Practice makeover — Dr. Hardy’s first successes are impressive

By Kevin Johnson & Emily Ely

Total Ortho Success™ Practice Makeover winner Dr. Brian Hardy of Hardy Orthodontics in Grove City, Ohio, looked at his monthly gross production recently and saw something extraordinary — his numbers were up 80 percent from the same month a year ago. Referrals were up 56 percent for the same month as well.

In this economy, these are amazing results — even more so considering Hardy Orthodontics had only completed six months of its year-long management and marketing consulting program.

Obvious, Dr. Hardy is pleased to see the first of many concrete results. One reason for the improving numbers is undoubtedly the work his practice has done implementing Levin Group’s Greenlight Case Presentation™ and PowerScripting™.

Greenlight Case Presentation

When orthodontists walk into a consult, they should always be:
• Knowledgeable
• Confident
• Motivational
That applies to every patient, every day.

To present more effective ortho cases, practitioners need to step into the shoes of patients and their parents. People come to an orthodontist because they are seeking beautiful smiles. Orthodontists and staff must earn their trust, validate their desire for a more attractive smile and guide them toward agreeing to ortho treatment.

While the desire for a great smile is a powerful motivator, the issue of price is a major obstacle. Most parents are well aware that orthodontic treatment is a significant expense. Their chief concern is how to pay for it.

In a difficult economy, the anxiety about cost is only amplified. In one of our earliest meetings with Dr. Hardy, he had concerns about starting their child’s ortho treatment because of the economy.

Top-producing ortho practices successfully handle the price issue by providing several financial options so patients/parents can choose one that is comfortable. This is more important than ever.

Levin Group recommends these options:
• Five percent pre-payment courtesy. The entire treatment fee is paid in advance, including the insurance portion. Ortho practices can benefit by collecting the fee upfront without having to set up a monthly payment schedule.
• In-house payment plan. Twenty-five percent of the fee is paid as a deposit with the remaining balance divided into monthly payments. Ortho practices must maintain an excellent focus on accounts receivable. Any patient who is one day overdue for payment should receive a call that day. The office should be careful to have some level of flexibility to help patients in difficult financial situations.
• Outside financing. An outside financing company, such as CareCredit (which Dr. Hardy works with), approves the parent or patient for a line of credit or a loan. These approvals can be achieved within minutes.

PowerScripting

When we first discussed the idea of scripting with Dr. Hardy, he had somewhat conflicted emotions. Although his practice had traditional patient compliance issues that were genuinely distressing both to himself and the team, he was apprehensive about scripting. Stating: “Is scripting difficult to implement?” “Will it involve memorizing thousands of phrases?”

It is impossible to overstate the importance of superior verbal skills. Every practice system in his office — scheduling, customer service and case presentation, to name a few — depends on clear, effective and consistent communication. The better Dr. Hardy and his team communicate with patients, the more successful his practice is likely to become.

Scripts can be created for different aspects of the ortho practice, but all scripts should always be customized to maximize the capabilities of team members. These factors helped Dr. Hardy create and implement effective scripts in his practice:
• Consistency: Scripting provides Dr. Hardy’s patients with consistent messaging. One of the most frustrating experiences for patients is hearing conflicting answers from the staff regarding the same question. It diminishes trust in the practice. Such an experience undermines case acceptance and leads to unsatisfied patients who aren’t likely to refer others.
• Power words. Power words are enthusiastic words that create positive energy and are used many times at the beginning of sentences. Words such as great, terrific, wonderful, fantastic, super and awesome are examples of power words. It is important for Dr. Hardy and his team to be upbeat and motivating, especially when dealing with a patient’s case acceptance issues.
• Customization. Scripts should never be recited word-for-word, as if a team member had memorized a speech. Rather, Dr. Hardy’s staff members are being encouraged to use their own words, paraphrasing the scripts, so that the essential information is communicated to patients in a natural and positive way.
• Role playing. Team members read over the scripts and “act them out,” or role-play. This training process reinforces the messages and helps the practice take place in the minds of patients. Role-playing can take place at morning meetings. It can be a fun and informative activity for the whole team.
• Positive communication. When an orthodontist and the team use verbal skills to present themselves in an upbeat way, patients respond better. As a result, Dr. Hardy, his staff and patients find themselves more motivated and more positive.

The state of the practice

At Hardy Orthodontics, things are headed in the right direction. In a down economy, Dr. Hardy is seeing nearly double the number of starts compared to a year ago. These results are doing a great deal to bolster the team members’ enthusiasm as they work to revamp systems and strategic planning.

Dr. Hardy’s office is currently focused on:
• Case presentation skills, scripts and techniques.
• A concerted effort to open consult and treatment start slots to ensure they see as many patients as possible.
• A more efficient approach to collections. This has already yielded results — this year they are up 58 percent.
• Better and more flexible methods for working with patients on financial issues in this economy without resorting to in-house financing.

Join us in our next installment when we explore Dr. Hardy’s accelerated practice growth.

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 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.

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