

Marketing for Prosthodontists: Become a Master of Digital Photography

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This great profession of ours has made huge advancements in recent years, but none more noticeable and more valuable than digital photography.

We live in an attention-deficit society. We are visually stimulated by images. Talking to people is becoming less and less effective. Nowadays, people want to see things instead of being told about them. With the accessibility of technological advancements in visual stimuli, people can usually acquire images and see every angle and color before they make a decision to purchase something.

Dentistry has lagged behind in this trend. But now the gap is closing. Some prosthodontists have realized the importance of digital photography and taken their practices to new heights, while others are still sleeping. One thing has become very clear: the future of extraordinary dentistry will be driven by those who have mastered one important discipline—digital photography.

Here are five incredible practice builders when it comes to digital photography:

1. **Do not Be Good at Digital Photography . . . Be a Master.** If young prosthodontists want to see a master at work in this department, could I send them to your practice? If the answer is “NO,” then change it. This is an important goal for many reasons. Most importantly, it will elevate the level of your dentistry and confidence when you approach photography with a “Mastery” mentality. Taking digital photos allows fantastic case documentation over time. The human condition (especially with visual documentation) does not allow for complacency in your work. Let that magical process work for you. Everyone likes to get better at their profession as they progress through life. It is



a crucial process in realizing any level of fulfillment. Visual documentation is the tool for this. You can evaluate your own dentistry over time and make huge improvements in your diagnostic and delivery capabilities. So do not be good, be a master.

2. **Have Your Assistants Take the Photos and Prepare Them.** Your dental assistant can do it as well (if not better) than you can. The problem is that we do not take the time to train them. Most extraordinary dentists I work with have their assistant take a series of 10 to 24 shots. The assistant then loads them into the computer and prints the four critical shots (face, smile, upper occlusal, and lower occlusal) on a piece of high-quality photo paper for the preclinical interview. It usually takes the assistant less than 10 minutes to do all of this. This is a great practice builder because it frees up some of your time to do the other things that only *you* are licensed to do. In addition, this system is executed with great consistency without you having to do it. You will find many assistants take major pride in how great their photos are. You do not take



X-rays do you? Same applies for photos. If this seems impossible for you, I highly recommend you order a training DVD by Dr. John Cranham to teach your assistants how to do this. The DVD is entitled "Records for Success, Part I." You can order it online at <http://www.cranhamseminars.com/practiceaids.shtml>.

Watch it with your assistants once a week for 4 weeks, until you get it down. Another fantastic resource is Dr. Greg Tarantola's Multimedia CD, "Dental Photography." You can order it online at <http://www.tarantoladentallearning.com/inc/sdetail/78>.

3. **Help Patients to See Everything, and Then Let Them Talk.** You have seen this, but many times patients have no idea what their mouth looks like (most prosthodontists do not even know what the inside of their mouth looks like). It is amazing what a picture reveals—it truly is worth a thousand words. Everyone needs a picture as a frame of reference when it comes to their health. Patients will use these pictures to create the picture of their dental health that is important to them. We all think in pictures, and it is important that you try to see the picture your patient has. Your entire process should be about seeing your patient's picture. Try not to talk at all. This may be hard, but getting them to talk and having you listen is one of the most important transitions you will ever make in dentistry. Crossing the bridge from good dentistry to "extraordinary dentistry" requires a different thought process. Sometimes you can put up the pictures on your flat screen or hand them to your patient on the photo paper and not have to say a word. They will do all the talking. If you do have to talk,

ask questions like, "What do you see?" or "Mrs. Jones, when we complete your treatment, how would you like your teeth to be?" Then be quiet and listen to their picture. The same principle applies to the treatment planning and consult phases. Have patients show you their picture of what they want. Preoperative visualization is where 95% of all mistakes on big cases are made. Photography is one of the ways to reduce errors and increase enthusiasm in this department. This may not seem like marketing at first, but the more you do it, the more you will realize that this is the genesis of most of your marketing efforts. It is important to build a portfolio of high-quality photos, and you will be limited without mastering the discipline of digital photography.

4. **Get Your Photos Circulating in Your Professional Network.** One of the biggest referral sources in a prosthodontic practice is from other specialists and GPs. We just do not have time to meet other dentists like we used to. On top of that, everyone thinks they are extraordinary. Other specialists and GPs do not want to hear about it, they want to SEE it. The greatest way for you to differentiate yourself as a truly unique, extraordinary, brilliant, cosmetic-restorative prosthodontist who has a reputation for doing "complex stuff" is not by talking but by SHOWING others what you do. Any time you get a referral from another specialist or GP, we call it a "moment of truth." This is your time to shine and say to yourself, "Not only am I going to do a fabulous job, but I am going to do a great job of documenting this case for you and let you know where the patient is in my practice and treatment process." I see too many

prosthodontists not use this resource in the way they should. Highly qualified referrals from your professional network are some of the most rewarding and productive cases you will ever get. Reward the behavior of your referral source by setting yourself apart from everyone else in your area. Get so good that your referral source says, "No one does it as well as he/she does." Send them tons of e-mails that **SHOW** them you know what you are doing. Do not use the excuse that most of the other dentists in your professional network do not use e-mail. You cannot worry about that. You have to show your referring network that you are on the cutting edge first, and then you have to encourage them to get up to speed with you. Raise the stakes for your practice and everyone around you. People will start to notice. The same goes for your lab technician. There are tons of reasons to enclose a CD with the patient's photos in the lab box. It improves quality and predictability all the way around. Make sure you send them finished photos, too. Rarely do lab techs ever see the final result. I used to work in a lab—whether you believe it or not, you have a reputation and word does get out. Become a treasured advocate for your lab and give them a reason to prioritize and enjoy working on your cases.

5. **Help Patients Remember What They Looked Like.** Some complex cases can take a very long time to complete. Many patients become so absorbed in the current picture they see that they seem to forget where they started. A wonderful way to market your practice is with an incredible posttreatment consultation that includes the before and after photos. That also becomes the perfect opportunity to ask your patients to share this great gift with their

friends. Everyone wins, and we do it in a visually stimulating and emotional moment.

Executing these five benchmarks in your practice will serve as a prerequisite to some of the more advanced efforts of internal and external marketing. Without fantastic photos of beautiful work, prosthodontists are limited to how much of a practice image they can project. In marketing, confidence in the truth of your message is extremely important. You cannot fool consumers today, especially ones that reach deep in their pockets to purchase discretionary items. You have to be as good as you say you are. The instant you are not, they smell a rat.

Becoming a master in the discipline of digital photography will serve many great purposes for you. You will force yourself to become a better prosthodontist, a confidence will radiate from it, your team will pick up on it, and eventually your patients and other members of your professional network will recognize your brand of being the "Very Best!" And that is the goal of any marketing effort.

So, stop talking and start **SHOWING!**

See you soon,

Kirk

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