



Sample Chapters

One of the keys to success of any business is our ability to effectively market our business and establish long-term successful relationships with our customers. As the level of change and competition intensifies in the dental profession, it is critical now more than ever to focus on these key areas of business success.

Fully Booked – Dental marketing secrets for a full appointment book provides a step-by-step guide covering the core fundamentals of a successful dental practice marketing plan. It takes out the complexity and jargon and provides a realistic, tangible and implementable approach for any practice looking for success.

This book is a must read for any current or new practice owners, principal, practice managers or those involved in running a dental practice and wanting to take their practice and patient relationships to the next level.

Michael Fahey, National Sales Director, Henry Schein Halas

In the ten years I've been the editor of *Bite* dental magazine, I've come across quite a few marketing 'experts' – some legitimate, many not. Carolyn S Dean is one of the former – the real deal when it comes to marketing expertise, which you can tell by reading this book.

The advice in *Fully Booked* is spot-on, is specifically tailored to dental practices, and is wonderfully comprehensive. I love the checklists at the end of each chapter, which help you keep up with a lot of detailed, smart and actionable information.

For any dentist concerned with attracting and keeping patients in this day and age, *Fully Booked* is a must-read.

Rob Johnson, Editor, Bite Dental Magazine

The reality is the practices that Software of Excellence work with have limited experience and expertise when it comes to running a dental practice as a business. As the world of running a dental practice gets more competitive and complicated it is critical to

understand the key elements that are going to make you successful and move from a good practice into a great business.

This book gives a fantastic overview of marketing, breaking down the jargon and highlighting the key aspects that you need to understand and implement to grow your practice. This is a must read book and highly recommended to everyone involved in developing a successful dental practice.

Jonathan Engle General Manager APAC/International Marketing Director, Software of Excellence

In *Fully Booked*, Carolyn S Dean has produced an invaluable read and reference for dental practice owners and practice managers. If you want to get serious about marketing in dentistry and especially the new expanding world of online presence, then start here! From basic concepts and expanding to a well-structured step-by-step plan, Carolyn guides the reader with experience and skill on the road to success.

I highly recommend her book, well done Carolyn!

Dr. Frank Papadopoulos, Dentist and Founding Co-Director Centaur Software – Dental4Windows SQL/MediaSuite

A refreshing idea that is long overdue!

When we study to become dental professionals, we learn all aspects of work within our scope. We become competent in daily practice but not, unfortunately, business generation and best practice. This book is unique in that it gives insights, common and revolutionary, to maximize our working day. It does this by putting forward ideas that can help market your practice, fill patient appointment books and maintain patient retention allowing us to do what it is we love to do, treat patients!

Fully Booked is recommended reading for all dental prosthetists, dentists, dental hygienists and therapists, practice managers and people interested in great ideas to maximise business outcomes.

Abe Awakian, President, ADPA NSW

I have floundered around with marketing for my dental practice over the years. The organisations I have used to help me, with hindsight, have not really had a clue about marketing a dental practice & the results I have achieved have been random and disappointing; invariably leaving me with the feeling that someone other than myself has profited from the exercise.

Using Carolyn S Dean's team to market my dental practice is a no brainer. I find I am several steps ahead with each marketing project because My Dental Marketing understands the dental industry from top to bottom and has a compelling solution, backed up with data and results from campaigns run in similar "dental" circumstances. Why spend your time and your money inventing a surf board when clever people like Carolyn Dean are already here riding the wave for you.

Dr. Andrea Clarke BDS, Milford Dentists and Hobsonville Point Dental, Auckland

Carolyn S Dean has demystified the cloud of noise that is marketing. In *Fully Booked*, she sets up clear pathways to enhance your dental practice using the latest marketing techniques.

Fully Booked starts by showing you how to clarify the core reason that you are in practice along with your passion and your 'why'. It then explains how to identify the 'DNA of your brand' and how to create targeted marketing campaigns to grow your dental practice and get more patients.

Whether you starting your dental practice from scratch or addressing your current position *Fully Booked* needs to be read.

Ian Shapland, National Business Development Manager, Elite Fitout Solutions and President, Australian Dental Industry Association (Queensland Branch)

Carolyn's latest book, *Fully Booked*, brings clarity to the murky waters of dental marketing. Her new book is a game changer to dentists in Australia.

As dentists in private practice, we can undertake the most complex of dental procedures in small dark spaces but are literally in the dark when it comes to the business side of our practices!

The moment I started reading Carolyn's book she made the daunting concepts associated with dental marketing coherent and intelligible. Her step by step process and writing style makes *Fully Booked* a joy to read and empowers me to dive in and explore the world of dental marketing so my practice can thrive with me at the helm.

Dr. Sara Lonergan, Tooth Sparkler Family Dental Care

When a great idea or a new book comes along people often say "why hasn't someone thought of that before?". This book goes much further than just attracting patients to your practice but makes you think about why you are in business and the importance of incorporating marketing into your overall business plan.

Most of the book is equally relevant to non-dental businesses and on that point I have had my business's website (MW Partners , Specialist Dental Accountants and Tax Advisers) established and maintained by My Dental Marketing.

With the business of dentistry becoming more competitive than ever, I believe this book is a must read for every dentist who wants to be educated on the core principle of marketing as part of a strategy to run a successful practice.

Albert Gigl, Principal, MW Partners – Specialist Dental Accountants and Tax Advisers

Over the last 10 years the face of Dentistry in Australia has gone through major change. There has been a large influx of foreign

dentists and more dental schools have been built graduating far more dentists than the profession requires. Corporates have been allowed to purchase dental practices and with huge amounts of money behind them and business experience, they can weigh out market private practices. Combined with this, patients are more savvy with their spending habits and more selective in who they go to for dental treatment. The internet revolution and easing of advertising restrictions has totally changed the way we need to market our practices. Certainly gone are the days we can just open our doors, do good quality dentistry and patients will flock to us. Most general private practices today are certainly struggling to keep their appointment books full.

