



# 3 Key Steps to a **Thriving** Stress-free Dental Practice

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# Introduction

Three key steps to tripling your revenue are:



Marketing



Scheduling



Treatment plan  
acceptance

These are what determine whether the practice reaches its full potential. This E-book covers the key elements involved in each of these areas and what you can do now to create the flourishing practice that you deserve.

Dental school doesn't teach this. You won't learn it on the internet. You have to learn it through trial and error. This e-book is intended to save you some "learning by my mistakes" time!

## Testimonial

"Twice before in my professional career as a dentist I have hired business consultants. I felt like the prior groups tried to "put me in their box" and there was nothing specific to my practice about it. With Ciara, it has been totally different. She listens closely to my goals and provides workable solutions to achieve them. I would recommend her to any dentist that wants to really grow their business. Our practice production is up approximately **70%** over 2015 and my net income has increased almost **4X** what it has been over the past ten years."

- Dr Kelly Blodgett, Portland, Oregon

# Marketing Your Practice Successfully

First, a word about the key marketing actions to take.

With all the marketing options available to businesses at the moment, it can be confusing for dentists to know where they should spend their hard-earned marketing dollars. We could break down the choices in to two categories – **internal marketing** and **external marketing**.

## Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is inexpensive and is geared towards your current patients. Most practices generate most of their new patients from referrals.

Internal marketing includes ongoing communications e.g. newsletters between you and your current patients, a referral program, flyers and e.g. notices in reception area that highlight different services.



## External Marketing

External marketing is directed towards people in the community who have never done business with you before. What's working in this area varies from one practice to the next but for many of my clients, they still include the more traditional methods employed before the dawn of the internet. For example, mailings to specific zip codes in your area, which can be geared toward certain income levels, is still a lucrative marketing campaign for many.



# External Marketing

With mailings, it is important to have the right offer. Try one of these 3 offers (or a version of one of them) that have worked well for other practices:

1. Free Whitening Pen with Initial Exam & Cleaning
2. \$500 Off Invisalign! Offer expires on *(date)*
3. New Patients and Emergency Patients Welcome (This one is very effective at generating high production cases – root canals, crowns etc.)

These are just some ideas of what has worked for many of my clients, from many different parts across the nation. Most importantly though - if you already have an offer that you've used successfully in the past, then please, re-use that! A marketing piece that has been tried and tested in your particular area, is one to be repeated over and over. Never feel the pressure to change it because it has been used before.

Constant marketing changes is a big mistake many practices make – they continue to change a marketing piece even after they find one that works for their practice. It is also important to reuse what has worked for you in any new media platform that you use. For example, use an offer that was run as a successful postcard campaign on your website, or on your Facebook Page.



# External Marketing

## Mailers & other traditional forms

Choose frequency over how many potential patients you reach. What I mean by this is, decide what your budget is and then make sure you don't spend it all on the first mailing. You want to be able to do at least 3 mailings to the same addresses, and preferably five. People usually need to see a mailing about 3 to 5 times before acting on it.

Select a small area where you have a lot of patients already, one that is close to your office, where the demographics match your target audience, so you can afford to blanket the area. Then market to it by sending a direct mailer, as well as other traditional marketing methods, e.g. sponsoring runs or neighborhood events, advertise in the neighborhood newsletter, participate in mixers, and place your name in anything relevant for that specific area.

Apart from mailings, there are of course several online marketing resources you can use – your website, SEO, Facebook Page, Facebook Ads, etc. I always recommend using the more traditional methods of promoting your practice first, as they are often the least expensive, and are tried and tested.

After that if you want to continue to grow your practice, some experimentation is often required to see what works best in your specific area. What works in LA can be different than what works in a more rural location, for example. Understanding and accepting that trial and error will be a necessary part of the process and will make it a smoother one.

[Read more External Marketing Ideas](#)

# Staff are Key to Maximizing Marketing

Most dental consulting groups focus on marketing to increase production. While marketing is a key factor to growth, an even bigger factor is how key a role your staff play in the growth of your practice. The traffic coming from all of your marketing efforts and your excellent word of mouth is filtered through you and your staff.

Whether a new patient prospect calling your office with questions ever winds up in your chair has so much to do with the communication level of your staff. Patient communication skills will also dictate whether or not a patient in your chair ever proceeds with treatment.

