

## Would your brand still be as sweet by any other name? Here, **Kevin Coyle** stresses the importance of a strong brand identity

Rather than trying to cram a marketing lecture into a short article, the easiest way to illustrate the power of a brand is to ask you to think of those brands closest to you.

Why did you start using a certain product or service provider in the first place? And why do you keep returning?

A strong brand promotes familiarity, trust, loyalty and becomes a lasting relationship. In order for your brand to thrive, the expectations of your patients must be met on each visit.

### The cost of confusion

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

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

To use a well-known example, Richard Branson didn't build one of the world's leading brands because of the red and white 'Virgin' logo.

He built a brand by having cutting edge artists and prime location megastores within the 'Virgin Music' stable, by offering a better, friendlier standard of service from flight attendants and increased online booking options within the 'Virgin Atlantic' brand and, most recently, with 'Virgin Media' being the first company to offer cable television, landline telephone, broadband and mobile telephony in one low-cost package.

So, how does this translate to you and your dental practice?

### Your biggest brand ambassador

Your biggest brand ambassador is always going to be your receptionist. Yet it's shockingly common to hear anecdotal tales of the 'prickly receptionist'. This is the first point of contact for all your prospective and returning patients.

If the experience is a bad one, how much revenue have you and your practice lost? You may be pleased that you're seeing three new patients per week and feel the reception team are doing a sterling job. However, if it's taking 30 new enquiries to generate those three appointments then something is very wrong. A 10% conversion rate on new enquiries is simply not good enough.

On a weekend away from the practice, spend some time considering what you would like to be your brand values.

Carry out a survey and speak to your existing patients, 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.

With so many considerations to take into account, you may wonder where a practice branded plan fits into the equation.

Well, the first thing you should remember is that your patients are just that – your patients. If you hear a plan provider refer to 'their patients' then alarm bells should start to ring. Patients may have their dental plan

administered by a nationally branded scheme, however, that patient is a patient of your practice. This is where their loyalty lies and the reason why a practice branded dental plan will always be the best choice for your practice.

Having your own practice branded dental plan is reassuring for your patients, whose other alternative may include what they perceive as some 'faceless insurer'. This supplementary insurance element is an essential consideration if you are about to implement a dental plan.

In the current economic climate patients not only like the option of spreading their treatment costs with monthly direct debits but also the peace of mind knowing that if an accident or emergency were to happen, they would have an element of cover.

### So where does the logo finally fit into the equation?

You may already have a logo for your practice, but if not there's no need to worry. Design teams will usually give you a range of options and build one for you. This is then used on all of the brochures that are produced for your plan or range of plans.

Why not find out how powerful a practice branded plan can be? **PD**

Comments to [pd@fmc.co.uk](mailto:pd@fmc.co.uk)

Kevin Coyle is marketing manager at DPAS. Kevin can be contacted on 01747 870910 or emailed at [kcoyle@dpas.co.uk](mailto:kcoyle@dpas.co.uk).