So this timely book is a well thought out, comprehensive insight into the state of dentistry in Australia today explaining the steps necessary to succeed in marketing, getting and retaining patients.

With decades of experience in marketing as well as working with dentists and dental practices Carolyn is uniquely positioned to share her vast knowledge in this field.

Dr. Jeff Brown, Principal Dentist, Greenwood Dental

Fully Booked is a book filled with extensive dental marketing advice that is critical for any practice operating in today's competitive environment.

The nine-step process given in the book makes an easy to follow guide for topics like building the right team & brand for your practice.

I would highly recommend this book to any dentist who wants to grow their practice

Robert Bowles, Dental Fit Out

Carolyn S Dean's book is a must read for any dentist who is planning to flourish over the coming years. Her expertise and

insight are real eye-openers to what many dentists consider the “Black Art” of Marketing. The nine step plan in *Fully Booked* is a road map to success that every dentist can follow.

Carolyn’s wealth of industry knowledge positions this book as the premier publication for all Australian dentists.

Steve Daley, Director Healthcare Financial Strategies

Fully Booked is a much needed book for the dental industry and Carolyn S Dean is the perfect person to have written it.

Carolyn’s wealth of knowledge and experience in the marketing of dental practices, especially in the realms of online opportunities, means she has become a highly sought after expert for dental surgeries. She gives insightful and practical advice throughout and her lessons for navigating online promotion of businesses. Her knowledge is invaluable.

I recommend this book to every dental practice, from start-ups through to well established surgeries. I know Carolyn to be very driven and focused and admire the success she generates in her life, and in the businesses she works with.

Julie Parker, Julie Parker Dental Management

This is a book that helps every day Aussie dentists decipher and survive the ever changing online marketing arena.

It is easy to read and very informative.

I have known Carolyn for many years, she setup my website and couldn’t be more thankful for the great job.

Dr. Saif Hayek, Founder Advanced Dental Services

The success of your dental practice is significantly influenced by your marketing ability, however these skills are rarely taught at university. Carolyn’s dental marketing book will help you overcome this shortfall by providing you with an accelerated marketing

education. Carolyn has a rare ability to translate marketing speak into plain English, and provides a roadmap that will allow you to develop your dental practice to the level you would like it to be.

David Hazlewood, Dental and Medical Financial Planner for Western Pacific Financial Group,

Author of Clinical Trials – How Successful Doctors Navigate The Constantly Changing Medical System To Achieve Financial Well Being

At last an easy to read, practical book on Dental Marketing. With a strong focus on attracting new patients and keeping the current one's loyal, *Fully Booked – Dental marketing secrets for a full appointment book* is a great resource for every dental practice. It is filled with business building strategies that can be implemented immediately and are relevant in the Australian marketplace.

As a marketing professional for 25 years, and more recently business manager for Plateau Dental Care, I found working with Carolyn and her team invaluable. Her structured approach to marketing makes sense and is cost-effective.

In this competitive climate a proactive marketing plan is essential to business success.

Toni Black, Business Manager, Plateau Dental Care

Fully

Booked

**Dental marketing
secrets for a full
appointment book**

CAROLYN S. DEAN

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*To Gerry, Callum and Ciara for their endless love,
support and belief in me.*

Please note

The advice offered in the book is general marketing advice. Before following this advice you need to check that you are operating within all regulatory frameworks.

Please conduct research and obtain advice on the relevant Federal, state and territory legislation that applies to your practice.

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Foreword

If you had asked dentists in the graduating classes of 1970, 1980, or 1990 what marketing they were doing for their practices, the answers would have been very short.

They might have placed an ad in the Yellow Pages. There might have been a sign hanging down from the awning in front of their strip-shopping practice. There could have been a brass plate if they were in a professional building.

But that would have been it...at the most.

Marketing was actually even frowned upon. It was not only seen as the last bastion for dentists who couldn't get patients any other way, but also deemed inappropriate by the dental authorities.

The world of dentistry has changed a lot in the past few decades.

Those years have coincided with:

- The creation and growth of the Internet.
- An increase in the number of dental schools.
- An overcrowded marketplace, with most members of the dental profession thinking that there are too many dentists in practice.
- A rise in corporate dentistry, creating a whole new market of competition – one that is more able to cut its costs, *especially*

in marketing. Many of the corporate entities in the dentistry business are owned by insurance companies. These companies market directly to *their* members...who just happen to be *your* patients.

All of these factors have changed the world of dentistry as we knew it, especially when it comes to marketing.

The overcrowded marketplace and rise in corporate dentistry mean that new practices are fighting hard to attract patients. It is no longer a matter of just opening the doors and waiting for the patients to find us.

Luckily for new practices (and older practices willing to adapt to changing technologies), there has been a simultaneous shift to the Internet when it comes to management of many aspects of business, especially marketing. This has meant that, provided a dentist can find his way in the world of dental marketing (navigating website design, pay per click advertising, search engine optimisation, blogs, forums, and algorithms), it is possible to establish a successful practice – even in a crowded marketplace.

However, being knowledgeable in the ways of dental marketing is a full-time job in itself, with rules constantly changing and a unique skill set required. The challenge of staying on top of this has become more and more sophisticated and is increasingly the realm of dental marketing specialists.

In my thirty-five years as a dentist, and more recently as Chairman of Prime Practice P/L, I have worked with many clients whose practices have benefited greatly from working with marketing companies that understand their needs and goals. I have also seen what can happen when a practice doesn't pay enough attention to what is now a vital part of running a dental business.

As the marketplace becomes more saturated, dental practices need to be proactive about having marketing strategies that not only make them stand out from the crowd, but also increase their patient-base and retention rates. Knowing who your market is, what they are reading, and which social media sites they are visiting is central to any marketing campaign. If you're putting out the right message, but it isn't reaching your audience, then the effort and time spent in crafting that message is wasted. Conversely, if your audience is hearing the wrong message, that can have a detrimental effect on your business's success. Knowing how to market, and to whom, is an integral part of running a successful, profitable practice in today's dental industry.