If your practice is not expanding at the level it should, ask yourself these 3 sets of questions:

1. How am I hiring? Do I have the knowledge to ensure that I make the right choices, or is it a case of potluck?
2. Are my staff motivated? Will they go the extra mile to achieve the goals of the practice or are they here to more or less do their job and get a paycheck?
3. Are they good staff who want to see the practice succeed? Do they have lack the tools to handle some of the objections they get from patients?

Most of the practices I work with these days, are already doing a decent amount of marketing. They have a website; they send out mailings in their neighborhoods; and/or to their existing patients; they are on Yelp, have a Facebook page etc. If not, of course, a marketing strategy is worked out to get these actions in.

However, these marketing efforts often don't translate into nearly the potential they should, if there is a communication defect between the staff and patient, the doctor and staff, and/or the doctor and patient.

# Staff are Key to Maximizing Marketing cont.

## Did you know?

Every business is, to an extent, a reflection of the personality of its owner. This phenomenon often explains why some of the best dentists don't fulfill their practice potential. It's not due to a lack of dental skill, but their ability to manage people.

In over sixteen years of consulting dental practices, I've seen a very small percentage of practices who were exceptions to the rule above. They were exceptional cases because the owners were able to compensate for lack of know-how with staff, and patients, by having someone on their team who wears this hat for them.

In one case, the doctor barely mentioned what treatment the patient needed but he had a dental assistant who was phenomenal at getting treatment acceptance! In another practice, the owner's sister was his office manager, and she was great with both staff and patients, very motivated to expand the practice and able to motivate others.

Other than these exceptional cases, owners who are willing to take their current level of people skills to the next level, will find that the practice grows exactly proportionately to their success in doing so.

We are not talking about a total transformation of personality but the willingness to:

- a) take a personality profile to assess their strengths and weaknesses and
- b) follow some direction on how to improve areas that if changed, will cause a different response from both staff and patients.



# Leadership & Management

Natural leadership ability comes from natural ability to understand people. Some people are better at this than others. But the good news is that leaders are not born; they are made! There are some keys to follow to develop great leadership skills. And these are:

1. **Communicating your vision** – everyone wants to be a part of something meaningful, of an organization that has a purpose and that is going somewhere. If this is not being communicated by the owner, it is difficult to expect staff to be motivated to do more than show up. You can't assume that everyone already knows the purpose or mission of the practice.
2. **Have morning huddles** – these are short 5-10 minute meetings to ensure everyone knows who is on the schedule for the day, co-ordination needed, outstanding treatment that needs to be discussed with patients, any scheduling conflicts/changes needed to ensure a smooth day etc.
3. **Have a weekly staff meeting** – these are not 'complaint sessions' and the owner must implement a 'no negativity policy' for these meetings. Only solution-based contributions are allowed so if an issue is raised, it must be accompanied by a suggestion for handling.

“Leaders are not born, they are made.”

The main purpose of the meeting is to assess where the practice is at vis a vis its goals for the month, and to focus on the key areas needed to meet goals.

For example:

- Marketing efforts
- Ways to improve patient service
- New treatments
- New policy, and
- Announce any upcoming trainings

Immediately following this meeting the staff can roleplay, especially in relation to handling patient objections.

# Leadership & Management

## cont.

You must have a disciplinary policy and it should say that three write-ups to their personnel folder is grounds for dismissal. Whether or not you dismiss them at that point is at your discretion, but usually somewhere along the way the staff member will either understand and take to heart that noncompliance is not going to work and they must do what is requested or, leave.

The important point about accountability is that the owner needs to have a very good process to follow in order to determine if an employee is going to follow protocol or not. If not, the sooner both parties move on the better.

**Staff training** – invest in your people! Make sure they are fully trained for their positions. They must do continuous role play to be able to utilize their training for the success of the practice.



[Read More Management Tips](#)

# Converting Prospects to Appointments

Having conducted numerous “mystery calls” for dentists, where I call the office as if I were a potential new patient, I find some receptionists handle these calls much better than others. The following are the most common mistakes. All of those I’ve called, (and that has been a ton!), make at least one, if not all, of the following errors:

- 1. Poor greetings** - The tone of voice when answering the phone is often not cheerful enough. Some lack this more than others but most receptionists could work on making the patient feel happier that they called.
- 2. Lack of concern** - Most go right into trying to schedule the patient without showing any concern for the issue the patient is experiencing. Of course, this is not always necessary if the patient calling has no issues. But even then, at least checking for any issues since the patient last saw a dentist would show appropriate concern and indicate that the office cares about the patient.
- 3. Not talking up the doctor** - The patient never having been to the office before, and in most cases having some dental concern, needs to be reassured that they called the right doctor’s office This is usually not at all difficult to do, but is often forgotten. For example, simply adding that “Dr. Thompson is very gentle and does excellent work,” or “Patients love coming to see Dr. Thompson,” or even “we get so many patients referred here because he is so caring and takes great pride in his work,” will all go a long way with a potential client.

