By Roger P. Levin, DDS

The economy has dropped precipitously, and the recovery is seen to be a slow and steady process. In the meantime, orthodontists cannot wait for the economy to recover before starting to rebuild their practices or retirement portfolios.

The power of systems

Systems are the backbone of every business. Businesses succeed or fail due to systems. The key to prosperity is having step-by-step proven systems in your practice. The better your systems, the better your practice performance.

An orthodontic practice’s most important system is scheduling, because it controls every other aspect of the practice. Levin Group teaches a method for total success called Power Cell Scheduling that provides doctors everything they need to implement a highly effective scheduling system. The schedule is even more important when one realizes orthodontic practices rely heavily because they see such a high volume of patients each day. An inefficient schedule leads to high stress, poor customer service and patient complaints.

The CEO of one of the most successful manufacturing companies in the United States recently stressed to me the importance of systems in his company and industry. His company often buys underperforming manufacturing firms and quickly increases production by changing their systems, which, in turn, greatly increases efficiency. This company has experienced tremendous growth by becoming experts in implementing effective and efficient systems.

Orthodontic practices are no different. The more efficiently a practice is operated using step-by-step business systems, the faster and better the results.

Five things to do now

1. Making your referral marketing the strongest it has ever been. Put in place a professional relations coordinator on a part-time basis and have her extensively involved in outreach to referring offices and patients.
2. All new patients should be scheduled within seven days. Many parents are shopping orthodontic practices, and the first practice they see often wins.
3. A strong and highly monitored observation program. All observation patients should be seen every six months on a pre-scheduled basis. If the observation patient misses an appointment, a staff member should reschedule it within 24 hours.
4. Patient financing, available through companies such as CareCredit, is a critical factor in orthodontics today. Levin Group clients now use financing, which can be approved in less than five minutes, for an increasing number of patients. While there is a discount factor, the practice will receive the entire orthodontic payment upfront without worrying about collection.
5. Limit the overdue debond rate to less than 2 percent. Many orthodontic practices do not think that they can handle any more appointments, only to find out they have a 10, 20 or even 40 percent overdue debond rate.

Conclusion

In the midst of a difficult economy, many orthodontic practices are reaching all-time highs in production and profitability by strengthening their systems, replacing their schedules and implementing Key Practice Expanders. The five action steps will help your practice get back on the path to growth!

Ortho Tribune readers are entitled to a 20 percent courtesy on the Total Ortho Success Seminar, exclusively for orthodontists, April 2-3 in Chicago. To receive this, call (888) 973-0000 and mention “Ortho Tribune” or e-mail customerservice@levingroup.com with “Ortho Tribune” in the subject.
Profiting during a recession

By Scarlett Thomas
Orthodontic Management Solutions

We’ve been saying for some time now that the economy is in a recession. We have seen plenty of negativity — in home foreclosures, job losses, bank closures. Not to mention, of course, our beloved stock market. This has definitely resulted in tough times, but it will pass and there are many things you can do, not only to get through it, but to thrive and come out on the other side in great shape.

Case acceptance

During these hard times, it’s very important that orthodontists become more flexible in their payment arrangements. Many patients with an expressed interest in starting treatment, especially during these economical hard times, should be treated as if they are royalty to the practice.

Consider offering a third-party payment option such as “Chase Healthcare Financial” to combat possible financial resistance. Chase Healthcare Financial offers a zero initial down payment and up to 24 months with no interest. This allows you to stay competitive without compromising your own office payment plans.

Creating budgets

While it is always important to examine the expense side of your practice, it is especially crucial in the present economic environment. A well-planned budget is a Magnificent thing. It can help you cut back in areas where you spend too much money. It can also help you SAVE more for your future needs. Creating and following a monthly budget is simple.

First, figure out where you spend your money — track all of your income and expenses for the last 12 months. Be sure to count even the most seemingly minor of expenses. Once you know how much you spend, you can figure out areas where you can significantly cut back and cut expenses. A well-planned budget is a Magnificent way to say “thank you” to referring doctors, taking them to lunch is a more cost-effective way to maintain the relationship. Debit cards filled with goodies on removal day is a fun way of celebrating patients’ accomplishments. However, during this recession I think most patients will be just as happy getting their braces off without the gifts and the added expense. T-shirts with your logo on it may bring a temporary smile to a patient’s face; however, during these hard times, it’s more likely to bring a long-term frown to your checkbook. Monthly games in the office do create excitement but can be limited to once a quarter rather than monthly.

MISCELLANEOUS SAVERS

Although elaborate letterhead is a nice representation of your practice, creating a similar look using your own practice management software system will save you thousands of dollars a year. In addition, you can order larger quantities of your current letterhead to lower the expense significantly.

Rather than continue to purchase new printer cartridges, find a refillable cartridge service in your area. Have a staff member re-fill them once a week. This service alone will cut the expense of printer ink in half.

If your cleaning service is weekly, assign chores to staff members to eliminate the expense. If you have a yard surrounding your building, have the gardener come once a month rather than weekly. Make sure all computers are turned off nightly as well as reducing the heater and air conditioner as much as possible prior to leaving the building.

