The top 5 ways to reinvent your practice in 2014

By Mark S. Sanchez, DDS, founder and CEO of tops Software

If you’re prone to making New Year’s resolutions, you may have vowed to lose weight or exercise more often. But here are some other resolutions I think we should be making to run your practice more efficiently and profitably. Have a more rewarding year. Reinvent the way you work.

But here are five things you can try this year.

Hire an ‘A’ team

As a practicing orthodontist, I know that having the right people can make or break any business, including an orthodontic practice. But how do you find those people? How do you keep them and motivate them? I recommend the book “Who” by Geoff Smart and Randy Street. The book has simple, easy-to-follow steps that will help you hire the best people for your practice. In fact, I have used the concepts in this book to attract and retain ‘A’ players at tops Software.

If you’re wondering how well this method works, perhaps I should mention that our customers regularly make comments such as the following: “The whole tops team has the best attitude of any company we deal with; nothing is ever a problem!” I rest my case.

Start using checklists (if you’re not already)

I am a big fan of “The Checklist Manifesto” by Atul Gawande. A checklist is a simple tool that can help manage complex processes. My favorite quote from the book is this:

“[C]hecklists seem able to defend anything at all against what it’s supposed to do. However, we believe that we’re cracking the code of patient tracking. Our secret blend of data, folded neatly into a seven-dimensional matrix — D7 Matrix™ analytics — reveals each practice in a new light. With D7 Matrix, we’ve found the perfect balance between complexity and simplicity. In just a few clicks, doctors, their staff members and their consultants can create a multidimensional analysis. If you want a snapshot of where your patients are in their treatment, how many new starts you have — whatever analysis you want to create — you can do it in one or two clicks.

In the hands of a skilled treatment coordinator, D7 Matrix is like having a Navy SEAL on staff to carry out the most important missions. If your software doesn’t offer this, you can’t truly see what is happening in your practice.

Beware of the hype

During the past few years, cloud computing has made lots of headlines — both in orthodontic publications and elsewhere. Cloud computing allows large companies like Amazon to buy on-demand processing power during peak seasons so they can process more orders. For them, it’s like buying electricity. Instead of building their own generators, they just connect to the power company. It saves these companies hundreds of millions to be able to connect to the Internet and process more orders during peak times (like holidays), rather than buying their own equipment to handle that peak traffic — equipment that would just sit idle the rest of the year. This concept is called elasticity.

However, small businesses (including the vast majority of orthodontic practices) really don’t need that kind of elasticity. They don’t need public clouds (hosted servers). In fact, using hosted servers can actually prove more expensive than purchasing a server, as many companies have found.

Beyond the cost factor, chief technology officers agree that database-type programs — which need really high performance, in terms of reading and writing to memory — really belong on a private cloud: a server that a private organization can own and keep on its own premises that can be operated across various office locations by multiple users.

Our flagship product, topsOrtho™, has been using private/hybrid cloud architecture for almost a decade — long before the word cloud became a marketing term. Our private cloud allows users to have remote access to their data and automatic updates, without the cost and security concerns of a public cloud.

Align yourself with others whose values mesh with yours

We built our software to run on Apple computers because the hardware is phenomenal, and we feel confident encouraging our customers to buy other Apple products. We also work with several other companies in orthodontics that we feel comfortable recommending to our customers.

Likewise, you should develop alliances with others whose work you admire. These can include referring dentists and other health-care professionals with whom you might collaborate for more complex cases, not to mention financial advisors, attorneys and IT consultants.

These are people who can affect your professional reputation, and they should be trusted colleagues. Like tops, these colleagues should be driven to elevate your practice.

So this year, resolve to run your practice more efficiently and profitably. Have a more rewarding year. Reinvent the way you work.

Reference

1) Metcalf C. Why some startups say the cloud is a waste of money. Available at: http://www.wired.com/wiredenterprise/2013/08/menmul-amazon/ Published Aug. 15, 2013.

About the author

Mark S. Sanchez, DDS, is the founder, CEO and chief developer of tops Software. He practices in one of Atlanta’s leading orthodontic offices and says he is the only programmer of orthodontic practice management software who actually uses such a product on a daily basis. Sanchez developed his programming skills while pursuing a doctorate in physics at Georgia Tech. He earned his dental degree and certificate in orthodontics from Emory University.