



Building a 'raving fan' culture

If you want to exceed your patients' expectations, stop looking for that elusive unique selling point (USP) and do the basics well, writes Lina Craven

Lina Craven is the founder and director of Dynamic Perceptions Ltd. Over the past 25 years, Lina has assisted orthodontic practices to realise their vision of success through the achievement of a customer-driven culture that focuses on delivering an exceptional patient journey. Possessing genuine practice-related experience, Lina's advice is relevant, practical and proven to get results. For further information please visit www.orthodontic-management.com.

Imagine the power of exceeding a customer's expectations! You hear the expression all the time; consultants use it constantly and business books are full of it. Funny then that it still remains a rare occurrence: it isn't difficult, it doesn't require huge expense, it probably generates the greatest return, yet it is the rarest commodity across all industry sectors.

Does your first impression impress?

The question you must ask yourself is this: how many of the patients who walk through your practice door actually take up treatment plans? While you may be successfully attracting patients to the practice, are your case acceptance ratios below par? All that effort and opportunity wasted!

First impressions count

The first contact is crucial to a successful conversion. Patients are often unaware of the skills of the clinician or the reputation of the practice so they will tend to shop around. Their decision-making process isn't normally

price oriented; it is simply based upon their experience and whether their needs and wants have been taken into account when treatment options have been offered! That means the new-patient journey needs to be outstanding.

Even before the patient arrives

The first impression of your practice begins with the first enquiry, so the initial phone call is crucial.

Whenever you call a prospective patient, do so from a 'distraction-free' place and always ask if it is okay to talk. If they say it is not a convenient time then arrange a mutually suitable alternative, otherwise carry on. Regardless of whether they have been referred or have self-referred, they must have your full attention because you only have this one chance to make an outstanding first impression.

Confirm personal details and the referral source. Explain what the initial consultation involves. Agree on an appointment time and advise them that they will receive a welcome pack in the

post detailing practice information and the types of treatments available. Be attentive and speak with a smile in your voice.

I undertake 'mystery shopping' and frequently find practices that fail in one or more of these steps, resulting in lost potential. Many practices don't even ask for my name – they simply deal with my call as an enquiry and not as a prospective new patient! Some practices have even 'diagnosed' my treatment needs over the telephone. Scary!

Your welcome pack forms part of the initial first impression too. This is where your investment in good marketing expertise pays off. It should portray the values of your practice and answer all the potential questions a new patient has – a patient is much more likely to make a buying decision when he or she has been well informed prior and during the consultation.

So if we have spoken to the patient in a confident, considerate and professional manner, and if we fulfilled our

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

first promise by sending a welcome pack promptly, and if our pack looks professional, appealing and answers all or most of the patient's questions, then we can rest assured that we have made an outstanding first impression and created a solid opportunity for another case acceptance. The task now remains to cement the relationship further through the remaining experiences of the patient along their journey with you.

Put yourself in the patient's shoes

Imagine how a prospective patient feels on the eve of an appointment to undertake an unfamiliar procedure. It's a journey into the unknown so they are probably somewhat anxious.

Imagine then the impact of receiving a call from the practitioner: 'Hi Lina! This is Dr X. You have an appointment with me tomorrow at 9am. I want to ensure I answer any concerns you may have at this time'.

Nine times out of 10 the patient is so shocked by this gesture that no concerns are expressed and any that may have existed have been alleviated by the call. In about 90 seconds, at no cost to speak of, you will have wowed the patient and reduced the likelihood of any last minute cancellations or no-shows.

