

32 High-Impact Marketing Tips for Prosthodontists

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One of the things I consistently hear from Prosthodontists is “I need more new, high-quality patients! Can you come out to my practice and help me with a marketing plan?”

I love the marketing side of dentistry, so I take them up on the challenge and fly out to their practice to see where we should start. After watching them operate for two days, I seem to come up with the same, profound observation and precursor before we even touch on the marketing process: These are really GOOD people providing a pretty GOOD service.

This is precisely the problem.

Prosthodontic practices often seek EXTRAORDINARY results by being just GOOD. But people don't want GOOD. As a matter of fact, the word GOOD is the perfect repellent for our time-starved culture. We don't have time for GOOD.

Think about it: When was the last time you went to a movie someone told you was just GOOD?

Never. Or not, at least, in the last five years. Don't have the time.

The GOOD movie they recommend quickly gets expedited to the file in my brain labeled “Not Even Likely to Rent.”

Or better yet, when was the last time you took a valuable night alone with your spouse to go to the new restaurant in town that, when asked, your friend says, “Yeah, I think it's good.”

Same answer.

Being GOOD and expecting EXTRAORDINARY results is a frustrating illness in dentistry. The remedy for this illness is often one word: MARKETING.

Marketing is an easy default for Prosthodontists to fall into. When asked, “Are you doing everything as a business to nurture the maximum amount of referrals internally?” most say “Probably not.” Thus begins the easy process of throwing thousands

of dollars at what usually starts as an internal service problem.

Harry Beckwith, an expert on service marketing and best-selling author of *Selling the Invisible*, says, “Unfortunately, this focus on getting the word outside distracts companies from the inside, and from the first rule of service marketing: *The core of service marketing is the service itself*... Too often service stinks... Service quality has sunk so low that if no one complains about your service, you shouldn't feel good. Most people have given up on complaining... **First, before you write an ad, rent a list, dash off a press release—fix your service.**”

So where do we start with fixing the service and optimizing our dollars with internal and external marketing efforts? Here are 32 very efficient, service-fixing, marketing tips (all in order) to use in your practice. Doing these CONSISTENTLY will help you cross that bridge from being a GOOD Prosthodontic practice to an EXTRAORDINARY Prosthodontic practice, worthy of EXTRAORDINARY results!

In the months that follow, we will examine each one of these tips in depth:

1. Do a ton of **Brand-Infusion Training**: This is a formal and continuous training program for every existing and new employee to memorize your brand approach. This is your best use of marketing time and dollars. Ask this question of yourself and your team: “How do we want our patients and referral network to feel about us and perceive us?” Remember, their perception is your marketing reality, no matter what you think you stand for. Once your team sees the answers to these questions, everything else makes sense. They can't do what they don't see clearly. Learning how to infuse your brand into all aspects of your practice, from the first

phone call to the last bill paid, will crystallize your vision and make your value more obvious to your patients. If you struggle with this, call us, and we would be happy to do a one-day Brand-Infusion Workshop with your entire dental team.

