

Keeping it simple

DPAS marketing expert Kevin Coyle enlightens us on how best to build your brand

A growing number of dental practices are embracing marketing and involving the entire team in the process. Yet a higher number of practices are starting to feel left behind in an area they have neither the resources nor experience with which to deal. It is the latter of these two groups who will benefit most from the following, very basic, pieces of marketing advice.

Like any business, a dental practice must set a realistic marketing budget and devise marketing objectives that are achievable. When you first try to set a budget, the figures can look quite daunting. However, the future of the practice depends on patient recruitment and retention so the initial outlay should be seen as a long-term investment.

You are taking the first steps to building a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship with your patients. Below are just some of the cost-effective ways to keep your marketing costs to a minimum.

Branding

Many people confuse a brand with the cosmetics of a company – the logo and colours, the stationery and advertisements.

However, a brand and its values take shape in every patient interaction you carry out – in the actions of your team and in the word-of-mouth referrals which good service will ensure.

Decide your brand values from the outset and carefully plan how the service that you are offering will differ from other local practices. You can create surveys inexpensively online with companies such as Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com) that can then be sent to friends, family and neighbours to assess what extra services would help define the practice brand.

Believe in the service that you and your team deliver and then communicate that belief. This is the most simple and straightforward way to take the first step towards building a brand.

www.don'twastemoney.com

The 'smoke and mirrors' approach – used by a number of website design companies to extract extortionate rates from clients – is rapidly being eroded.

Many practices simply require a five-page static site that includes details on what treatments you provide, the team and their expertise, opening hours, contact information and some testimonials or case studies.

Speak to a few website design companies and think long and hard before commissioning a 20+ page Flash-enabled website at great expense, just for the sake of it. When it comes to having search engine optimisation, again question how much of this is needed.

While I may be about to oversimplify the process, by and large if you live in a densely populated city or urban area where people are likely to use Google or Yahoo! to find a practice, then by all means opt for a higher optimisation package.

If, however, your practice is in a rural area with only a handful of practices and a more mature population demographic, then your marketing budget would be better spent elsewhere.

The marketing team at DPAS would be delighted to refer you to any of the preferred providers we recommend for website design and hosting.

PR

Public relations doesn't have to be an expensive exercise. We are currently in the grip of a recession with screaming headlines in local publications stating the increased number of job losses and closures of businesses.

These very same publications are also desperate to print the positive stories. If you're opening or expanding a practice then not only will you be increasing local employment but also improving the access to dentistry for local residents. Perhaps you should consider an open day and invite your local press. If they cannot attend, take some digital photographs (making sure they are clear, in-focus and include a lot of people and action) and have somebody write a few paragraphs about the day.

You can then email this to all local publications whose contact details are normally found in their first few pages. It is also worth inviting your local MP who will normally attend a photo opportunity that promotes an increase in local employment.

The contact details for your MP can be found at www.parliament.uk or by calling the information line on 020 7219 4272.

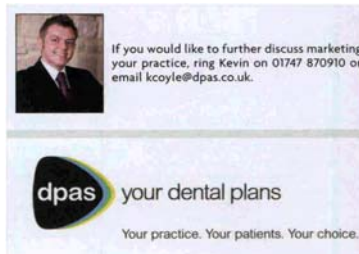
Plans

If you are offering a dental plan, a 'practice branded' option gives you the best opportunity to strengthen patient loyalty. DPAS has been offering 'practice branded' plans for more than 12 years and we are incredibly flattered to see a well-known nationally branded plan provider recently promote the benefits of strong branding of your dental practice.

That's advice that we have always given, so it's refreshing to see another provider follow. It's your brand so use it to your benefit.

When choosing a plan provider you will need to choose one that shares your goals and will help you grow patient numbers whilst offering an outstanding level of service.

The above is merely an introduction to the cost-effective marketing basics that a new practice can use.



If you would like to further discuss marketing your practice, ring Kevin on 01747 870910 or email kcoyle@dpas.co.uk.

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