While some practitioners may be questioning the validity

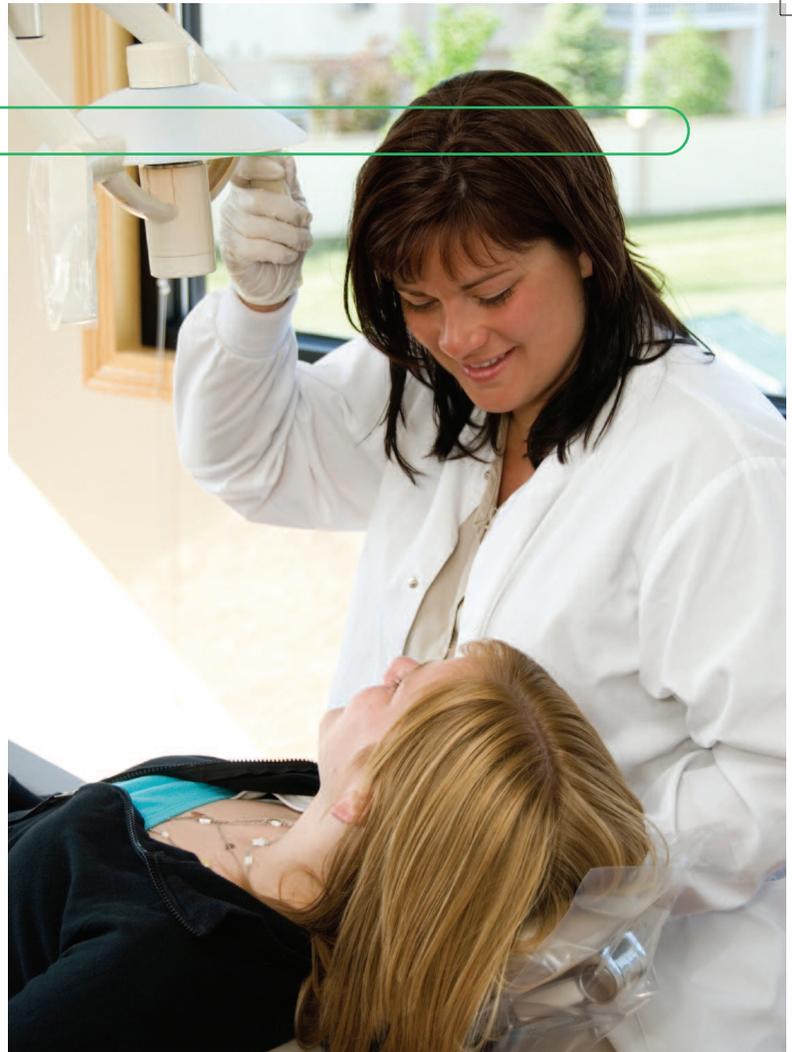
of this suggestion – after all, they have staff to undertake this function – they should consider that with an average of three new patients to call a day, at 90 seconds a call, it is an investment in time of no more than five minutes. The subsequent conversion into several thousand euros of revenue and a raft of additional 'raving fans' who will go on to become the greatest advocates of your service is a return worthy of some consideration.

Plan the stages of the journey

When the patient arrives for his/her appointment, be ready! The treatment co-ordinator (TC) should greet the patient with a firm handshake, make him/her feel welcome with some refreshments, and follow the rapport questionnaire.

Consider the 'wow' factor when the practitioner first approaches the patient. Use your knowledge to build rapport and trust. Rather than the standard, 'What concerns you about your teeth?' say, for example, 'Hi Lina. Congratulations, I understand you are getting married in eight months' time. Let's see how we can give you a perfect smile for that day!'

Following the clinical examination, the manner of case presentation is crucial. It shouldn't be rushed. You want your patient to leave well informed and ready to make the right decision.



A well-trained TC will enhance the practitioner's explanation using layman's terms, he or she will check understanding and qualify any remaining doubts without wasting valuable 'doctor' time.

Finally, a comprehensive walkout pack will be provided with a planned follow-up process. With the right systems in place a full written report can be presented before the patient leaves, furnishing them with the information necessary to make the 'right' decision.

The power of talented people and proficient processes

So for no additional cost but some extra thought, care and attention with regard to the team you choose, the skills you give them and the processes you employ, you will have 'wowed' a customer, vastly increased your case acceptance, and benefited from the enormous power of a 'raving fan' culture! Now that, to me, is the most powerful USP any business can have! 

PRIVATE DENTISTRY

SPEAKERS: Kevin Lewis, Omer Reed, Philip Newsome, Lina Craven, Rahul Doshi, Ashish Parmar, Nigel Risner, Komal Suri, Mervyn Druian, Bridget Crump, Rob Walsh and Liviu Steier

DATE: 30 November 2007

VENUE: Westminster, central London

PRICE: dentist €585.26; subscribers €526.12; team member €358.95; team rate €1,162

Lina Craven is just one of the eminent speakers at Private Dentistry 07.

Private Dentistry 07 is 'must' for those working in private dentistry or looking to move into private practice in the future. It is specifically designed to help you unleash your potential. Private Dentistry 07 is also relevant as an update to new developments in private dental practice, to look beyond today's practice structures by reaching to tomorrow's trends, increasing the amount of private dentistry your practice delivers.

This symposium consists of three interactive and motivational, parallel sessions designed for you and your whole dental team. Level 1 is designed for dentists moving into private practice, Level 2 is tailored for dentists wanting to make their private practice more profitable, and there is a team session stream.

For further information please visit www.independentseminars.com, call +44 (0) 1923 851777 or email seminars@fmc.co.uk.