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