I can thoroughly recommend *Fully Booked* by Carolyn S Dean to any dentists who want to get to grips with their dental marketing and understand the essential elements required to promote their practice in the most effective manner.

In my experience of working with Carolyn and recommending her and her team's services to Prime Practice clients, I have found her to be an ethical, knowledgeable, and excellent consultant who specialises in dental marketing.

The steps outlined in the chapters to come shine a light on topics such as marketing touch points, practice branding, internet marketing, blogging and all the different types of internal and external marketing needed for a dental practice operating in today's competitive environment.

Using this knowledge and following Carolyn's advice will enable you to raise your business above the bar, increase your patient-base and stay ahead of your competition.

Whether you wish to outsource your marketing activities or improve them within your practice, arm yourself with the expert guidance in *'Fully Booked'* and follow the steps to dental marketing success.

Dr. Phillip Palmer

Dr. Phillip Palmer ran a successful dental practice in the Sydney CBD for 34 years.

He has been involved in teaching dental practice management since 1995 and he is Chairman of Prime Practice Australia P/L.

Through Prime Practice, he has helped thousands of dentists to reach their goals, increase their income, and enjoy their practices more. He has lectured around the world on practice management topics and has a deep understanding of all the different management, financial and professional issues that face dentists. He is regarded as Australia's leading expert in the business of dentistry.

Introduction

Escaping an out-dated paradigm

When I talk to dentists, many of them express a desire for more new patients. But when I ask questions about what they are doing to attract patients to their practice, I am surprised to find so many dentists still stuck in an out-dated paradigm.

Up until twenty to twenty-five years ago, you were effectively not allowed to market yourself as a dentist in Australia. You could only make an announcement when you opened your practice and that was all. Your signage even had to be of a certain size and font. Because of this, many still consider it unethical or just wrong to market or advertise their dental services.

But times have changed. As a dental professional, you are facing unfamiliar challenges running and marketing your practice. You are confronting increased competition (both locally and abroad), an oversupply of dentists, ever-rising practice operating costs, and more marketing-savvy patients. On top of this, your potential patients are becoming more discerning about where they go to get dental services, with many heading overseas.

To achieve practice success, it is essential to build long-term relationships with patients and prospects. Long-term patients are more likely to feel satisfied. It is they who welcome the opportunity

to refer others to you and who will continue to use your services in the future.

It is now more critical than ever for you to make informed choices regarding how to market your practice in order to consistently attract new patients and retain current ones.

The myth of the marketing silver bullet

Marketing your dental practice to attract the right kind of patients, keep them active, and get them to refer you to their contacts is no easy task.

The companies trying to sell you the ‘marketing silver bullet’ that will ‘solve all your marketing worries’ are constantly calling. Well-meaning friends, colleagues, and patients are giving you advice on what they think you should do to market your practice. The range of marketing media is evolving, and the rapid changes in online marketing make it almost impossible to keep up.

You want to be able to focus your main energy on running your dental practice, while employing the right marketing tools and techniques to ensure its success.

I have written this book to help dental professionals better understand how to effectively market their practice and build long-term relationships with their patients. You no longer have to work it out by yourself, filtering through multiple sources of advice.

The purpose of *Fully Booked* is to take the hard work out of dental marketing. Its nine-step process will work for any dental professional (practice owner, practice manager, or marketing consultant) who wants to grow their practice.

Dental marketing is not just about ads, email campaigns, or having a social media presence. It is about building and maintaining relationships with your patients.

Common dental marketing mistakes

Over my years working with hundreds of dentists as a marketing consultant, I have observed the common challenges that prevent them being able to successfully market their practices:

- They have few or no marketing skills, as dental schools around Australia still deliver very little in the way of business or marketing training.
- They have no overall marketing plan or strategy.
- They have been burned badly in the past with their marketing activities.
- They don't accept that they can and should market their practice and their services.

And what are the biggest mistakes that dental professionals are making when marketing their practice?

- They have a scattergun and inconsistent approach to marketing.
- They do not track the return on investment (ROI) of the marketing that they have done/are doing.
- They do not know the average lifetime value of a patient, which makes it incredibly hard to set a marketing budget and to think about long-term strategies.
- Because of the overwhelming amount of information, advice, and options when it comes to marketing, they often procrastinate and do nothing.

- They try and do it all themselves, taking shortcuts and trying to save money, resulting in failure and frustration.
- They fail to get the right expert advice, causing a cycle of disappointment. This often leaves them feeling fearful of attempting anything else.
- Many think that there is a 'silver bullet' to solve their marketing issues. This leaves them open to unscrupulous sales people, and to disillusionment and frustration when their marketing efforts fail.

So how can you overcome the long list of mistakes, wasted money, and wasted time? The nine steps I've identified not only give you an understanding of what you could be doing to market your practice, but also enable you to plan, track, and execute your marketing campaigns in an effective manner.

The nine-step process



STEP 1. Get back to basics

The first step addresses the basics of identifying your ‘why’ and what your core values are. Understanding your patients and knowing your competition are key to success.

STEP 2. Start with a plan

It is incredibly important that you have a marketing plan for your practice. If you don’t plan then you are very likely courting failure, because you don’t know where you’re heading and can’t evaluate whether your marketing attempts have been successful.

STEP 3. Build the right foundation

This step focuses on having the right foundation on which to build your practice. Your team and your brand are your keystones. An understanding of patient touch points and the different types of marketing are your launch pad.

STEP 4. Attract the right patients

Now that you have the right foundation, you can then target your ideal patient. This step is where you understand the right marketing tools, channels, and techniques to attract the right kind of patients to your practice.

STEP 5. Nurture relationships with your existing patients

Attracting patients to your practice is only the beginning. You need to understand how to build on the relationships with your existing patients by using the correct marketing tools and techniques to turn them into long-term patients.

STEP 6. Maximise your patient referrals

Long-term patients will always refer people to you. Developing referral programs maximises the benefits of word of mouth. In this step, you learn what makes a great referral program and how you can deliver this in your practice.