2. Thrive on **Systems**. Being consistent is the key. The continuity and consistency of your experience are guided by the systems that drive your business. Real simple: For talented people to shine in your practice, you need systems to guide your operations. Systems drive the business, and people run the systems. Patients see, feel, and observe your quality with how consistent you are. See “Starbucks 6 Squares” in the December 2005 *Journal of Prosthodontics*.
3. Make sure that your office has a **Powerful Phone Presence**. Be sure that everyone who answers the phone in your practice knows how to create the ultimate “dental concierge” experience. The most important contact with your business is the first 30 seconds on the phone. We call it the “30-second test,” in which people make assumptions about who you are. It is important to understand that the people who answer your phone doesn’t just represent your business...they are your business. See “The 30-Second Test for Prosthodontists” in the March 2005 *Journal of Prosthodontics*.
4. **Handwritten Notes to ALL Parties Involved in the Referral Process**. Write a minimum of two handwritten letters whenever you get a new patient. One to the patient coming in (signed by everyone in the practice), and one to the referral source. This lets them know that you value them as a patient and appreciate the business they send to the office. Adding that personal touch can make all the difference.
5. **An Untouchable New Patient Process**. Your new patient process is one of the most differentiating elements of your practice. Patients will make a decision about how unique and extraordinary you are from this process. Make a commitment to improve this process so much that you start to see regular referrals just from the exam alone. Your “Likeability Factor,” which determines how successful you ultimately become in a service-oriented business, can only be improved by a well-crafted experience.
6. **Delivering a Smooth and Neat Way to Ask for Referrals**. Research shows us that it is five times more expensive to market to new clients than it is to mine for them within the walls of our own practices. Find a comfortable way to help your patients recruit other great patients to your practice. Let your patients know you are currently accepting new patients and that if they have any family or friends that would enjoy this kind of care, now is a good time for them to call your office.
7. **Make “Before New Patient” Calls and “After Care” Calls**. Some Prosthodontists have done a fantastic job of differentiating their “personalized” approach to relationships in their practices with these two calls. The “Before New Patient” Call is a call (the day before) to all new patients scheduled for the comprehensive exam. Find a comfortable way to say, “*Hi Mrs. Jones, this is Dr. Felton, and I just wanted to first, welcome you to our practice, and second, see if there was anything you were concerned about that I should pay close attention to when I get a chance to meet with you tomorrow. Feel free to call me back on my cell phone if you would like. If not, I’m looking forward to meeting you tomorrow at 10 am.*” This call is in addition to the confirmation (or welcome call) that is done 48 hours prior. You will get an answering machine about 80% of the time, but people will recognize it as a nice touch. It costs you nothing and takes very little time. The “After Care” Call is just to check in and see how patients are doing after a procedure that was performed in your office. Again, the call costs you nothing and takes very little time.
8. **Active Involvement in Organized Dentistry**. Get out there and establish your name as a leader in the dental community. Become involved in your local dental society; speak at various study clubs or other functions. These networking activities will introduce you to your peers. It can be especially helpful in making yourself

known to the other specialists and GPs in your area. GPs and other specialists will send you more of the “complex stuff” if you are recognized by your peers as being the person “who can handle this kind of work.”

9. **Have Each Member of Your Team Own Your Work.** Don't try to sell Cadillacs to your patients if everyone in your practice has broken down, rusty station wagons. Make sure everyone who works in your practice owns your work. (Oh, I almost forgot—owning your work applies to the Prosthodontist too.)
10. **Brand Infusion of Your Dentistry in Your Referring Network.** Get everyone to SEE how good you are without saying a word. Show them the effects of your hard work and dedicated CE schedule. This is best done within your referring network. They will become one of your greatest sources of new, high-quality patient referrals as they stop hearing you talk about how great you are and start SEEING how great you are. Email is a fantastic brand-infusion tool to communicate with other dental professionals about how good you are without talking.
11. **Put “Fling Books”** in the offices of your referrers (not just other specialists). The “Fling Book” is named after the only person I've seen do this with a very high level of class—Dr. Mike Fling (Oklahoma City). A Fling Book is just a beautiful compilation of your work and the procedures you love doing. It explains the procedure, shows examples, and wonderfully positions your logo and practice throughout to convey the message that you are “the best choice” for all of these procedures.
12. **Make Digital Photography a Cornerstone in Your Practice.** Seeing is believing in this decade of dentistry. Digital photography is a “must” for patients to value comprehensive dentistry.
13. **Share Before and After Photos.** Document your work. It will not only grow your confidence in your own abilities, but it will also build the confidence of your patients and your referral network.
14. The best way to encourage referrals and celebrate your accomplishments with patients is through **A Fabulous Post-Treatment Consultation.** In some cases, patients rarely remember what they used to look like. This is a great way to show them where they were, strengthen relationships, and encourage patients to share this great gift you have given them with others. Document this meeting and share the details with the referral source, if appropriate.
15. **Patient Portraits.** Take a final, professional portrait of patients who have finished cases and send it to their homes in a gorgeous frame, in a beautiful box, with a fabulous thank you note. There is nothing better than posting a beautiful ad of your work in the home of a patient. Besides, when was the last time any adult went and had a professional picture taken of themselves? Never. It is just another visual way to reinforce the value of your relationship with your patients.
16. **Use Images & Artwork in your office.** This is a hugely missed opportunity for many practices. If you want patients to aspire and ask for the best that dentistry has to offer them, give them a reference point. Place pictures of beautiful, healthy mouths in and around your office for all to see.
17. **Frame and Hang Your CE Schedule at Front Desk.** Make sure your patients can see, without asking, that you care about furthering your education. And don't hesitate to let your staff brag about you by saying things like, “Dr. Felton is on top of his game. He is very dedicated to being one of the best in dentistry. You are going to LOVE him!”
18. **Strategically Place Your Awards in the Office.** Better yet, instead of telling patients how committed you are to being at the top of your game, show them. Have a nice viewing area for patients to see all of your awards and certificates. Make sure they look sharp and are placed in high-quality frames.
19. **Strategically Place Your Logo in the Minds of Your Community.** Spend some good money developing a sharp logo and positioning statement to support your brand-infusion training. Put this logo on everything that is exported from your office. Put your logo on some very

