



ORTHO2

Welcoming Adult Patients to Your Door

by **Edwina Wood**

In the not so distant past, marketing the orthodontic practice was relatively simple. The practice would build a relationship with a general dentist, and that office would refer all their patients to the orthodontist. The orthodontic practice would build a relationship with their patient, and the patient would bring their siblings and send their friends. Most of the patients were adolescent so the marketing strategies seemed to fit this age group: kids' clubs, child like games and contests, and a youthful décor in the office.

But in today's new market, are we limiting our treatment to this young age group and missing an opportunity for growth? Recent research done by Align Technology shows that 74% of adults in the United States report some type of malocclusion. The potential for growth in this market is vast. Also, the American Association of Orthodontists notes that one in five orthodontic patients is over age 18. In your practice are 20% of your patients adults? Are you welcoming this group of smile seekers into your office?

There are several reasons this group of 23 million Americans are slow in seeking treatment. Financial and time commitments are both concerns. Secondly, parents are notorious for putting off their needs and focusing on the children. Also, many of these adults were told as children that they would need extractions or even surgery to achieve that perfect smile, so they gave up that dream years ago.

When adults do decide to inquire about orthodontic treatment, their want list includes:

- Nice smile
- Want to look younger
- Build confidence
- Short treatment time
- No pain
- I want it Now!
- Affordable

- Proactive-looking for answers (2-4 opinions)

To develop an adult-friendly orthodontic practice and make adults feel welcome, use the want list to find ways your practice can fill or address these needs. The most important tool is good communication skills. It is imperative to educate the adult about what options are available with the new technologies present in orthodontics. With these technologies they can get a better result in less time and with less pain. Educate the entire team so they can actively work to improve the patient's dental knowledge.

To fill the adult patient's needs, one must listen to what they want. Ask the right questions. What is important to them? Is it their cosmetic appearance? Is it their dental health? Then provide them with all the possibilities of treatment, and how it will benefit them personally.

Is it appearance? A picture is worth a thousand words. Prepare an adult-only treatment portfolio; a detailed presentation of progress throughout treatment. Separate adult cases by modalities of treatment; a section for clear braces, aligners, surgery cases, etc. Showcase this information in all forms of media: office brochures, website, photo albums, PowerPoint, and download onto an office iPad. Deliver an adult album to your top referring practices for their lobby. Use this portfolio to educate your community on the possibilities of adult orthodontics.

All cases cannot be textbook perfect, so when building an adult's treatment plan, consider preparing two or three treatment options for the patient. Present the options in a way so that they can make an educated decision of what fits their needs and lifestyle. Not everyone will elect for the surgery route, but there may be other options that would

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improve their dental health, cosmetic appearance, and improve self esteem. Also consider combo treatment, including braces, aligners, and removable appliances.

Redefine your practice to be a premier adult practice, catering to their needs, such as:

- Scripting for the adult new patient initial phone call
- Convenient appointment times
- Private adult rooms
- An adult start kit – Adult information (do not give a No-No List!); no restrictions, but positive suggestions to help with discomfort; tips to help them succeed.
- An adult treatment assistant, someone to treat them at every appointment
- Towel warmer for post treatment to help ease facial muscles
- Rebond fee – remove braces for life events, weddings, reunions, etc.

Develop an adult branding plan to provide the best service to this established age group, and then overhaul your current marketing plan with a mature viewpoint. Consider all the following areas:

- **Community:** Educate everyone about your practice and your area of expertise!
 - Attend women’s expos and health fairs
 - Attend bridal fairs
 - Wine and cheese affairs
 - TV – public service ads, support the causes that are important to you
 - Volunteer - Give back to your community
 - Press releases on new developments in orthodontics
- **Professional Community:** Educate the dental offices but don’t limit professional contacts to dental offices only. As adults age they seek professional services from many different providers. Share the benefits of orthodontics with the professional community. Build relations with: dermatologists, cosmetic surgeons, chiropractors, etc.
 - Lunch and learns for offices
 - Joint patient incentive programs with hygienist
 - Professional discounts
- **Internet Community:** A 2010 Local Search Usage study reports 70% of consumers go online first for local business information. Make sure they find what they are looking for with a strong Internet presence.
 - Optimize Internet searches and update all information on the web
 - Continually update your website; include key search words
 - Gather and post reviews from your patients
 - Add informational links to your website

- Add a link to your website on local businesses websites
- Social media – Facebook, Twitter, blog, Instagram, etc.
- Office videos
- Reach your patients with email and texting
- **Current Patients:** The focus of every staff member has to be quality patient care. Create opportunities to make every patient feel special. When patients feel important and cared for, they will be your biggest enthusiast. Every staff member should feel confident in asking for patient referrals:
 - Referral “Share a Smile” cards (given at banding and debanding appointment)
 - Referral gifts
 - Handwritten thank you cards
- **Staff Members:** Your team is your leading activist! Teach them, show them, train them, educate them – make every staff member your practice’s strongest advocate. Give them the tools they need to be your best promoter and constantly seek opportunities to produce potential new patients.
 - Constant continuing education
 - Develop a team attitude
 - Empower everyone to use their knowledge
 - Proactive verbal skills
 - Develop listening skills
 - Scripting for all office systems
 - Develop a marketing team
 - Referral rewards
 - Team retreats
 - Individual business cards

Welcome means freely permitted or invited. Use this information to provide new insights into the strengths and weaknesses of your practice. Redefine your practice vision, creating value with your strengths and repairing your weaknesses so that you can invite future patients of any age in your door. ☺

About the Author



Edwina Wood has more than 34 years of orthodontic experience in both clinical and management roles. She continues working as an office manager/treatment coordinator for Harwell and Harwell Orthodontics in Amarillo, Texas. She is speaking at the 2017 Users Group Meeting.