STEP 7. Foster partnerships and raise your profile

Once you are building great relationships with your patients, it is time to look outside of your practice and see what other businesses you can create partnerships and programs with.

STEP 8. Learn to listen

To understand what you are doing, both right and wrong, in your relationships with your patients, you need to learn to really listen and respond to them. With the advent of social media and online review websites, it is now easier than ever before to listen to your patients and learn from what they are saying. In this step, you will learn the best techniques and tools to enable you to listen well.

STEP 9. Review, revise, retry

As with everything in your practice, it is imperative to review your marketing. This step guides you through reflecting on what is and isn't working, revising anything that needs changing, and then retrying.

How to use this book

Each chapter of this book is written as a self-contained topic with exercises, cases studies, and checkpoints. You can, therefore, dip into the book at any point, but I recommend that you work through the steps one at a time, building upon a solid foundation.

This approach will be the difference between success and failure for any new or experienced dental professionals wishing to grow their practice. If you are serious about marketing your practice in a controlled and monitored way, not falling victim to unscrupulous providers, and being freed from the frustration of unsuccessful marketing efforts, then read on. It is time to change your mindset.

Before We Begin

Changing your mindset

I understand why many of the dentists out there are still of the mindset that marketing is wrong. But many excellent dentists have realised that, to grow their practices, marketing is essential. To stay and flourish in business, you need to embrace marketing and recognise it as critical to your practice success.

There are some significant mindset changes that I believe need to be taken into account before we progress.

Dentistry is a business

Even though you are delivering an important service to the community, your dental practice is most definitely a business and, as such, requires sound business practices. The business of dentistry requires that you understand everything from bookkeeping to basic tax law, from marketing strategies to good record keeping.

Very good dentists are not necessarily equally good business people. It is widely recognised that business skills aren't taught in dental school, meaning new dentists are unprepared to run a business.

Therefore, dentists tend to learn the hard way, through making mistakes. Many realise after a couple of years that there are aspects of dentistry they don't understand, such as how patients come and go from a practice, how to market a practice effectively, and how to employ and retain staff.

Successful dental practitioners hire coaches and experts, attend business seminars, read up on marketing business practices, join networking groups, and seek help to hone their business skills.

Those who do best at running a dental practice are those who are able to embrace the business end of things. They find gratification, even fun, in setting business goals and achieving them.

You are competing

The combination of the huge increase in the dentist to population ratio and the rapid expansion of national corporate dental centres will impact almost every dental practice in the country. More than ever, it will force dentists to compete for work and look for ways to stand out from the crowd.

You may consider the other dentists in your area to be your friends, and you are right. They are your colleagues, your allies, and maybe even your confidantes, but they are also your competitors. There are a finite number of potential patients in the area, and you are all fighting for a bigger piece of the pie. You and your practice are now in a highly competitive environment.

You need to be marketing

Relying on your current patient base and word of mouth is no longer good enough. In today's world, marketing and advertising

are not only accepted but expected. Don't miss out because you view marketing as tarnishing your professional image. You can run a respected, professional business and still promote your practice and services to the community.

Your patient is always right

In today's highly competitive arena, it is imperative that you start listening to and understanding your existing and potential patients. For your practice to survive and thrive, the patients have to come first. You need to adapt your business to account for patients' needs, wants, and fears.

Patient education, sales, and communication are key

If marketing has a bad reputation, then sales is even worse. But we are now in a consumer age. Your patient today is more discerning and does not necessarily blindly follow your recommendations. Most dental treatment is discretionary and costs are high.

The reality of being in practice is that every time you get an enquiry and you respond, you are actually selling to the patient, i.e. convincing them that your dental services are right for them, that you are best positioned to deliver the services, and that you will deliver the service in a manner that is right for them. All of your staff members are your sales people, and your receptionist is your front line sales force.

I am by no means suggesting that you adopt a hard line style sales talk. Once the patient believes the dentist has a sales agenda, trust is quickly broken. No doubt, you have all had patients who have come to you having left the dentist who tried

to sell them expensive treatment.

I suggest that you look at your team's communication skills and work on how you can communicate effectively with your patients, so they accept the treatment right for them.

Communicate with your patients so that you can guide them through the various options to prevent objections, without being viewed as a salesperson.

You must abandon the silver bullet

I am sorry to say that there is no silver bullet solution to your marketing woes. There is really no single thing that you can do to guarantee attracting more new patients; likewise, there is no single thing that you can do to guarantee the retention of your patients.

The only true way to achieve marketing success with your practice is to introduce and refine upon multiple touch points (marketing communication activities) with your patients.

Marketing is everything... everything is marketing

When I talk to dentists, I notice there is still a common belief that marketing is all about advertising and selling. The truth is that marketing is not only advertising; it is not only selling. These are just a small part of what marketing is.

Marketing is everything a practice does to educate existing and prospective patients about its services, from an advertisement in the local newspaper, practice brochures, website and online presence to patient communication and satisfaction.

The key to great marketing and communication is finding out who your ideal patients are, working out how to reach them, and letting them know about your services.

It was Regis McKenna who coined the saying, 'Marketing is everything and everything is marketing' (Harvard Business Review). It was his way of expressing the fact that marketing is not a function but an all-pervasive way of doing business.

If you wish to grow a sustainable practice, now is the time for you to embrace marketing at the core of your business.

Step 1: Get Back To Basics

What is your ‘why’?

Before I even start talking about marketing your practice, it is important for you to go right back to the beginning and think about why you started your practice in the first place. In essence, what drives you to be where you are today? What is at the core of you doing what you are doing?

- Why did you choose dentistry as your career?
- Why did you risk everything and open a dental practice?
- Why do you continue to work so hard to deliver dental services?
- What does it mean to you and what does that say about you as a person?

What, truly, honestly, is your ‘why’? We spend so much time trying to break the code on the ‘how’ of business success that we often forget about our ‘why’.

