Annual Planning

Carina Shaw discusses developing a strategic marketing plan

Developing a strategic marketing plan for the new financial year can not only help you keep on top of your regular practice marketing, but help you target the right people at the right times to achieve the practice growth you’re aiming for.

Marketing plans are most effective when set out clearly, reviewed regularly and stuck to. This way you can allocate a budget for your marketing and tailor it for the various seasons, school holidays, anniversaries and national events, such as Mouth Cancer Action Month.

A marketing plan must also be part of a broader business plan, however, and be thought about in a structured, strategic way. For example, it might not be the right time to do any marketing if your practice is at the early stages of a refurbishment. Here is some advice on how to put together a strategic marketing plan and some tips on how to populate your regular marketing with timely and interesting content.

Establish your audience

This is where a patient profiling report, available through some payment plan providers, can come in really handy as it will show you the best audiences to target in your area. It uses postcode information to profile the types of people who live within a reasonable drive of your practice, categorising them so that you know who and where your target audience are and the best way of reaching them.

For example, that national average for the ‘Affluent Achievers’ category is 22 per cent. If your report says that there are more than usual in your area, you will know to pitch your tone of voice and marketing activity for this group. Likewise, if you have a high percentage of the ‘Mature Money’ group in your area, social media marketing might be less effective so you need to look at alternative ways to reach this audience.

You may also find that there is a high percentage of a group you have never targeted before, which can be a great opportunity for a targeted flyer drop or regional magazine focus, but remember to always put in a strong call to action so that people have a reason to contact you.

Get your team involved

Below are just a few ideas from us on how you can capture your patients’ interest with your marketing efforts each month for the full financial year. However, it’s worth including an ideas session in your regular practice meetings too, as your team may have some brilliant ideas which are more closely tailored to your practice.

By establishing your audience and deciding on the most appropriate way to reach them, you are far less likely to waste money on unsuccessful marketing as you will be far more targeted, as opposed to a more scattergun approach. However, it’s also a good idea to monitor your marketing so that you can see what the most successful marketing campaign of the year was. That way you can do more of that type of campaign in the future or spend more money promoting it in your strategic plan for the following year, thus making your marketing more and more successful year on year.

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Monthly tips for regular marketing content

April - Easter – if your area has a high percentage of families, why not target parents and children with some marketing on children's oral health and tips on how to enjoy Easter treats without ruining teeth? If you have any payment plans for children at your practice, then this is a great time to promote these too.

May – From mid May till mid June it's National Smile Month. Why not try hosting an open day or free check up event to help people in the area make the most of their smiles? You could even hold a competition to win some treatment to help someone's smile be the best it can be.

June - Summer hydration – create some leaflets, slides for your practice waiting room screens or a section in your regular email newsletter on tips to reduce fizzy/sugary/acidic drinks in the hot summer months. Include some facts and tips and some alternatives to keep people hydrated.

July – It’s National Kissing Day on 6th July, so get involved and perhaps include some facts in your marketing about targeting bad breath and some practical tips for getting your patient's mouths healthy for kissing!

August - Back to School - target by offering tips for pre-school term check-ups, morning brushing and lunch boxes. You could also offer free check-ups for children to get them school ready and hopefully encourage their parents to become regular patients.

September – September is Colgate Oral Health Month, so why not promote an event such as a toothbrush amnesty where people bring in their old toothbrush and you will give them a new one for the month? This is a great way of driving potential patients into your practice and potentially helping your business to grow.

October - Halloween is becoming more popular in the UK every year, so get involved by getting your practice team to dress up in scary Halloween costumes for an open day promoting family oral health. You could also produce flyers or a section on your website on tooth friendly trick or treating, recipes and snack ideas!

November – November is Mouth Cancer Action Month and practices across the country are offering free screenings to highlight the importance of the ‘If in Doubt, Get Checked Out’ message. Mouth cancer is on the rise and the more people know about this highly treatable disease the better the survival rates will become.

December – It’s Christmas of course! So a personalised greetings card to your patients is always a nice gesture. But why not include some tips on how to enjoy Christmas treats without spoiling their oral health; or run a free check-up offer leading up to December 24th. It’s a great way of getting people into the practice and signing them up to Denplan can be a way of them fulfilling a new year’s resolution.

January - New Year’s resolutions – can be a way of them fulfilling a new year’s resolution. This can cover anything from quitting smoking, regular attendance, keeping an eye on alcohol intake, better diet (from dental perspective) and better oral hygiene.

February - Budgeting – February is the month when a lot of Christmas credit card bills are due and is one of the toughest financial months of the year. Target new patients with information about payment plan options and spreading the cost of treatment.

March - Preparation for wedding season – look at what brides are doing to prepare for the most important day of their lives – tooth whitening, straightening, facial rejuvenation etc. Attend some bridal fairs and talk about your minimal invasive aesthetic services.