



# Four Business Cards

by **Debbie Best**

**K**ris, my real estate agent, came over to my house a couple of weeks ago with her 8-year-old daughter Audrey. Audrey had just been to the dentist for her six month check-up and it was recommended that she see an orthodontist to evaluate her constricted maxillary arch and anterior open bite. Kris was given business cards for four orthodontists in the immediate area.

## Business/Referral Cards

The first impression can happen before the initial call to your office. It can start with your business card. All of the business cards Kris was given were printed with the office logo, doctor's name, address, and telephone number. There was nothing on the 2" x 3" cards to set one office apart from their competition. As this would be Kris' first experience with an orthodontist, she looked for name or brand recognition and then asked for recommendations from her friends and colleagues. Knowing that I worked in the orthodontic field she came over to the house to ask for my opinion. If your office was one of the four business cards, what could you do to increase your chance that you would be THE office or one of the first offices contacted? Rather than leaving the back of your card blank, utilize the space and consider adding the following:

- Your mission statement – what makes you unique
- Office hours
- Referred by \_\_\_\_\_

You might also consider a fold over business card which will allow space for a map and/or directions to your office.

## After They Decide to Call You

May 2011 statistics in the United States show that in 58% of two parent households both parents are working outside the home. Another 30% of United States households are single parents. With these staggering statistics we are still seeing an increase in the number of potential patients/parents who choose to seek more

than one opinion before committing to treatment. The initial telephone call to your office can set the stage for an exceptional orthodontic experience or take you out of the running before you ever see the patient. Evaluate your patient experience over the telephone:

- Is your telephone answered by the first or second ring?
- Do you have telephone coverage Monday through Friday, including over the lunch hour? If someone has four business cards and cannot reach a live person when they call, there is a good chance that they will call the next doctor on their list. Your office might be eliminated before you leave the gate.
- Does your team member answering the telephone sound professional, unrushed, and emulate a smile that travels across the phone lines?
- Have you trained your team members to ask for the name of the person who is calling and then use their name during the conversation?
- Do you strike a balance between gathering information with educating the patient about orthodontics and empower your doctor and team? Does the patient or parent end the call feeling excited about the appointment or does the potential new patient feel as though they have just gone through a 50 question interrogation?

## Appointment Availability

No matter how flexible and extended your office hours are you will never be able to please all of your current, future, and potential patients. Orthodontists who have extended their hours to offer evening appointments often find patients missing the prime time slots due to

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sports, dance, or even television programs (American Idol won the contest last year taking the highest priority over patient appointments). Weekend appointments are quickly cancelled or missed if the weather is nice. There is no right or wrong office hours; set your hours for what works best for your individual practice needs. The key is to offer a flexibility of times and have new patient appointments readily available, ideally within a week. Stagger your lunch hours and coordinate your patient schedule with your local public and private school calendars. If you practice in an area where the schools offer early release one day a week make sure that you synchronize your office hours to take advantage of the prime, non-school hours.

### Voice Mail, E-mail, and Text Messages

If you use an automated system to leave messages or leave a personalized message double check to make sure that you are speaking clearly. We recently switched over to Vonage for our home telephone service. One of the features they offer is to send you an e-mail with voice messages received. I had an appointment scheduled for surgery and received the following e-mail message the evening before:

“Hello Ms. Beth, this is Dr. Troy. I’m going to be around two dollars tomorrow. I just called to say I want anything. I just wanted to remind you not to eat or drink anything after midnight and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow and I will take a care of you. Okay. Take care, bye”

More than a little concerned about who was going to be taking care of me during my surgery I picked up the voice message. The actual message on our voice mail said:

“Hello Mrs. Best, this is Dr. Choy, your anesthesiologist for tomorrow. I just called to say hi more than anything. I just wanted to remind you not to eat or drink anything after midnight and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow and I will take good care of you. Okay. Take care, bye.”

After feeling much relief that it appeared that I was going to be in reputable hands for my surgery and getting a good laugh out of the translation of the voice message to text, I realized that there was a valuable lesson to learn from this experience. We have to keep one step ahead of technology and proactively synchronize all methods of communication we use. Do your voice and text messages emulate your office mission statement and philosophy? Often the ideas you have today are technology changes that were already in the works yesterday.

### Continuing the Wow Factor – Utilizing Patient Managers

Have you ever made a major purchase where you were given excellent customer service prior to the purchase and then things changed once you signed on the bottom line? The honeymoon stage was over, and reality set in; the old bait and switch technique. You don’t want to be known as the orthodontic practice who was extremely accommodating and informational before treatment started and now patients cannot get convenient appointments. It is important to remember that patients are your strongest referral source. They should not become a number once they start treatment. Each patient is an individual with specific needs and requests.

As offices get busier it becomes more difficult to keep the personal touch with every patient contact. I vividly remember the first time an established patient walked into the office and I could not remember her name. To this day I am not sure who felt worse. This unfortunate episode was the spring board for my strong endorsement of the patient manager system. The patient manager allows us to strengthen and maintain our close connection to each patient. The patient manager program can set you apart from your competition. The personal touch follows the patient throughout the duration of their treatment.

With the patient manager program, patients are assigned to one clinical assistant or to a team of two assistants. The goal is to have patient managers or patient manager teams see their assigned patients 95% of the time, taking responsibility for the progress of treatment, patient cooperation, and patient satisfaction. Not only does this system enhance the clinical expertise of the patient manager (as they see the results of each wire change and adjustment), but it also strengthens the connection the patient has to the practice. The patient manager becomes their cheerleader, coach, and friend as treatment progresses. Additional positive results seen as a result of the patient manager program are:

- Reduced missed appointments as the patient feels a responsibility to the patient manager as well as to the orthodontist. The bond formed between the patient and their patient manager can be compared to the relationship you might have with your hair stylist or personal trainer.
- Patient cooperation is increased as the patient

manager monitors compliance and works with the patient/parent as a team to achieve the desired result. They know firsthand how the patient is doing throughout treatment, celebrating successes, and giving positive encouragement when improvement is needed.

- Extra or emergency visits are reduced through increased compliance by the patient and accountability by the patient manager. The patient manager knows what is happening with each of their patients. If a distal end is not clipped, a door is not closed, or a bracket comes off due to the bonding technique, the patient manager takes responsibility to see the patient and take care of the problem.
- Increased patient referrals as a result of the close connection the patient and family have with their patient managers. They feel as though they are referring a friend or acquaintance to another friend.

Over the course of comprehensive treatment patients will spend 12 or more hours in your office. Just think of the close bond that can be formed between the patient manager and the patient in that amount of time. Lifelong friendships are created as well as the creation of another

strong orthodontic advocate for your practice.

Design your business cards so when a potential patient is presented four business cards, they call you first! Be the practice that creates raving fans who tell others about their phenomenal, ultimate orthodontic experience. Seeing those four business cards was a validation that it is essential that you set yourself apart from your competition both before and after that first call to your office. ♡

## About the Author

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Debbie Best, a practice management consultant for Consulting Network, has over 35 years of experience in the dental and orthodontic field. She will be presenting in San Diego at the 2012 Users Group Meeting.