The ‘why’ is so important because it is what drives the passion, the soul, and the purpose in your heart and business.

Getting to your ‘why’

In his book *Start With Why*, Simon Sinek says, ‘People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.’

Your friends don’t like you for what you do. They like you for who you are. The same is true for patients and employees. Many businesses have lost perspective. They know what they do, but have forgotten the reason.

Do you know why you are in business? Why did you set up and continue to run your practice? Why do you get up everyday to work in your practice? Really, truly, and honestly, do you know your ‘why’?

Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- What does success mean to me?
- What am I most passionate about?
- In what way is my practice an extension of my passion?
- If I could make a difference for anyone or anything, what would it be?
- What are some small steps I can take to begin to make that difference?
- How can I support or contribute to a cause, organisation, individual, or group that stands for something that is important to me?
- Is my passion represented in my practice culture, mission, and vision?

Spend time answering these questions and you will likely find your ‘why’. Knowing your purpose may compel you to take on challenges that will stretch you as much as they inspire you.

Identifying your core values

Too often, short-term planning clouds good business decision-making and causes us to make the wrong move. The only way to meet long-term goals is to root them in missions worthy of our dedication and the kinds of values that meaningfully connect us and enable us to relate deeply to the world around us.

The best companies develop core values that impact their company culture, brand, and business strategies, making them unique.

I believe that when you ask people why they are in business, those with the strongest values are the ones that will continue to grow and flourish.

Incorporating values into recruitment

Hiring staff purely on the basis of their talent and then training them on the values that matter to your company simply doesn't work in the long term. Instead, hiring decisions should focus on issues like character from the start. That way, you'll build a team who innately understand your practice's purpose and will make practical and principled, self-directed decisions day-to-day that put the patient first.

Don't stop there, either. Make sure to reward people not just for getting the job done but for how they get the job done.

Measuring progress based on values

The old adage that 'what you measure is what you get' remains valid.

Not only should you measure 'how much got done' (i.e. profits and losses) but also, more importantly, keep track of 'how it got done'.

Patient surveys are a great way to monitor this.

Inspiring your employees

Conventional wisdom tells us that “carrots” are a better motivational tool than “sticks”. But even “carrots” have limits, particularly during tough economic times. Instead, leaders need to inspire their employees.

Think about how much we are asking of employees today. We want them to go beyond merely serving patients to create unique, delightful experiences; to honourably represent your practice and nurture its brand, not only when they are on the job but whenever they publicly express; and to be creative with fewer resources and resilient in the face of unimaginable uncertainty.

These contributions will not come as the result of threats or even bonuses. Instead, as a practice owner and leader of your staff, you must inspire your employees with a sense of deep purpose and shared values.

Core values example – Zappos

An example that I love when it comes to a business with great core values is Zappos, the USA-based online shoe store, commonly cited as the world’s leading example in customer service:

-
- Deliver WOW Through Service
- Embrace and Drive Change
- Create Fun and A Little Weirdness
- Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded
- Pursue Growth and Learning
- Build Open and Honest Relationships With Communication
- Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit
- Do More With Less

- Be Passionate and Determined
- Be Humble

Identifying your ideal patient

One of the cornerstones of any marketing campaign is knowing who your 'ideal patient' is. Many practices make the mistake of avoiding this stage in the eagerness of going ahead with their marketing campaign as soon as possible. You need to stop and think about whom your marketing will be directed to, what they want, what problems they have, and what solutions they need.

The key for implementing a strategic marketing plan is for dentists to identify their practices' ideal patient or target patient profile. Once you know your target market, you need to get to know how best to communicate with them.

Take into consideration what activities will best help reach these people. For example, general dentists, orthodontists, and paediatric dentists might focus on reaching mothers. In this day and age, social media marketing and electronic patient communication would be a better use of the marketing budget to reach that particular demographic than advertising in the Yellow Pages print directory.

For a young demographic, you may turn to the Internet, whereas for an ethnic demographic, you may want to communicate using an ethnic community newspaper.

How to identify your ideal patient

You may find that you have more than one 'ideal patient' (e.g. busy corporate workers and mothers with young children). You will notice by doing this exercise that each type of 'perfect patient' will

have different characteristics.

We recommend that you have a different marketing campaign for each one of your ideal patients. Think about:

- Who is your ideal patient?
- Where do they live?
- Where do they work?
- What gender are they?
- What age are they?
- How much do they earn?
- What lifestyle do they have?
- What are their attitudes towards your services?
- What are your ideal patients' issues?
- How do your services help them?
- What do they want to know/what questions do they have about your services?
- What are their concerns and fears about your services?
- What do they read? Who do they talk to? Where do they shop?
- What age groups and ethnicities are most represented?
- What social media platforms do they use?
- How do they want to book an appointment?
- What do they want in terms of location and opening hours?

Another way that you could do this is to look at your existing patients and identify the most profitable. Is there any commonality in terms of demographic and behaviour? You then should think about how you could go about attracting and retaining more of this

type of patient.

It is important that this processes is repeated every year to identify any demographic shifts to the economics of your area that you need to be aware of. This is important as demographic shifts could change the demand for the service mix you provide.

Understanding your patients

Marketing starts with identifying your patients' needs and matching them with the skills and services within your practice, ensuring the right team and systems are in place to support this process.

Here are some of the things your target patients may be interested in finding out:

- **What's in it for them?** Make sure something differentiates you as a dental practice. Stand out from your competitors.
- **What do others think?** Dental reviews are vitally important. Today's consumer often looks at several potential service providers before choosing. Their deciding factor isn't always location, price, or a website's colour schematics. It's often based on a quick reputation check.
- **Do patients enjoy an ongoing relationship with the practice?** Continue to provide your patients with health advice and news that matters to them. This can help them remember who you are when it comes time for them to seek out a dentist.

What is important to your patients?

