



ORTHO2

Branding 101 for Ortho Practices

by **Dr. Roger P. Levin**

Since the Great Recession, the dental economy has undergone permanent changes. Research conducted by the Levin Group Data Center™ shows that 75% of ortho practices have experienced declines in production. Orthodontists now operate their businesses in intense competition with other ortho practices (and with general dentists) for a smaller pool of patients. Parents and adult patients approach spending more cautiously. They arm themselves with information before making a purchase to ensure that they are getting the most value for their dollars. They ask more questions and compare prices. Ortho shopping, where parents and patients visit multiple practices before accepting treatment, has become the new normal.

Given this shift in the ortho market, practices must work harder than ever to make certain that they earn the business of parents and adult patients. Front desk personnel must always answer the phone promptly and cheerfully, prepared with scripts to win over first-time callers and schedule them for consultations. Treatment coordinators must train diligently to ensure that their case presentations build value for the practice while extolling the benefits of ortho treatment. Practices must offer multiple patient financing options to help families afford braces. But before parents and patients can even discover your ortho office, you must successfully market your services to them and to referring doctors.

Distinguishing Your Practice from Competitors

The Encarta Dictionary defines marketing as “the business activity of presenting products or services in such a way as to make them desirable.” The most effective approach to making your ortho services desirable is to stand out from your competitors in a positive way. If your practice seems the same as all the others in your area, then parents and patients have no reason to choose you over them.

When considering which practice characteristics to promote, remember that people without dental training

have little idea whether you’re a good orthodontist or not. They can’t examine your current patients to see how well their smiles are shaping up. However, they do know how they were treated when they called your practice for the first time. That’s why clinical excellence won’t work by itself as a differentiator. The way to separate your practice from competitors is to focus on the patient experience.

Identifying Practice Differentiators

What makes the patient experience at your practice different from the patient experience at any other practice? To answer this question, you need to set aside any personal bias and look at your business from the prospective patient or parent point of view. Their perceptions are all that matter, and shaping that perception is what marketing is about. From the patient viewpoint, some competitive advantages that your office may be able to promote include the following:

- Exemplary customer service. Parents and patients should walk out of your office after every appointment deeply impressed by how much you and your team care. If your staff members truly connect with patients and families and express genuine concern for oral health, your marketing materials can publicize superior service. You want to make sure that you have a system in place to provide the best patient experience every time so that when patients do accept treatment, they’re not disappointed.
- Location. Parents and adult patients will rarely travel any great distance to see a particular orthodontist. They prefer to find a convenient location. Consider whether your practice is near a local school or easy to access from major roads, for example. If so, accessibility may be an effective differentiator for your office.

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- Charity or community involvement. Does your practice support a charity or community activity, such as clothing drives, canned goods donation, or sponsorship of a local sports team? If you do, social responsibility could serve as one of your distinguishing characteristics. These types of activities also make your ortho practice more visible in the community, so that your marketing messages reach a wider audience.
- Available technology. Perhaps you and your team make a point of investing in the latest technology to improve outcomes for your patients. Do you have cone beam CT scanners or an in-house lab that allows for faster turn-around time on appliance fabrication with direct doctor supervision? Can other practices say the same, or are you ahead of the curve?
- Lower fees. Before the recession, parents might have seen your office as inferior if the ortho services you provided were less expensive than at other offices. In the new dental economy, that way of thinking has virtually disappeared. Now the cost of ortho treatment plays a more important role in case acceptance than ever. If your fees are lower, let audiences know.
- Patient financing options. If your practice isn't the cheapest in town, do you have the best financing plans? Ortho practices have always offered in-house financing, which served them well in the past. However, in the new dental economy where families are more cautious about their spending, this option is proving less attractive to them. Consequently, ortho offices should be placing a greater emphasis on patient financing from a reputable outside company. Parents benefit from outside financing because that they don't have to come up with a substantial down payment, and they can extend their payments beyond the actual treatment time. As a result, most parents will place greater trust in the practice if it gives them a viable way to afford ortho treatment.
- Convenient office hours. Does your practice have evening or weekend hours to accommodate patient schedules? Busy families will appreciate any flexibility you and your staff can offer. In your marketing materials, state specifically which hours you are open.
- Fun features. Ortho offices should be comforting and family-friendly places. If your reception areas and treatment rooms feature electronic tablets, video games, television screens with cable or movies, frequent contests and promotions, etc., you may win over parents and patients by presenting those amenities.
- Doctor credentials. Are you board certified? Do you hold specific certifications, or have you earned recognition for

your use of particular orthodontic techniques? Although parents and patients can't judge your clinical expertise, they will understand the importance of such credentials.

Whatever the distinguishing traits of your office may be, remember that they'll only work to build your brand if they carry weight with patients and parents and if the messages are received.

Communicating Your Brand Message

Once you've defined the practice's differentiators, they must be communicated consistently at every possible opportunity. This should happen not only in marketing materials (both in print and online), but also over the phone, during in-office conversations with parents and patients, and during consultations. One effective way to convey your practice's brand succinctly is to write a tagline or slogan for your office that gets included in all communications. The more often the brand message gets reinforced, the higher the levels of confidence parents and patients will have in choosing your practice.

Building Trust

According to Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, "Great companies that build an enduring brand have an emotional relationship with customers that has no barrier. And that emotional relationship is on the most important characteristic, which is trust." This is as true for an ortho practice as it is for a coffee shop. Since patients can't fully judge you by your clinical expertise, they need to trust that you'll take excellent care of their mouths, and that they will see the results in their smiles. Your marketing materials must make promises that your patients can count on.

If you follow the principles outlined in this article, you will create a unique brand for your ortho practice that communicates the specific reasons why prospective patients and parents should choose you over your competitors. They'll know why obtaining treatment with your team will benefit them and their smiles. And they will see your marketing claims come to life when they call or visit the office. As more and more new patients come through the door and decide to become part of your ortho family, the practice will grow and prosper. You and your team will then be able to focus more on what you love to do: creating beautiful smiles. ☺

About the Author



To learn more about how to market your ortho practice, attend Dr. Roger P. Levin's "Set your Ortho Practice on Fire" seminar on October 8-9, 2015, in Baltimore. Ask your Ortho2 Systems Consultant how you can receive an educational grant to attend the seminar tuition-free.