Orthodontists today have tremendous opportunities to build great practices, even in a bad economy. Since 1990, orthodontic practices have doubled or tripled their capacity without increasing overhead. Thanks to this increased capacity, orthodontic practices can become larger than ever before. Doctors can double or triple their income while working three-and-a-half to four days a week.

At orthodontic seminars, doctors tell me, “I’m already at maximum capacity. There is no way I can grow 30 percent in a bad economy!” Others are probably thinking, “I have the capacity, but where am I going to find patients in this economy?”

Orthodontic success depends on having the right methods. The methods you create, develop and implement will determine whether you have a $500,000, $1 million, $1.5 million or $2 million practice. The use of advisors also can expedite the creation of the right method and systems.

Different times, different methods
As a practice develops and grows, it is critical to update your methods to achieve greater success. Too many orthodontists employ one method to reach a certain level, but then fail to realize that this same method becomes the No. 1 factor restricting their growth.

For example, the new patient system varies from practice to practice but contains these basic steps:
• New patient (or parent) calls the office.
• New patient is appointed for consultation and exam.
• New patient appointment is confirmed.
• New patient presents to the office.
• The doctor or treatment coordinator meets with the new patient and follows a series of exacting steps to complete the consultation, exam and presentation in one or more appointments.
• The new patient is presented with the treatment option.
• The financial arrangements are worked out.
• The treatment is scheduled to start.
• The treatment is confirmed.
• The new patient arrives at the office on the day of treatment.

Each office will apply a new patient method differently, and offices with extremely high case acceptance will continue to apply their method in the same way. However, when these practices want to reach the next level, their methods must change.

For instance, was there a recommendation made for the mother to have orthodontics along with her daughter? Does the practice have a sibling program offering a 10 percent courtesy if two children from the same family have orthodontic treatment concurrently? Were patients offered a 10 percent courtesy if they agree to have all appointments in the morning? Was motivational scripting used to encourage patients to alternate morning and afternoon visits, thus creating a more balanced schedule?

These are the types of questions that influence how a method can change when a practice is ready to go to the next level.

Changing methods as practices grow
Based on 23 years of experience consulting to orthodontists, Levin Group has identified $1.2 million in annual revenue as the current threshold point for orthodontic practices. Those operating below this figure have often maxed out their systems and will need a new method to reach the next level. Those above $1.2 million will need to update their method to achieve continued growth.

Both will require a change of method to reach their true potential.

One might think that smaller revenue practices would be more streamlined with lower stress. In fact, it is often the opposite. Practices generating below $1.2 million are often stretched beyond their systems and are more hectic, more stressful and more chaotic, which reduces their overall practice profitability. This occurs because these practices have failed to design new systems allowing continued growth.

I have spoken to many orthodontists with annual practice revenues below $1.2 million who say they can’t possibly handle any more growth or patients. At Levin Group, we know this is not the case.
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We have seen that the main problem is not busyness but how the systems are designed and implemented.

Why is this so? These doctors are reacting to their day-to-day reality rather than understanding that their systems are restricting practice growth. In a sense, it is like trying to run a marathon wearing 10-pound ankle weights on each leg. Removing the ankle weights will allow the athlete to perform at a much higher level.

Levin Group has identified solutions to this situation based on the Levin Group Method for Total Ortho Success™ — a customized approach to helping practices design, develop and implement new systems that allows them to go to an entirely new level. The method analyzes all management and marketing systems to identify the true potential of each orthodontic practice. You should regularly analyze your practice. If you have high stress — you probably have outdated systems!

What we have found is that many orthodontic practices begin to max out somewhere between $900,000 and $1.2 million. The reason is that the systems that allowed the practice to get this far are now stretched. At this point, the orthodontist thinks he or she has a practice with little growth potential due to the level of stress and chaos experienced.

The problem is these orthodontists don’t realize there are similar practices earning two or three times the gross revenue in the same number of days. The difference is the growing practice finally recognized its old scheduling system created limits on production capabilities.

Breaking through limitations

Many systems have maximum limits. Whether it is scheduling, case presentation or clinical flow, systems do have a maximum limit and eventually need to be replaced if the practice wants to continue to grow. What many orthodontists do not realize is that new systems will reduce the level of stress in the practice because they are based on efficiency and effectiveness and allow the practice to achieve continued growth.

Practices can grow from $500,000 to $1 million to $1.5 million to $2 million and above if orthodontists understand that the same systems that enabled their practices to reach one level will not take them to the next. In my CD “Maximum Success for Orthodontists,” I demonstrate how updated systems combined with a consistent referral marketing program allow orthodontists to reach their true potential.

Conclusion

Orthodontists should evaluate where they are today and how much they would like their practices to grow in the next three years. Ask yourself if you believe your current systems will be able to handle that level of growth and if the referral marketing program you have in place will attract a sufficient number of patients to maximize updated systems.

While the economy poses a challenge to orthodontists, it is often internal factors (e.g., the lack of a proven method) that have more of a negative impact on a practice’s growth potential than any external forces. With the right method, long-term growth can be yours!

Ortho Tribune readers are entitled to receive a 20 percent courtesy on Dr. Roger Levin’s next Total Ortho Success™ Seminar, “Get Exponential Growth Now,” being held Sept. 25–26 in Scottsdale, Ariz. To receive this courtesy, call (888) 973-0000 and mention “Ortho Tribune” or e-mail customerservice@levingroup.com with “Ortho Tribune” in the subject line. The first 10 orthodontists who respond also will receive a free copy of “Maximum Success for Orthodontists,” Dr. Levin’s groundbreaking referral marketing CD.