

What Marketing CAN'T Do for Prosthodontists

Kirk Behrendt, ACT Speaker & Coach

Marketing is a very hot topic in dentistry right now. Dentists are competing for the discretionary dollars of patients in unprecedented ways. While there is no question a good marketing program can boost a practice to new heights, it is also important to understand that marketing can't fix your practice by itself. You have to do that.

Michele Pariza Wacek, the author of *Got Ideas? Unleash Your Creativity and Make More Money*, states that there are at least four things that Marketing CAN'T do for you. This month we examine what those things are and how they relate to your practice.

1. **Marketing Can't Make You An Overnight**

Success: Making a commitment to market or brand your practice to boost the number of new patients is a great idea. And just because you spend big money to start making your presence in the local media, it doesn't mean you will see an increase in new patients right after it. Most dentists get upset when they spend a fortune on some beautiful ads and then don't see immediate results. Marketing is a continuous effort to project a level of quality in everything you do. The rewards that come from such an effort take time.

Branding yourself to get people to see you as a specific type of professional can't be done with ads and commercials alone. We often tell prosthodontists that it takes 7–10 years to become an “overnight success” in dentistry. You need to work really hard at all the little things that create this kind of a fantastic reputation.

If your practice is under considerable financial stress, a good marketing program may not be enough. In fact, it can make the situation worse if you are not careful. Any effort needs time, creativity, and expertise to become effective. It will also require a continuous financial commitment. So before you spend the

money, realize that branding and external marketing are long-term efforts that only support (not guide) your game plan for the next decade or two.

2. **Marketing Is Not About Doing Something Once And Forgetting About It:**

If you have ever marketed in dentistry before, you know this one well. Great marketers are always testing ideas and doing it a lot. Many of the most successful marketing dentists will tell you they have had as many failed marketing efforts as they have had successful ones.

One thing is for sure: they understand that there is no “off” button. It is only a valve you open and close based on your knowledge and success. Once you turn it off for a few months, you become greatly susceptible to the severe ups and downs of the production waves.

If you are planning on being successful in your marketing, you have to understand that this road never ends. Persistence in projecting your reputation is vital to how successful you ultimately become. This includes your integrity and ability to deliver on your promises and those of your practice.

3. **Marketing Can't Fix A Bad Experience:**

If you only get a few new patients a month, there is a reason for that. Your search for this reason must be relentless. Many prosthodontists who get 3–5 new patients per month think a little marketing will bring them to the greatly desired land of 10–15 new privately referred patients. In truth, a practice with very few new patients can't spend enough money to create practice solvency. External marketing will only work in the long term if it is done with integrity. Promising a unique and extraordinary image and then having patients experience something less than that can be fatal.

As Harry Beckwith says in his fantastic book *Selling the Invisible* (which should be required reading in dentistry), “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.”

So before you spend big money to attract patients from a broader market, make sure the experience patients have in your office is so incredibly unique and extraordinary that people are emotionally moved by their interaction with you and your team.

4. **Marketing Can't Fix A Flawed Business:**

Let's face it. Prosthodontics is a specialty in which everyone believes they have an “exceptional practice.” Finding complacency in this belief can often be a defective leadership trait. Marketing can't fix staff problems or cash flow issues. Quite simply, marketing can't fix your business. Many times dentists see conflict with team members or financial crunches as critical times in which the antidote is marketing. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Marketing is best suited for a team that believes with great passion in their leader and the purpose of the practice. If you continuously have problems with the people around you, there will be very little effectiveness in how successful your practice marketing ultimately is. On the financial front, if your practice overhead is high, no amount of marketing will ever

relieve your stress. Chances are, you will spend some serious money to outrun the overhead monster that keeps you from spending more time with your family.

Fix your business before you pull more people into it.

Marketing is a wonderful and exciting component in today's world of dentistry. Being realistic about its role in aiding your practice growth is something that has to be clearly understood. Waving the “marketing magic wand” will never fix your practice by itself. Its magic can only be realized when your commitment to it and expectations of it are sound.

Keep up the great work.

Kirk

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 in 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 reach him at 800-851-8186 or email him at kirk@actdental.com.

Copyright of Journal of Prosthodontics is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.