It is critical to understand what is important to your patients. There have been a number of studies in this area.¹

It has been found that the most important factors that significantly

influenced dental patients' perception of service quality were:

- 1. Pricing** – the cost of the appointment and/or treatment.
- 2. Responsiveness** – the ease of getting an appointment.
- 3. Waiting time** – how long they waited.
- 4. Patient comfort** – the levels of anxiety experienced, maintenance of comfort and self-respect, and perceived pain.
- 5. Perceived professionalism** – whether they felt adequately informed about treatments.
- 6. Practice ambience** – their view on the physical characteristics of the practice (decor, equipment, uniforms, marketing material).

You should understand that most of your patients do not have the knowledge to assess your skill or work. They therefore rely on the experiential cues to assess your service quality.

Pricing

The high cost of dental work is a common complaint. Price is central to the patient perception of you and your services. It is all about what your patients consider good or bad value.

Tips to combat poor price perception:

- Build trust by spending time with your patients and demonstrating a genuine interest in them and their health.
- Take the time to clearly and simply inform the patient of all of the treatment options and their associated benefits and risks.
- Encourage frequent visits. The more often you see a patient the

greater the opportunity to build your relationship, rapport, and trust.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness is all about a dentist's ability to schedule and keep appointments. Ask yourself:

- How easy is it for patients to schedule an appointment?
- Are you able to fit in patients at short notice?
- Do you offer flexible opening times (early mornings, late evenings, or weekends)?

You also need to think about how easy is it to book appointments with you:

- Do you offer online booking?
- Do you have forms on your website?
- Can they email your practice?
- Is the only way for them to request or book an appointment with you via the phone?

Waiting time

Lack of punctuality is a common patient complaint. Trying to pack as many patients in as you can causes overruns and late appointments. Consider allocating additional time to each patient so that they feel well cared for and not rushed. This can then work as a buffer if any appointments overrun.

Patient comfort

This is about the levels of anxiety experienced, maintenance of patient comfort and self-respect, and perceived pain.

Think about what you are doing to increase the level of comfort for

your patients. Here are a few ideas that can make a difference:

- Warm towels at the end of an appointment.
- Blankets over patients' knees during an appointment.
- TV screens to provide distraction.
- A choice of music.
- Noise-cancelling earphones.
- Lip salve.
- Eye masks.

Perceived professionalism

This concerns whether the patient feels adequately informed about treatments. Patients want to feel as though they have been given a choice about what happens to them. Clear communication is key.

Practice ambience

The ambience of the practice concerns everything about the practice's look and feel:

- Physical characteristics of the practice (decor, equipment, uniforms, marketing material).
- Happiness of staff.
- Politeness and helpfulness of staff.
- Televisions or games.
- Children's toys.
- Dental technology.
- Price and ease of parking.

What hours do your ideal patients want

you to open?

This is another area of greater and greater importance. We live in an increasingly busy world. People are wanting and expecting increasingly flexible opening hours, be that before or after business working hours or at the weekends. If you are working in a business district area, an absolute must is to be able to see patients early in the morning and later in the evening to fit around people's busy schedules. If you are focusing on families, blocking out times that are just for children in the couple of hours after the end of school could differentiate your practice.

Thinking about your patient demographic and changing the way you run your practice accordingly is key to marketing. Make sure that you communicate changes to your patients.

In summary

You may find that your practice is strong in one or two areas but not across all the aspects that are required for excellent service. A dentist offering next-day treatment for emergencies, supported by caring, empathetic staff is great for service. But if you're running late and operate from a surgery that has seen better days, you have to work harder to overcome those negative impressions.

Knowing your competition

There was a time when the only competition that you had to worry about was the other independent dental practices in the 8km radius around your practice. Nowadays, there has never been a greater amount of competition and it has never been harder and yet more important to market your dental practice. It has never been more difficult to thrive as a dentist in Australia. There are a number of well-discussed factors affecting how you and your practice are

competing:

- **The oversupply of dentists** – Australia will have a dentist glut until at least 2025 as there are too many dentists being trained and registered in Australia (resulting from establishment of new dental schools at regional universities). Plus, the number of overseas trained dentists has increased from fifty to over three hundred over the last four of the last five years². As a consequence there are more and more dental practices opening around the country.
- **The growth of the dental corporates** – There is an increasing trend to corporatisation of the dental industry in Australia in line with the United States. These corporates have aggressive growth plans and are expanding rapidly, buying up increasing numbers of dental practices, hence, increasing competition and driving down dental salaries as they capitalise on the oversupply of dentists. With their impressive marketing strategies and budgets, they are targeting your patients.
- **Preferred providers** – In the past ten years, private health insurance providers have begun aggressively targeting an increase in the numbers of contracted dentists. Medical insurance companies and their preferred provider model are also greatly affecting the competition. They are fixing procedure rates with their preferred providers in your locality or opening up their own dental practices. The insurance companies are targeting your existing patients with the promise of lower priced procedures.
- **Overseas dental providers** – Dental tourism is increasing in popularity. Australian dentists now have to compete against overseas providers. In the current economic climate, many patients consider treatment in Australia to be too expensive

and are choosing to travel overseas. Insurance provider NIB is now providing cover for certain procedures to be carried out overseas.

In addition to the above, there are also a number of issues that affect dental practices:

- **Over supply or under-demand?** – A question that has to be asked is whether there is actually an oversupply of dentists or an under-demand. A *Health Workforce Australia* report found a fifth of all adults don't go to a dentist often enough to maintain good oral health.³ The ADIA have calculated that 23,000 dentists would be needed if everybody went to the dentists once a year. This, in theory, means that the opportunity for the dental profession would be significant if the Australian public were to change their oral hygiene habits.
- **New dental services and offerings** – There are increasing factors contributing to dental practice competition including price positioning (e.g. 'no-gap' offerings) and new service (range and quality, new techniques and technology).
- **Luxury goods** – Fred Joyal, in his book *Everything Is Marketing*, talks at length about how dentistry is a discretionary spend and the real competition to dentistry are the luxury goods providers. Consumers happily spend thousands on a new car, piece of electronic equipment, or holiday and yet the average spend per year on dental work in Australia is \$221.⁴
- **Educated consumers** – Your patients and potential patients are getting more and more savvy about where they go to get dental services. They are being bombarded with over six hundred pieces of advertising every day. Their experience of marketing and marketing messaging is getting more sophisticated and their expectations higher.

