



ORTHO2

Tapping into the Adult Ortho Market

As the ortho market tightens up, with more (and more types of) competitors vying for patients, many orthodontists are discovering new opportunities to attract adults to their practices for treatment.

The adult market has always accounted for a substantial number of ortho cases, but a combination of societal and technological changes in recent years has set the stage for potentially dramatic growth in this category.

Keeping Up Appearances

Modern American adults find themselves in situations quite different from what existed a few generations ago. The external pressure and internal desire to look younger, healthier and more attractive has never been greater, for several reasons:

- As baby boomers came of age, many of them felt they would change the world with new ideas that their elders—grey and wrinkled, often with visible dental problems—were too old to appreciate. They cautioned each other to “never trust anyone over 30.” Now that they themselves are seniors, they’re driving growth in the fitness, diet, cosmetics, hair coloring, plastic surgery, and other age-defying markets. Ortho treatment fits comfortably into this major trend.
- The boomers, along with subsequent generations, find themselves in a more challenging job market. As recently as the ‘70s, many workers could reasonably expect to stay with one employer for the duration of their careers. With such job security, they didn’t have to worry much about having straight teeth. Now, changing jobs every few years is the rule rather than the exception. This sets a high priority on being able to flash an attractive, confident smile at job interviews.
- A person doesn’t have to be in the “me” generation these days to show a certain amount of self-indulgence. After years of fantasizing, many adults reach a point when they’re ready to change the

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fantasy into reality – driving a sports car, taking a big vacation, or having straight teeth and a Hollywood smile.

- Compared with so many other commonplace expenditures – college tuition, cable bills, car payments, etc. – the cost of seeing an orthodontist may seem less daunting than it would have a decade or two ago.

New Ortho Technologies for Adults to Consider

Although some conditions still call for treatment with traditional braces, there are many cases in which other options can be considered. Clear aligners, lingual braces, and porcelain braces appeal to adult patients because they are much less noticeable. When adults realize they can have their teeth straightened without it being so obvious, they’re much more likely to accept treatment.

Prepare for the Adult Market

Before implementing strategies to bring in adult patients, make sure your practice is ready in terms of environment and clinical capabilities.

If your office has been designed and equipped to appeal to young patients (as it should be), it may be off-putting to adults. Your reception area and at least one treatment room should be adult-oriented. If you provide amenities suitable for parents who bring in their children for treatment, you may need to do very little to make adult patients feel welcome when they arrive at your office. Your adult treatment room should be decorated to satisfy adult tastes and, if ortho-related images or visual aids are used, they should feature adults, not children.

Your TCs will need to modify their presentation

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somewhat to address the adult ortho candidate. They'll still be emphasizing the benefits of treatment at your practice rather than the technicalities and explaining the financing options, but the overall tone should be different. As with presentations of treatment for children, these adult versions should be carefully scripted so the TC can consistently present treatment smoothly and persuasively.

Preparation on the clinical side may be more involved. You may need to add new treatment options that meet adult needs, which may involve investing in additional technologies as well as in specialized training and certification for you and your assistants.

Bear in mind that changes you make to appeal to adults will also serve as strong selling points in your marketing efforts.

Identify and Develop Strategies for Specific Adult Market Segments

Once you've readied yourself and your office for adult patients, it's time for you and your marketing coordinator to develop strategies for attracting those patients to your practice and persuading them to accept treatment. To do this, think about how to approach each segment of your adult market separately. Although some strategies may end up working across segments effectively, you'll get better results if you begin by planning how to engage each group specifically.

The primary target groups for adult ortho treatment are:

1. Parents of Current and Recent Patients

These are the best candidates for treatment because...

- They have already chosen your practice for ortho treatment (for their children) and presumably have a positive impression of your skills, your team and your practice as a whole.
- If their children are still undergoing treatment, you may be able to offer them the convenience of parent-child appointments.
- You've already established lines of communication with them, so you can easily—and at little or no extra cost—inform them about your adult ortho services and persuade them to take advantage of what you offer.
- You, your TC and probably other staff members will have existing relationships with these parents, increasing the likelihood that, if they decide to have ortho treatment, your practice will have the "inside track" for acceptance.

2. Friends and Family Members of Patients' Parents

You can reach this target audience almost as effectively (and cost-effectively) as the parents themselves. When planning how to attract them to your practice, consider these points...

- Though your ultimate target is parents' adult family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers and other acquaintances, your initial communication will be through parents of existing patients. This will be far less costly than trying to market to them directly.
- By asking patients' parents for referrals of adults they know, you'll be encouraging word-of-mouth advertising, which is the most powerful type of advertising. In effect, the parents will become your advocates or ambassadors, speaking from personal experience about the quality of ortho care you're providing for their children (and perhaps for them as well, if they've already accepted treatment).

3. Adult Social Media Contacts and Networks

If your practice has established a strong online presence through social media, you have a ready-made way to get the word out about your adult ortho services. You may already be in touch with some of the prospects you reach in this way, but they will in turn be able to help spread the word to their own personal connections and networks.

4. Adults Searching the Web for an Ortho Practice

Many of the adults who decide they'd like to explore the possibility of getting ortho treatment will go straight to their web browser to search for orthodontists. To capture this potentially substantial market segment, you need to...

- Add content to your website about why they should come to you for adult orthodontics.
- Optimize your website so it comes up high in search lists.
- Make sure your practice shows up prominently in local online directories and gets favorable reviews.

5. Adults Exposed to Your Community Outreach Activities

If most of your patients will continue to be children, then most of your activities in the community should focus on that market—but many of the community members you encounter, influence, and impress will be adults. You and staff members involved in outreach should always be mindful of the fact that some of those adults may, in fact, be excellent prospects for treatment. Include adult services in handouts, presentations about ortho care, and conversations about your practice.

Consider Offering Incentives

The value of the care you provide should be great enough to merit the consideration of adult ortho candidates. However, if you're facing strong competition, you may want to incorporate promotional activities in your adult marketing plan. These can range from an open house with free refreshments, to discounts for parent-child or parent-friend packages, to online drawings for oral care products.

In most geographic areas, the adult market for orthodontics has

not yet been saturated with marketing messages. It therefore deserves serious attention from any ortho practice that has not yet reached its full capacity for patients. By making adult care a marketing priority for your practice, you and your team should be able to increase production significantly. ☺

About the Author



To learn more about how to market your ortho practice, attend Dr. Roger P. Levin's "Ignite Your Referrals, Increase Your Close Rate" seminar on May 19 in Philadelphia. Ask your Ortho2 Regional Manager how you can receive an educational grant to attend the seminar tuition-free.