

10 Reasons for Publishing a Web site

Referrals from satisfied parents and colleagues are the cornerstone of your marketing efforts. You supplement this success with community activities, dental society involvement and strong practice materials. Should you add a Web site to your marketing mix? Here are 10 points to help you make the right decision for your particular pediatric dental practice.

1. You want a practical way to market your practice 24/7. A Web site can offer easy-to-find information about your pediatric dental services to current, new and potential patient families. It can provide a positive introduction to you, your staff and your special services to children. In short, a Web site serves as a complete practice brochure available 24 hours every day.

2. You hope to attract new patients to your practice. More than half of U.S. households have computers, and more than 100 million Americans use the Internet to find health and dental information.^{1,2} In fact, the number of people going online to find oral health information has tripled in the last three years.² Consumers visiting dental Web sites are typically seeking general dental information or researching particular treatments. However, since four percent are looking for a new dentist, they may very well find you.³

3. You would like referrals from health and dental professionals. Your colleagues in medicine and dentistry have access to the Internet and spend more time online researching medical and dental topics than the general public. For example, about 75 percent of dentists conduct research via the Internet and spend an average of eight hours a week exploring health and dental topics.⁴

4. You are targeting the young and the rich – and the somewhat young and not-really-rich. Predictably, younger, affluent individuals are more likely to have Internet access and spend time online than older and less prosperous individuals. Less predictably, while those under 30 spend more time online than older adults, consumers between the ages of 35 and 55 are likely to search the Internet spe-

cifically for health and dental information.⁵ Bottom line: Since your pediatric dental practice targets Americans under 50, a Web site would be a fine addition to your marketing plan.

5. You serve a wider geographic area than most dentists. Basically, the broader your geographic market, the more a Web site is a good buy. Since a Web site goes worldwide for one price, it can be more affordable than marketing tactics such as direct mail or newspaper advertising.

6. You want to offer valuable information to parents and reduce some of your routine office phone calls. Parents can visit your Web site any time and find what they want to know about your services and their children's oral health. Your site can provide essential information such as hours, location, services, payment options and directions to your office. In addition, your site could offer pre- and post-treatment instructions, answers to common parent questions and dental health education on such topics as teething, pacifiers, baby bottle tooth decay, dental emergencies and sealants.

7. You know your patients search the Internet. Children – your most important target audience – are online at home, school and the library. A page within your site appealing to kids might feature dental quizzes, puzzles, cartoons, interesting oral facts, contests and science project ideas.

8. You have the resources to create a great site. Just as your practice materials and promotional events present you to the community, a Web site represents you on the Internet. Your Web site will be as engaging to potential and current patients as is your practice. Choose to have a Web site only if you are willing to devote the necessary time, money and effort to make it attractive, functional and compelling.

9. You and your staff have time for site maintenance. Once your Web site is up and running, it must be maintained just as any other marketing project. First, for a site that has an e-mail address for contacting your office, ad-

ministrative staff must be prepared to check e-mail messages once or twice each office day. Second, you or a team member will need to work with your Web developer or Internet provider to revise your Web site, usually two or four times a year.

10. *The AAPD can help you develop a Web site.* Members can easily create a customized Web site through the Member Web site Program. Simply visit the AAPD home page (www.aapd.org), log in using your AAPD member id and password, choose the “Member Web site Program” button from the side bar then select “Create a Web site.” After entering your credit card information, you will be prompted to enter text about your practice and even upload electronic photos should you choose. For only \$20 per month, your Web site will bear the AAPD logo, official AAPD dental topic information and customized information about your practice’s staff, payment methods and location.

Team Motivation: Ideas with Impact

A motivated team makes your practice profitable, productive and professional. Dedicated staff are crucial to the success of your pediatric dental practice.

But how can you best motivate your employees? Aren’t fair wages enough? One of the best things you can do is hire good people and pay them what they are worth. Practice Management Consultant Linda Miles recommends wages at 20 to 25 percent of gross collections for general practices. That said, money is not the only motivator, and in fact, is not the best motivator. Business surveys show that about 75 percent of people will not work at a boring job because the pay is good – and will not leave a job they like for one that pays more.

