In this article, I discuss the next very important component of the marketing mix: promotion. There are two different kinds of promotion strategies: internal marketing, aimed at existing patients and their families (an example of this kind is referrals); and external marketing, aimed at those outside of the clinic. Research has proved that the most effective method to attract new patients is by word of mouth through internal marketing and that this approach attracts 80 per cent of new patients. External marketing, such as advertising or public relations, however will create awareness of the clinic among prospective patients, but very few new patients will actually visit the clinic. The following are six areas of promotion relevant to dental practices.

_Logo_

The clinic’s logo is its fingerprint; it is its identification. It should appear not only on the clinic’s business card and stationery, but also on its outdoor signs, promotional items, uniforms and billing statements. The logo should be so identifiable with the clinic that people should be able to identify the clinic just by looking at the logo and without reading the name of the clinic.

_Business card_

A business card provides a first impression of the clinic; it hints at the clinic’s traits and what it stands for. A clinic’s business card must make a powerful, positive personal impression by offering something out of the ordinary. For example, you could consider achieving this by means of

– a high-quality paper;
– a beautiful logo; or
– the unique use of colour.

_Newsletters_

Dentists should think of newsletters as an important means of informing others about the clinic by communicating general information concerning the clinic or the services offered, as well as providing photographic material in order to communicate with patients visually and confirm the written content. Newsletters can be sent to patients by e-mail monthly, quarterly or yearly. Newsletter content could include the following for example:

– You could educate your patients about how you can prepare a tooth using laser.
– You could inform them about an educational seminar or congress that you have attended.
– You could introduce a new treatment or service that you have added to the clinic.

_Testimonial book_

Clinics can have a testimonial book either on the reception desk or in the waiting lounge. It is very comforting for new or existing patients of the clinic to read about the experiences and feelings of other patients at the clinic, especially in cases in which patients feel afraid or anxious about dental treatment, or mistrustful of the dentist.

A testimonial book is a very helpful marketing tool for two reasons: it reinforces a positive image of the clinic to the person writing the testimonial, and it encourages patients to accept the treatment recommended by the dentist and feel safer and more at ease.

_Web presence_

A clinic’s website and social media sites may be the first places a new or a prospective patient may visit to establish information about the clinic. The clinic’s
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Competitive advantage should be clearly communicated on these sites in order to demonstrate instantly the benefits of visiting the clinic.

**Presence in the dental field and networking**

In addition, it is very important to establish a general presence in the dental field by presenting dentistry-related seminars or by writing articles for a journal or local newspaper, for example. In this manner, you can achieve recognition of your name and establish yourself as an expert. Such a presence acts as reinforcement for existing and prospective patients.

Furthermore, you could

- network with other professionals;
- offer scholarships or sponsorships bearing the dental clinic’s logo;
- advertise or be invited to speak on television programmes or communicate via other media;
- be an active member of professional groups;
- volunteer for community activities;
- accept invitations to social functions;
- be present at political activities;
- present your hobbies and activities; or
- participate in a group form of a solo activity you enjoy, for example, if you like jogging, you could join an amateur running club that participates in charity races. You could also join a networking group, such as a social club, and attend at least two of its events a month.

**Conclusion**

Of course, you cannot adopt all of the above promotion strategies. Therefore, it is very important to make an accurate evaluation and invest more time and effort in those strategies that yield a greater return on your investment.

I would like to conclude with a powerful and inspirational quote from Kevin Roberts, CEO of global advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi: “Our goal, nowadays, is to create lovemarks not just brands.” There is a difference between the two terms: brands are owned by companies; lovemarks are owned by us, dentists and professionals who love our jobs. Brands deliver performance, respect and trust. Lovemarks infuse intimacy (empathy, commitment and passion) and sensuality (triggers emotions). Our patients operate in terms of all five senses.

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