A word on corporate marketing

Corporate practices bring with them professional marketing support and big marketing budgets. The main focus of their high-impact advertising is to bring new patients through the door. This really raises the bar for the independent practices that want to get noticed.

So how is the corporate approach different from that of an independent practice? First, they have a plan in place that calls for consistent long-term communication. Their objective is to build a recognisable brand that gets stronger month after month and year after year. Second, they have professionally-designed communications that they know will resonate with the patients they're targeting. Finally, they use an integrated approach to cover all the touch points. It's not a scattergun approach.

Independent practices can offer bespoke personalised services that the corporates can never offer. In the coming steps, learn how you can market your differences and strengths, while having a well thought out and strategic marketing plan.

Step 1 – Checklist

- Do you know your 'why'?
- Have you written down your core values?
- Have you articulated your core values to your staff?
- Have you identified your ideal patient?
- Do you know what is important to your patients? Do you know your competition?

Bonus Material

To download checklists and documents that

accompany this book:
Go to www.fullybookeddentist.com/resources

Step 2: Start With A Plan

The importance of having a plan

When it comes to business, Benjamin Franklin's warning, 'By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail', has never been more apt. Without a marketing plan, how will you know where you are heading and what you are trying to achieve? Without a plan, how will you ever evaluate whether your marketing attempts have been successful?

I've worked with hundreds of practices, and most dentists don't know what a complete plan looks like or how to implement it if they do have one. This step will guide you through some of the basic elements required in a workable plan for your practice, while the steps to come will explain how to implement in your strategy.

Creating your marketing plan

Good marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. You need a long-term approach. Having a solid marketing plan and systems in place to make it easy to execute it, month after month, is key. You need to have all the basics in place to get results.

How much time should my plan cover?

Make sure you give yourself enough time to succeed. If you don't, you will experience an undercurrent of urgency that will stifle both your creativity and your energy.

Usually, the entire process of creating and implementing an initial marketing plan takes about fifteen months:

- The first three months are dedicated to the planning and creation stage.
- The implementation stage runs for a year.

You should begin the creation stage of the second year's marketing plan three months before the end of the current year's implementation stage, and so on.

Who should create my marketing plan?

An individual dental practice owner may find it difficult to know which marketing efforts will best work for their business. If marketing does not come naturally, a trusted dental marketing consultant or strategic adviser can help guide you. Relying on experts to select the most appropriate and effective marketing mediums to grow the practice may also allow you to focus on what you do best, providing quality dental care to the community.

Whether you are creating your own plan or employing the expertise of dental marketing consultants, identifying your goals, developing a marketing budget and maintaining oversight of the process is crucial.

Setting your goals

Successful practices establish clear short-term and long-term goals before establishing detailed and incremental plans to achieve those goals. Without clear goals, progress and success cannot be measured. What are your goals?

The aim of your marketing plan is to achieve the goals set by your business. Critical to your practice success is to have your business, financial, and marketing goals in alignment. The perfect scenario for practice success is when your business coach and marketing coach or consultant works in close collaboration with you.

Identifying your growth needs

The first thing to do is identify your desired growth goals. Most practices fit within three specific growth models:

- 1. Rapid Growth** – This is generally for new practices, recently purchased practices, or practices that experience high turnover. The aim is to bring in a lot of new patients quickly.
- 2. Sustained Growth** – The majority of practices fit within this category. Growth is important, but not too fast. The goal is about steady, controlled growth.
- 3. Patient Retention** – This is for practices who are in the enviable position of not needing new patients and simply want to retain the patients they have.

Setting SMART goals

The key to successful planning is to set goals that are SMART:

- **Specific** – Your goal needs to be well defined and be clear

to anyone that has a basic knowledge of the practice.

- **Measurable** – You need to be able to track whether your goal is being achieved.
- **Agreed Upon** – There should be agreement with the staff involved as to what your goal should be.
- **Realistic** – Your goal must be achievable, with regards availability of resources, knowledge, and time.
- **Time-Based** – Your goal should have an element of time, whether it be an established frequency (daily/weekly) or deadline (a certain date).

Example: SMART Goal

To get forty-five new patients by running a promotion for the months of June and July offering free take-home teeth-whitening kits for all new patients.

Knowing your numbers

In order to truly know how your business is going and be able to plan for where you want it to be, you need to track and analyse your practice figures regularly over time. When you know your figures, you are able to identify the causes and effects of changes that occur and make adjustments where necessary. Knowing your numbers can prevent unnecessary stress, panic, and rash decisions from being made.

Additionally, tracking where new patients are coming from and weighing that against money spent on marketing will give you a clear indication of the effectiveness of your marketing efforts, without which you will never know what to continue, repeat, or stop.

More than 60% of dental practices are unaware of their numbers of lapsed patients, more than 40% do not track where new patients are coming from and almost 30% are unaware how many new patients visit their practice each month.⁵

One element integral to your marketing strategy and budget is your calculation of the lifetime value of a patient.

Calculating patient lifetime value

Lifetime value (LV) is a determination of the financial value a patient brings in over their 'lifetime' with your practice. The key to understanding LV lies in the recognition that a patient does not represent a single transaction but a relationship that is far more valuable than any one-time exchange.

However, lifetime value is not about any one patient; it is about stepping back and taking a look at your patient base as a whole. Understanding that, while some never return and some never leave, on average there is a typical patient lifetime and that lifetime has a specific economic value.

If you don't know what a patient is worth, you don't know what you should plan to spend to get one or what you should plan to spend to keep one.

Determining how much the average new patient spends in your practice over the lifetime of the relationship is crucial to running a successful practice. It enables you to make informed, fact-based decisions about your advertising, including how much you should be willing to spend to acquire a patient, which approaches are actually paying off, and whether you're getting

the best return on investment (ROI).