Research conducted by Wright Communications (1998 – 2001) asked U.S. dental teams what aspects of their practice environment provided the greatest motivational value. Their responses, listed in order of preference, were:

1. A caring “family” environment; good relationships with other team members;
2. Incentive or bonus programs;
3. Flexible work hours;
4. Praise from the dentist for contributions to the practice;
5. Enjoyment of the work itself; a heart-felt calling for dentistry;
6. Employee benefits, such as sick leave or paid vacation;

7. Participation in the management of the practice;
8. Opportunities for advancement or expanded job responsibilities.

How can you encourage good relationships between team members?

Dental teams mentioned four specific points in describing how their dentists encouraged good relations between employees: open communication, respect, fairness and clear work responsibilities.

Open communication. One team member responded, “The doctor is honest with us. He asks occasionally if we are happy with the way things are going and if there’s anything we’d like to change.” Another stated, “I feel listened to and can speak my mind. I can express disagreement and not be punished for it.”

Respect. The research elicited a variety of statements reflecting the dentist’s ability to show respect toward employees. For example, “I know I’m important to the practice and can make a difference,” and “She treats us with respect and professionalism, and that attitude rubs off on everyone else.”

Fairness. Another theme was perceived fairness in personnel policies and salary levels. For example, one respondent wrote, “The doctor doesn’t play favorites. Apple polishing doesn’t work around here.” Conversely, a large drain on motivation was a perceived lack of equity in employee benefits and performance expectations.

Clear work responsibilities. When team members know and perform their job duties, patient treatment goes smoothly. When staff members do not know their assigned duties – or are allowed to avoid them – the team is in constant conflict about what they will and will not do. The more dedicated employees end up doing chores no one else wants. This situation hurts motivation, productivity and patient care.

The solutions for creating clear team understanding of work responsibilities are up-to-date job descriptions and an employee policy manual. These documents must be taken seriously and not treated as “just paperwork” by the practice. A strong program of ongoing performance appraisal and annual performance evaluation is equally essential. In addition, some offices cross-train their employees to promote a better comprehension of each team member’s role in practice success.

Do bonus and incentive programs really motivate dental teams?

Practices reported that these programs, if well managed, increased productivity and rewarded employees in a tangible manner for effective work performance. Disadvantages were noted as well. For some practices, financial incentives lost their effectiveness after an initial burst of productivity.

The most common incentive approaches are based on production, collections or a combination of both. Essentially, staff receive a percentage of production or increase in production (or collections). The incentive is divided equally between employees based on number of hours or days worked. Production can be figured every month or every three months. Or, staff can be given a daily production goal and receive a bonus for each day the goal is met.

Although most reward programs are based on team performance, some are built on individual achievement. In one office, each staff member submits a practice idea at the team meeting. The staff member who submits the idea considered best by the team receives a small bonus. (Team members are not allowed to vote for themselves.) Another practice offers a monthly award to the team member who provides exemplary treatment to a patient. The team selects the award recipient. In a pediatric dental practice in Texas, a monthly "You Go Girl!" award with a cash bonus is given to the staff member who has made the most significant contribution to the practice.

As a final word on rewards for good performance, dental team members highly value praise from the dentist for contributions to the practice or patient care. For example, respondents noted, "Everyday the doctor says he appreciates what I do," and "It is an unusual day when the doctor neglects to compliment staff." Staff also appreciate docu-

mentation of their professional accomplishments, such as placing course certificates and positive patient letters in their personnel files.

In summary, this research shows that dental teams are motivated more by a caring atmosphere and positive leadership than by dollars and cents. Successful motivational programs require not an open checkbook, but open communication and careful thought. By motivating your team, you reduce the stress in your work environment and build a more positive, profitable practice.

PMM News Features New Author

The AAPD welcomes Robin Wright, M.A. as the new author of *PMM News*. Ms. Wright is president of Wright Communications and adjunct faculty of the University of Illinois Dental School. With an international reputation as a dental communication specialist, Ms. Wright has presented over 400 seminars, including the AAPD annual session. She is the author of 50 professional publications, as well as the 1997 book, *Tough Questions, Great Answers: Responding to Patient Concerns about Today's Dentistry* through Quintessence Publishing.

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3. American Dental Association, Survey Center, 2000 Public Opinion Survey: Consumer Sources of Dental Information.
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