



NEW DIRECTIONS IN ORTHODONTIC MARKETING

Orthodontics is experiencing new competitive pressures at a level unlike ever before. Examples include the introduction of aligner dentistry that has an increasing number of general dentists providing orthodontic services, the expansion of corporate dental groups that typically include orthodontic services, and the opening of orthodontic retail stores either for referral to an orthodontist or for direct-to-consumer aligner products. These trends are creating a higher level of competition in orthodontics and challenging many of the old models for getting, keeping, and growing referrals and referral sources.

Remember the old saying, "Never put all of your eggs on one basket?" Well it's an adage that should always be kept in mind when creating your orthodontic marketing strategies. In the old days, orthodontists typically received most of their referrals from two sources—doctors and patients. So, of course, their marketing only focused on wooing referring doctors and treating patients well. However in the new world of orthodontic marketing, this is no longer enough. In order to reach the highest levels of potential, today's orthodontic practices must embrace marketing in what I refer to as the FIVE FOCUS AREAS:

1. The Branded Patient Rewards and Referrals Program
2. The Parent Ambassador Program
3. The Social Media Interface
4. The Referring Doctor Driver
5. The Full Awareness Community Program

The FIVE FOCUS AREAS for Marketing Success

Creating marketing strategies for patients, parents, social media, doctors, and your local community offers your practice numerous referral opportunities. Practices that address the following FIVE FOCUS AREAS will properly set themselves up for ongoing success.

- The Branded Patient Rewards and Referrals

by Dr. Roger P. Levin

Program. While most orthodontic practices have a patient marketing program, many are antiquated and dull. The key to a successful patient marketing program is branding and engagement. Create a brand name for an ongoing, comprehensive, high-energy patient marketing program that engages your patients with contests, raffles, prizes, and social media.

- **The Parent Ambassador Program.** The majority of family referrals within orthodontic practices come from parents, most often mothers. As I like to joke at orthodontic seminars, "The Mother Net" is far bigger, faster, and more powerful than the Internet. Parents always have numerous opportunities to refer others and this is why we created a concept called the Parent Ambassador program. Parents who provide referrals can win gift cards for manicures, spa visits, or restaurants. They can also be entered into contests, receive ongoing education and information, and participate in a host of other parent outreach programs.
- **The Social Media Interface.** Most orthodontic practices have some involvement in social media, but many do not have the right formula. Social media is about outreach to patients and non-patients, driving the orthodontic practice brand in the marketplace, demonstrating that the orthodontic practice is the practice of choice, and attracting referrals. The marketing coordinator needs to have a strong focus on social media interaction and continually place relevant information on the top sites. When social media is handled properly, the interest in regard to the orthodontic practice increases and so do referrals.

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Social media is a category that affects marketing to all of the referral sources—patient, parent, doctor, and the community.

- **The Referring Doctor Driver.** Of course you can never underestimate or neglect the incredible financial benefit of doctor referrals. For many years, this was the driving force behind referral programs. However, some theorize that doctor referrals are no longer worth the marketing pursuit. I must disagree. I have worked with hundreds of ortho practices that offer plenty of anecdotal evidence showing doctor referrals can create anywhere from 30 - 60% of their orthodontic practice patient base. Doctor marketing requires a well thought-out and planned campaign based on building strong relationships. Orthodontists must periodically reach out and network with referring doctors, however the marketing coordinator will handle 95% of the responsibilities that help to gradually increase referrals and acquire new referral sources from referring doctors.
- **The Full Awareness Community Program.** Community outreach is an essential. Community outreach creates awareness of the orthodontic practice, attracts new patient consults, and offers an almost infinite set of opportunities including marketing to schools, sports teams, community events, fitness centers, etc. The key is to put together a campaign that reaches the target market for

the orthodontic practice, which is often children, and encourages them to have an orthodontic consult as early as possible. But remember, community marketing should change and adapt regularly. For example, there may be an excellent parent magazine in which to advertise but then a new parent website emerges that is far more pervasive and will create new, untapped opportunities. The better the community outreach, the more consults the practice will acquire.

Orthodontic marketing has become more sophisticated and complex in the last 10 years. Limiting your marketing to one focus area is a sure way steer your practice into a production plateau, or maybe even a decline. Practices that effectively address all FIVE FOCUS AREAS in their marketing campaigns will have the best opportunity for ongoing success. ☺

About the Author



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