

Good Stuff to Chew On: Marketing & Staffing Still Count!

Recessions hurt. And this one is hurting just about everyone I know, especially business people. At this point, perhaps you are considering cutting back in some areas of your practice in order to weather the storm. And if you look at your monthly budget, marketing and staffing may jump out as expenses that are tempting to cut. The fact is that they are major expense categories, but is it really wise to cut there? Probably not. Both are more important now than ever before.

First, let's take a look at marketing, which includes the services you offer, your pricing, communication with your patients, and the way you treat them as well as advertising and promotions. Some studies have actually shown that increasing your marketing during a downturn can help you continue growing both during and after the recession. You market your practice for many reasons. Of course you use it to build business and to establish and maintain your identity, but it is equally, if not more, important as a tool for retaining patients. Marketing reminds your existing patients that you are there for them even in hard times.

If a patient really needs treatment, for example, but cannot afford it, accepting payments over time will earn you that patient's loyalty for a long time to come. That is marketing. It sounds simple, but they will remember you for being a caring person. Working with them now will help make sure they are still with you when the hard times are a thing of the past.

Patients who are facing financial hardship may well put off seeing the dentist, especially if they do not see its necessity. Now is the time to return to the basics and use your marketing to remind patients of how important good, regular dental care is to their overall health and continued earning ability. Now is also the time to focus on their needs not their wants. Consistent marketing keeps you in front of your patients and can serve as a reminder that good dental care is as important to their health as regular medical treatment.

You have worked long and hard to build a good reputation for customer service. Now is not the time to let that slide. You can look for ways to save, but be careful that they do not impact service or your patients' good opinion of you and your staff. As you economize, remember that it costs little or nothing to focus on strengthening the core values you have established to emphasize what you as a practice stand for – service, friendliness, quality treatment, professionalism, and so on. That focus is an essentially free investment in the future.

And that brings us to staffing. Your staff is the face of your practice. They are the smiles and encouragement your patients encounter from the first moment they call. They keep your practice running smoothly and efficiently. You have invested considerable time and expense in their hiring and training. Eliminating staff is the last thing you want to do when your goal is to retain existing patients. But if your practice has been hit so hard that you have come to that drastic point, perhaps you could enlist your staff's help in brainstorming ways to save their own jobs. I'll bet you find that they are incredibly creative. And giving them the chance to find ways to stay employed will earn their loyalty as well.

Of course, properly screened qualified temps are an excellent way to keep your practice running smoothly when you are short handed. The key is to find an individual who will fit into your existing office culture, making the addition of a new person transparent to your patients who have

come to expect a certain level of service from you and your staff.

The bottom line is that marketing and staff should be the last thing you cut to save on expenses. Cutting either can affect how your patients perceive your practice both now and after the downturn is over. If you must cut in those areas, cut minimally and cut very judiciously. The recession will not last. It will be over soon. You want to emerge stronger than before and that is possible.

Quote of the Month

"Some give up their designs when they have almost reached the goal; while others, on the contrary, obtain a victory by exerting, at the last moment, more vigorous efforts than ever before."

Herodotus

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