



The 5 Rs of Marketing with Software

Maximize practice management software capabilities to boost efficiency and profits

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Today there are few dental offices without a practice management system—this vital tool is the backbone of running an efficient and profitable business. The main players in the industry are Dentrix, Eaglesoft, Softdent, and even MacPractice. Dentists have enthusiastically adopted one system or another, and many use a significant number of the robust features these programs offer to users.

As a “wet-glove dentist,” national speaker, and exhibitor at many dental conventions, I am surprised to learn that despite knowing the dramatic efficiencies of running an office with management software, there is still a significant reluctance among dentists to embrace the other M—marketing. In fact, marketing

can be readily accomplished through third-party software that works in tandem with the practice management systems.

Today there are numerous software programs—including Lighthouse 360 (www.lh360.com), DemandForce (www.demandforce.com), RevenueWell (www.revenuewell.com), and Solutionreach (www.solutionreach.com)—whose purpose is to stimulate practice growth by, among other things, reactivating existing patients and encouraging new ones. Marketing tasks accomplished through your practice management software fall into five categories:

- Reminder
- Recare
- Reactivation
- Reputation
- Referral

These software programs have both similar and differentiating features, but all are grouped together as “patient communication programs.” They allow a dental office to electronically communicate with patients in a number of different ways, which saves a significant amount of time for the team and allows them to focus on other tasks at the front desk. A closer look at these “five Rs” reveals how software can streamline marketing tasks and improve office workflow while helping to boost practice production.

Reminders

The Old Way

Prior to purchasing my practice in 2007, I worked in an office where the front desk was tasked with constantly calling patients to confirm their dental appointments. They would spend half the day on the phone trying to get patients to confirm, leaving messages for those who didn’t respond, and worrying that some of the more unreliable ones would forget about the appointment the next day. Rather than risk leaving a hole in the hygiene schedule or, worse, in the dentist’s schedule, they would keep calling until they got a confirmation call back or finally reached the patient. It also meant that an additional team member would be needed to handle some of the other duties necessary at the front desk during a normal business day.

The New Way

A fundamental shift has taken place in the way we communicate. Patients now prefer to receive texts and emails about their appointments; most do not want to be called on the phone. These software programs email patients about their appointment at set intervals to remind them about an upcoming visit. For example, 3 to 4 days before an appointment, the software sends an email and text message asking the patient to confirm, which in most cases is automatically captured in your practice management program. Even better, 1 hour prior to the appointment, patients will receive a text messaging alerting them to the upcoming appointment. Many a

patient has thanked me for the last-minute reminder that prevented a missed appointment. One saved appointment pays for the entire month of what the software costs.

It is important to note that patients can't cancel their appointment via these electronic methods. In addition, it is still necessary to call some patients, including those who do not confirm electronically and older patients who do not have access to this technology.

Recare

The Old Way

Whether we like it or not, many patients do not value their recare appointments and either don't schedule or cancel. As with reminders, front desk personnel as well as hygienists would have to call patients when they were overdue for their recare visit. They would even have to run reports within the practice management system to get the list of overdue patients. If the patient didn't answer, the staff member would have to leave a message and call again if they didn't respond—all resulting in a huge waste of office staff time. Many offices still send postcards filled out by patients, thinking seeing a card with their own handwriting would prompt a better response.

The New Way

These software programs email patients when they are due for their recare appointments at set time intervals; they also email the team to follow up on patients who do not respond. Every single day in my office, I receive a recare request from my software so we can contact the patient and schedule the appointment for them. You are still going to have to call some patients, but most are very responsive to electronic notification, and even better, there's no need to spend the money on postage for those postcards.

Reactivation

The Old Way

Face it, patients get lost all the time. With those who don't make going to the dentist a priority, before they know it a year plus has gone by since their last visit. Worse, they may have switched to another dentist and have not alerted your practice. The team has to once again run a report and call the patient, not knowing if the patient is even coming back to the office. What a waste of time!

The New Way

Patients receive an email from the office letting them know that it has been a specific amount of time since they were last seen in the practice. They are usually asked if they would like to schedule an appointment or if they are seeing another dentist and wish to have their records inactivated. Many will respond that they have left and mention their reason via email rather than place a call to the office.

Reputation

The Old Way

In the past, a dental office would ask the patient who has had a good experience to go home and post a review on sites that collect and publish reviews, such as Google, Yelp, and Facebook. Of course, most

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Practice Building

would go home and forget, so maybe one or two out of the 100 asked would post a review.

The New Way

Reputation is a dentist's most valuable asset and one of the best ways for practices to market and improve their online presence. Your satisfied patients are far more likely to tell others about your practice online if they receive an email asking them to review the practice. The review that is left in most cases stays on the site that the company creates and may be visible on Facebook and your website. Please note that, regardless of what these software companies tell you, in most cases, the reviews they generate do not end up showing up on Google and Yelp. There are programs designed to specifically help with this aspect of practice marketing known as "reputation marketing." It is vital for all practices to make this a priority, as 87% of searchers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.¹

Referral

The Old Way

New patients are the lifeblood of a practice. Without new patients, your practice will struggle, as there is only so much work that your recare patients can generate. In the old era of internal marketing, the dental team is trained to make a point of asking patients who have had a good experience in your office to refer their friends and family. The office may also post a sign that says, "Accepting new patients."

The New Way

The various email communications from software programs offer numerous opportunities for patients to refer their friends or family. While it's still a good idea to ask patients for referrals when they are in the office, the software-generated communications make it easy for them to send a simple email to their friends and family with their positive comments and information about contacting the practice.

Don't Be Left Behind

These third-party software programs all offer exclusive features such as a payment portal that allows your patients to pay online

when they receive a bill. They may also send postoperative instructions to patients and/or send team members an email with a task list of things that have to be done each day. To find out which best meets your practice needs, you can call one of the companies, ask pertinent questions, and decide which one would work best for your office.

Practice management systems provide tools to successfully run your business, but in my opinion, these patient communication software programs are a vital addition to not only make your office more efficient, but more profitable as well.

Reference

1. Online reputation statistics. iSocial Reviews website. www.isocialreviews.com/online-reputation-statistics. Accessed May 5, 2015.

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