sharp and professional uniforms for your entire team to wear. Then encourage your team to wear them in all the busy lunch and breakfast places in town. Anytime I see someone with a smile in Panera, wearing a professional health services uniform with a sharp logo on it, I'm reading it, trying to figure out what they do and where they practice. Heck, sometimes, I even ask!

20. **Create Great Public Relations Opportunities.** Hands down, your best-spent efforts in external media are through good public relations. Be on the lookout for good exposure to the market you serve. Most dental PR efforts are self-serving and boring. They usually have to do with some dentist trying to tell the community how great he/she is. Blah! Instead, create (or work with someone who can create) an article or video with stories that are truly valuable to the community. Then just position yourself a few times in the article or piece as the expert in town who specializes in this kind of thing. Goodwill efforts are always wonderful for all parties involved. People love a good, emotional, human-interest story. That is why every major builder in the country wants to work for free on the show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. It's great PR, and it makes you feel great! Find ways to do this in your market, but do it for the thrill of service first, and for the PR second. People can usually see through transparent efforts.
21. **Eliminate Random Magazines from Your Patient Greeting Area.** Replace them with CURRENT magazines that reflect your taste. Also, place some reading material that focuses on creating smiles, restorative dentistry, and cosmetic treatments in your greeting area. Get your patients thinking about their teeth before you even talk to them.
22. **Excellence in Office Esthetics and Ergonomics.** The future of high-quality Prosthodontics will greatly employ the use of office esthetics and ergonomics. Discussing high-end treatment has to be done in a high-end setting. You don't have to go out and build a brand new building, but there are some simple efforts that can greatly improve the appearance of your office without sky-rocketing your liabilities. Building a very classy and comfortable patient bathroom is some of the best money you can spend. Do it, and people will comment on it forever. High-end restaurants figured this out decades ago. We judge how good the establishment is by how clean and comfortable the bathrooms are.
23. Once your logo has been mastered, create **A Solid Web Presence** that is a good reflection of what is going on inside of your practice. Make it really easy to navigate. Do you need a great website? Absolutely! Most people think, "Well, how good can he/she be? They don't even have a website!"
24. **Search Engine Optimization.** Help me find you if I need to. Everyone knows how to use web search engines nowadays. Most of us have a search engine set as our home page. I am amazed by the number of Prosthodontists I can't find on the web. Have your web programmer code your beautiful website to come up when people search keywords related to you. If someone mentioned your name to me at a party, and I typed in "your name" or "Prosthodontist" on my web search engine, could I find you on the web? If not, you are missing great opportunities. In today's information world, it is not who you know, but rather who "Googles" you that counts!
25. **Start Collecting Email Addresses.** The greatest piece of customer information any business in the world will have in the future is their email address. Most big companies learned this years ago and have exploded their market presence. Most Prosthodontists are slow to realize this, but there are a few who see this goldmine of opportunity. Email is a centerpiece in how we guide our daily activities. Why not get ahead of the curve and start using this valuable resource? Email newsletters and email confirmations will be standard practices in the future of dentistry. So start collecting email addresses now. People are now checking their email long before they check their