# Efficient Scheduling

In addition to scheduling new patients, a dental office must also maintain an organized scheduling of existing patients. If the day is not arranged properly, it's very possible that even a full schedule may not make money that day.

Implementing clear policies about what procedures can and cannot be scheduled when, are key to a successful practice. In fact, I have in some cases found this issue to be the main thing that holds a practice back from growing. If your new patient numbers or new patient enquires are increasing but your production is not increasing to a corresponding degree, a key reason for that will often be the schedule. Every practice should have their schedule evaluated, to determine if it is a productive one or not. If it is not productive, then we can figure out how it needs to be tweaked so as to increase profitability.

Call for a **free consultation** to see how your schedule could be better optimized to increase revenues!



[Schedule a free consultation](#)

# Treatment Plan Acceptance

First and foremost, the doctor must be very sure about the treatment plan the patient needs. If there is any uncertainty, or the doctor and staff jump around with lots of different options for the patient, this leads to confusion and information overload, which often results in inaction!

## The Money Objection

This is the toughest one for staff to handle, for multiple reasons. They may have financial struggles themselves, so they are too sympathetic to the reasons given for why the treatment plan is too expensive.

Some offices begin explaining financial options before the patient is really even sold on doing any treatment. Many believe if they figure out a way to make the treatment affordable, the patient will act. However, patients need to first make a decision that they want the treatment, before they figure out the finances. No matter how cheap a car dealer makes the payments on a Ferrari, if you don't want a Ferrari, you won't be interested in how he lower the payments for you.

# Treatment Plan Acceptance

## cont.

There are other reasons why investing in communication skills training will help increase treatment acceptance:

- 1. Lack of patient knowledge** – The general population is not well educated on dental health. Lacking education, they often don't take responsibility for their teeth, which means they fail to take action by accepting the treatment plan. Great educators are great communicators, so it's imperative that you either find staff who have this ability and/or provide sufficient training to augment it.
- 2. Money is a touchy subject** Even the sweetest, most easy going person, often gets a bit prickly when it comes to parting with their hard-earned cash. Overcoming this is no mean feat! It takes skill to be able to navigate the line between backing off completely at the first sign of reaction to cost, and pushing too hard.

**While this might seem quite overwhelming, any investment in the area of improving communication skills of your staff, will pay dividends.** The return on this investment is immediate, and continues to increase the more attention it is given. This, in my experience, is the difference between a practice just getting by and the practice reaching its true potential!

Ensure your team has not only the technical skills needed, but also the requisite communication skills to manage patients so they comply with scheduling policies and follow through with treatment plan recommendations.

Having a dental practice management coach come in and teach them the key tools they need to handle patients, especially how to handle the money objection is often necessary to move a dental practice forward in increase sales.

# Conclusion

A practice that has implemented the above essentials will reach its full potential for growth, profitability, and goodwill in the community. These are also the key points to avoid being an insurance-driven practice. An insurance driven practice is a weak practice. It tends to be limited by the services it provides to its patients, as they are routinely dictated by the insurance plan.

The less dependent a practice is on insurance networks, the more the doctor and staff can provide the type of dentistry they know is best for the patient. As a result, morale is higher and the practice can afford to invest in hiring the best people, purchasing the best technology, and getting the best education.

Following the above points puts **YOU** in control of **YOUR** practice.

If you're ready to learn how to transform your current dental practice by optimizing your scheduling policies, ensuring your staff is trained and performing at optimum levels, and improving your leadership skills, take the next step by **scheduling a free consultation with me.**

I've helped countless other dental practices across the nation tune-up their marketing and management practices and **triple their revenue.**

You could be next! If you want to **TRIPLE** your revenue, contact me today to get a free, no-commitment, personal consultation.

[Get Started Today!](#)





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Ciara MacMahon has been a dental practice management consultant for over 16 years. During that time, she's helped over a thousand dental offices restructure their management and marketing practices to increase their revenue, outperforming all of their previous sales numbers by up to three times what the office was previously generating.

Approaching two decades in the business, serving dental practices all across the nation, Ciara has come across all kinds of practice management issues, some common and some unique... she has seen it all! If you know your dental practice could be performing better, or you're not sure if you're reaching your full potential, give Ciara a call for a free consultation.