When money is tight, even reducing the most basic of necessities can increase or maintain your net income. If you would like to learn more about these options, I invite you to attend one of my upcoming workshops in San Diego. Please visit www.orthocounseling.com to learn more.

About the author

Scarlett Thomas is an orthodontic practice consultant who has been in the field for more than 25 years, specializing in case acceptance, team building, office management and marketing. As a speaker and practice consultant, she has an exceptional talent to inform, motivate and excite. Contact her by phone at 619-455-2104 or by e-mail at scarlett@orthocounseling.com.

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- Dr. Jay Gerber
Director of Orthodontics

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Preparing for the Ortho Practice Makeover

By Kevin Johnson and Emily Ely

The winner of the Levin Group Total Ortho Success Practice Makeover is ready for change. And he is going to get it! Dr. Brian Hardy of Hardy Orthodontics in Grove City, Ohio, is about to begin his one year of Total Ortho Success Management and Marketing Consulting with Levin Group. But he won’t be going through the process alone. For the next 12 months, we will be taking you along for the ride. As Dr. Hardy’s consultants, we’ll report on what steps are being taken to grow his practice.

In this year-long journey, Kevin Johnson will focus on the management systems in the practice and Emily Ely will focus on referral-based marketing systems. Participating in both programs simultaneously will dramatically enhance Hardy Orthodontics’ position for practice growth—even in our present economy. Hardy Orthodontics is a working-class, low-crime town, one of the fastest growing suburbs of Columbus.

It is the hope of Levin Group and Ortho Tribune that the articles will educate and inspire you to spark your own makeovers. So, let’s get started! Let us introduce you to Dr. Hardy and his practice.

Location profile — Grove City, Ohio
- Type of community: suburban
- Population: 51,820
- Median family income: $62,039
- Description: a working-class, low-crime town, one of the fastest growing suburbs of Columbus.

Office profile — Hardy Orthodontics
- Locations: one
- Doctors: one
- Staff: three (a scheduling/insurance coordinator, a treatment coordinator and a clinical assistant)
- Treatment chairs: three (with the possibility of adding three more)

Doctor profile — R. Brian Hardy
- Age: 56

Levin Group Total Ortho Success Practice MAKEOVER

The economy. Specifically, he is concerned about patients’ continued ability to make a 25 percent down payment on ortho treatment in the midst of a down economy.

The schedule. He readily admits his scheduling system is not as disciplined as it should be. He says he is, “reaching a point where hard and fast scheduling rules need to be implemented.”

Limited staff. He wants to create a professional relations coordinator (PRC) position and have an office manager who can handle insurance-related issues. Staff members agree the office is understaffed.

Inventories. He manages a team of consultants who are trained in improved systems, the stress level in his office. Dr. Hardy feels with no solid system in place to handle inventory. Staff members made note of the same fact in information surveys they submitted to us.

Stress. He reports stress is high in his office. Dr. Hardy feels with the implementation of new and improved systems, the stress level will be much better.

Chief staff concern
- Overall, staff members rate their office highly. However, one area of concern did present itself when team members filled out Levin Group’s Survey.

- Dental school: University of Kentucky, 2002
- Years in practice: six
- Years in this practice: two and a half (started from scratch in 2006)
- Status: married 12 years, two children
- Practice aspirations: to practice solo for the next five to 10 years unless growth necessitates change and then moving just his one location in the next five years.
- Life aspirations: to afford his children’s education and pay for their weddings as well as travel
- Retirement aspirations: wants to sell his practice at age 60

Dr. Hardy’s chief practice concerns

- Practice.
- Staff.
- Operations.
- Financial.

What’s next for Dr. Hardy and his team?

Dr. Hardy’s 12-month program consists of three phases with each featuring interactive workshops and one-on-one consulting. For the next improvement when we report on Dr. Hardy’s visit to Levin Group headquarters. We will discuss our findings and recommendations in detail.

To jumpstart your own Total Success Ortho Practice Makeover, come experience Dr. Roger Levin’s next Total Ortho Success Seminar: being held April 2-3 in Chicago. Ortho Tribune readers are entitled to receive a 20 percent courtesy. To receive this courtesy, call (888) 973-0000 and mention “Ortho Tribune” or e-mail customerservice@levingroup.com with “Ortho Tribune Courtesy” in the subject line.

References
2. Ibid

About the authors
Levin Group Senior Consultant Kevin Johnson has spent the last eight years working as a Levin Group orthodontic management and marketing consultant. He manages a team of consultants and is a frequent lecturer at the Levin Advanced Learning Institute. Johnson earned his degree from Towson University in 1996.

With many years of marketing experience, Levin Group Consultant Emily Ely joined Levin Group in 2005. Ely uses her unique knowledge and experience to provide marketing solutions for her orthodontic practices. She earned her degree in business from Towson University.

Both Ely and Johnson are members of the Ortho Expert Team, a specialized group of consultants who are trained in the needs of orthodontic practices.

For more information, please contact us at database@levinsonomics.com.

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