- phone messages. It's fast, easy, and it's VISUAL. Phone messages are seldom ever good news, take too long to listen to, and usually require writing something down. In my house, I know my wife is headed for a bad day if her email isn't working.
26. **Fantastic Image Pieces.** Once you have your logo and website finished, make sure the quality of everything that leaves your office says five things. (1) "Here we are again." (2) "This is what we stand for." (3) "This is exactly what I want to say." (4) "This is how to contact our fantastic office." (5) "We did all of this using high-quality materials."
 27. **A Great External Marketing Blueprint and Timeline.** If you are going to spend money outside your walls to get people to know who you are, the best bet is to spend it very wisely. A blueprint alone can be a great marketing tool. It generates massive contagious enthusiasm for the future. Nothing energizes you like the promise of a better future. A blueprint and timeline visually establish the timing and consistency of our efforts. They streamline efficiency when it comes to cost. It also helps measure the effectiveness of your every effort. Some external marketing efforts can go well beyond 10% to 15% of your gross income per year. External efforts, if planned wisely, can fall way below 5%. Get a plan. Let everyone know how and when to use it. It will energize you.
 28. **Evening Presentations.** Get good at telling your patients' stories. Do presentations outside of dentistry to position yourself. Remember, people are emotional. Do not talk about the procedure, veneers, etc. Tell patient life stories packed with emotion. It is too boring when it is about you. Realize that it is not about you; make it mostly about them.
 29. **Network** with the critical professionals in your community. Again, this is outside of dentistry. Plastic surgeons, spas, and fitness professionals are a great place to start. They require a different strategy—how you can help or team with them, and not how great you are.
 30. **The Case of the Month.** Create a "Smile of the Month" to post in a really nice frame within your office. Then put it in the local neighborhood newspapers. As Dr. John Cranham says, "Before you know it, patients will start to ask you when they can be the case of the month."
 31. **An Eye-Stopping Newspaper or Magazine Ad.** External newspaper or magazine ads can be useful efforts to reinforce your presence in the community. Make sure if you are spending the money that first, the ad is really well done. Second, it reflects the image you want. And third, it is designed with specific intent. Keep in mind that there are two perceptions patients can have when reading ads; one perception is that the ad is purely marketing—they see you saying "I need patients." The other perception is that your ad is a branding effort—patients interpret your ad as you saying "This is what we do here." Two completely different interpretations.
 32. **Television and Radio.** It can be an option. Traditional thinking would lead you to believe it is very costly, but if done right, and if factored into your blueprint, it can be a very cost-effective way to get your message out.
- I strongly suggest that you read the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. It will get your pulse going like no other book when it comes to this transition.
- Remember: Your brand is your reputation. And you build your reputation by what you do.
- So, do it very well.
- Kirk Behrendt is the Director of ACT Dental Practice Coaching. He has lectured all over the United States to major meetings and study clubs. He has extensive experience on practice profitability, team building, leadership, and dental practice marketing/branding. Kirk and his team are primarily focused on positively impacting the future of dentistry one practice at a time. You can call him at 800-851-8186, or email him at kirk@actdental.com, or visit ACT Dental's website at www.actdental.com.**

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