

## **A Recipe for adding two times greater value to your business**

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Where do your best patients come from? Most of the time dentists will say from word of mouth referrals. Word of mouth referrals are ubiquitous. They occur between strangers in hallways, over coffee and in passing while we go about our busy lives. We love to share information with other people. It makes us feel good to be, “in the know”. In fact, research indicates that the average American engages in 16 word of mouth conversations every day (Walter Carl). So, if people are talking, how can we get them to talk about us, their dentists. As a doctor, I am data-driven and I wanted a predictable method with a measurable ROI. This article will serve as a recipe for you to launch a powerful word of mouth marketing campaign that will help you grow top line revenues in your practice.

Have you ever tried a blue-tooth wireless headset? I have and after using it, I swore I would never use one again because of the poor quality. That is until recently when I was talking to a friend and he told me about his remarkable wireless headset. He explained that the device is lightweight, has crystal clear sound quality and, instead of sounding like he is yelling down a tunnel, it sounds as if he is on a traditional landline phone. As he is describing this device to me he says, “It’s not cheap, but I can assure you it is worth every dime and it is so good that I have told no less than 50 people about it. So, after promising I would never own another hands-free device, I found myself spending discretionary income on a little electronic gadget. And that, is how word of mouth marketing works. As a matter of fact, research by Villanueva, Yoo and Hanssens confirms what we intuitively already know, those customers acquired through word of mouth marketing add two times greater value to your business than customers acquired through traditional marketing techniques.

We know patients are talking about their experiences to other people. In fact, the average American engages in 16 word of mouth conversations every day (Walter Carl). So, how can we really turn it on and compel those highly coveted referrals to talk about our offices? Over the years, I have tried many different techniques to drive word of mouth (WOM) campaigns. For over a decade our practice lived on “care-to-share” cards. We gave away flowers, and then brownies, then gift cards then we went to cash. But, with new laws and regulations, and just pure ethics, we really cannot depend solely on enticements or use these pure rewards campaigns in our practices. As a matter of

fact, current research supports that samples and coupons are not linked to increased word of mouth referrals (Berger and Schwartz). So, why do we proceed with capricious WOM campaigns without knowing what really makes them successful? Because, we know that if we do something, something will happen. In effect, we know that WOM works and if we can harness the power of that, we can grow our practices. Actually, WOM is twice as effective as radio, four times more effective than personal selling and seven times more effective than print advertisements (Katz and Lazarsfeld).

Recognizing that the science behind WOM is not completely understood, a body of knowledge is starting to surface that allows us to deploy WOM campaigns with greater success. The essentials that are most apparent are that an idea, product or service must have what Jonah Berger has identified as: social currency, triggers, emotional components, visible awareness, practical value, and stories.

## **Social Currency**

What we say influences what others think about us. The experiences we have that are unique, the knowledge that we share, are all forms of social currency. In dentistry today, this can be achieved very easily through technology. Imagine being a patient and for the first time you get to see and take home photos of all your teeth using the the latest technology from a company like Sirona. Digital impressions with a CEREC versus traditional alginate impressions at your first visit would certainly be extraordinary. What would be remarkable is if you show people the CEREC impressions on a virtual articulator that matches perfectly with their anatomy because you used a Sirona 3D Pano to image their mandible and maxilla. Or perhaps you create an extraordinary experience by taking a holistic approach, spending time with them and being mentally present. Regardless of how you create social currency, you want people to talk about you when they leave the office in such a way that it makes them look like they are in the know.

## **Triggers**

Cues or triggers in the environment influence our decisions. As a dentist looking to market your dental business, you must create triggers for your patients to think about you when they leave the office. It could be a catchy tagline like, “when you have pain think of Dr. Crane”. Or as the research indicates, it could be as simple as integrating well placed, well timed color schemes in your office and in your marketing pieces. Nevertheless, you need a trigger to have an effective WOM marketing campaign.

## **Emotional Content**

Going to the dentist is a very emotional event and you can capitalize on all the great stories that bring the emotion to life. Share the many stories of satisfied patients. When you increase the effects of satisfaction, the effects on increased WOM are significant (Riadh Landhari). Also, if you can focus on the positive emotions you will see higher social activity and greater satisfaction (Watson). By increasing emotional content into your overall mix, you will improve your WOM campaign.

## **Visible Presence**

Creating awareness about your dental office requires that you make your office visible. From yellow wrist bands to socks, having a visible presence can catapult social behavior and drive a WOM campaign. We participated in a Susan G Komen Run and created Shirts that said, "Save your TaTa's and your teeth" with our office information. The shirts were a huge hit and became a visual for our office. As a matter of fact, those shirts were referenced as a referral source to our practice for several years.

## **Practical value**

Everyone has a mouth. Most people have teeth. As a matter of fact, research by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research indicates that adults have an average 24.9 teeth. So, you could argue that most people need a dentist therefore dentists have practical value.

For example, If you perform same day crowns with a CEREC, it would be important to quantify this for your patients. We say something like this: You know, it used to take two hours to perform this procedure and we required that you return two weeks later, because we have invested in the latest technology, we can now do it in one appointment. We also use the OralID oral cancer screening device. It is a very visible process of checking for oral cancer and when a patients sees us using it, they know we care. When our patients know we care, they share. Creating value that is practical is about our patients it's about saving patients time or money, or helping them have good experiences.

## **Stories**

In 1999 the world was first introduced to a guy named Jared who had apparently lost over 245 pounds eating sandwiches from Subway. Imagine eating fast food and losing weight. It was a story that resonated with millions of people and related a much more powerful message that could not be conveyed with bullet points and facts. I have been asked to review marketing campaigns for multiple dentists. Usually they contain a list of services, an occasional testimonial, and often irrelevant pictures like "digital" x-rays, but

rarely do they tell a story worth sharing. This is unfortunate since dentistry has the ability to influence and change people's lives. What is the story that you want people to tell about your practice and how can you craft that into a vessel that allows it to be carried on by your patients. Listen to your patients and help those stories to be told. Especially now with social media, a story can be told very quickly. Are you the caring dentist or the quality dentist or the educated dentist? find stories that convey that message and help those stories to be told.

I had a patient who told a story about losing his dentures when he went scuba diving in the Gulf of Mexico. After that happened he came to see me for implant retained dentures. The way he told the story and finished it by saying that now he could scuba dive with confidence made the story relatable, memorable and funny. As a result of us sharing this story, we saw our implant treatments soar in the practice. Stories are the vessel that carry your message; find the stories.

If customers added to your business by word of mouth marketing can offer a two times greater value to your business, it is reasonable to suggest that a majority of your efforts should be directed toward fostering your word of mouth marketing campaigns. Dentists are in a unique position to give people something to talk about. By creating a framework for your WOM program you can create social currency, triggers, emotional components, public awareness, practical value, and stories. Give your patients something to talk about and grow your practice.



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