One of the biggest mistakes dental practices make when running their practice numbers is looking only at what a new patient spends in the first visit. Why is this wrong? You'll most likely not do any major treatment on the patient for eighteen to thirty-six months. If you only consider the initial visit, you're overlooking the important, ongoing production that only comes over time, and this will significantly skew your calculations. Marketing expense has to be viewed against the long-term value of the patient.

Step 1

To begin, you need to think about the average timespan that a patient stays with your practice. For most practices, and given the current economic climate, seven years is a conservative number. I have used this in the sample calculation below. Feel free to use your own number if it differs.

Next, what does the average patient spend over that time period? For the purposes of our sample, we'll use a low estimate of \$500 a year (assuming some restorative work and regular maintenance).

Again, use whatever average number you think is accurate for your practice. \$500 is probably on the low side, especially when you factor in whitening, cosmetic treatment, and implants.

Using these numbers, a single patient is worth \$3,500 over their life in the practice.

Example Calculation #1	
Average years in your practice	7
Average amount spent per year	x \$500

Value of one patient	\$3,500
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Step 2

After you've determined the value of one patient, there's a second, more critical part of the calculation (and it's one that most dentists miss): secondary referrals.

If your team is actively asking for referrals, and providing a good dental experience, a typical new patient is estimated to refer five new patients over the next five years. Write in whatever number of referrals you believe to be true for your practice.

That means, if a new patient spends an average of \$3,500 and goes on to refer five additional patients (each spending an average of \$3,500), that's another \$17,500.

Example Calculation #2	
Value of one patient	\$3,500
Average number of referrals	x 5
Value of one patient	\$17,500

Step 3

You have to consider income from secondary referrals as part of the value of that first patient. After all, you never would have seen them without the initial advertising that attracted them. Now you need to add it all up. The total lifetime value of this sample patient is \$21,000.

Example Calculation #3

Value of one patient	\$3,500
Production from referrals	+ \$17,500
Value of one patient	\$21,000

This \$21,000 of production for your practice all stems from a single new patient over a seven-year period. This highlights the importance of not only giving your patients continued great services but also how having an ongoing, active, and publicised referral campaign can have a huge impact on your production.

Setting your marketing budget

Sticking to a predetermined marketing budget and creating a thoughtful plan for implementation will ensure that you are spending your hard-earned money to maximise the reach and return on investment of your marketing efforts.

Setting and adhering to a marketing budget may seem like a daunting task for many dental practitioners, but this is a critical step in implementing a successful practice marketing strategy.

How much should I spend on my marketing?

Marketing is an investment. A dental practice should be spending somewhere between 2-10% of their annual gross income on marketing. This includes planning fees, personnel time, production costs, and implementation costs. Your marketing budget is very much dependant on your business goals:

<p>Rapid Growth</p>	<p>This is generally for new practices, recently purchased practices, or practices that experience high turnover. The goal is to bring in a lot of patients quickly. This is the most expensive because it requires a lot of awareness-marketing.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>7% – 10% of your annual gross income.</p>
<p>Sustained Growth</p>	<p>The majority of practices fit within this category.</p> <p>Growth is important, but not too fast. It's really about steady, controlled growth. Sustained growth requires more moderated marketing efforts.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>4% – 7% of your annual gross income.</p>
<p>Patient Retention</p>	<p>For practices in the enviable position of not needing new patients and simply wanting to retain the patients they have.</p> <p>This level is all about enhancing the experience of current patients.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>2% – 3% of your annual gross income.</p>

Putting aside your monthly budget

Once you have calculated your annual budget, I recommend dividing that number by twelve and putting aside a twelfth of the total each month. If you get in the habit of doing this, you will always have some marketing funds available to ensure a consistent marketing effort.

The most successful dentists are those who are consistent in their marketing efforts. Consistency requires funding, and funding should be carefully planned and budgeted.

Calculating return on investment

Return on investment (ROI) is a simple calculation you can use to evaluate the success of your marketing tactics. In order for you to calculate your marketing return, you need to have systems in place to track the patients and referrals that are generated.

To calculate the ROI for any marketing campaign, you simply divide the dollars you receive by the dollars you invested, using the lifetime value of a patient for a given period of time.

I recommend that you should be trying to get a ROI of 3:1 or above for all your marketing campaigns.

Return on Investment (ROI) example

Let's say a given campaign brought in fifty new patients and cost you \$10,000.

You may decide to track your marketing ROI against the two-year value of a patient (of \$1,000)

50 new patients x \$1,000 average value of a patient = \$50,000
invested

\$50,000 = 5:1 ROI

\$10,000

Any ROI over a 3:1 ratio is good.

Hence, you should keep doing or even do more of this type of marketing in this example.

Implementing your marketing plan

People often get lost at the most important stage of their marketing plan, implementation. It may feel as though, once you've outlined a strategy, you've already done everything at this point, but you haven't. Now that you have done all the hard work, you must actually follow the plan you have invested so much of your time in and see it through to the end. Otherwise, you will lose all of your momentum, not to mention money, time and brain cells.

Nominate someone to be in charge of implementing your plan and to be responsible for staying on time and within budget. It doesn't matter whether that person is external or internal, only that the person has the time and energy to dedicate to your success. Unless you actually set aside time to work on your plan, it will be pushed aside in the daily grind and forgotten. Then you will have lost your investment, because the key to a successful marketing plan is consistency and repetition, fuelled by enthusiasm. If you work your plan only sporadically or at the last minute, then you lose the awareness you are building.

Planning for a marathon, not a sprint

Once the marketing strategies have been determined, put them into a calendar or timeline to ensure that those who have been tasked with the responsibility can execute the plan.

Careful thought should be given to the timing of each activity, and marketing activities should be scheduled and spread throughout

the entire year, with focus given to the slower times of the year when prospective patients aren't necessarily looking for dental care.

Tracking your plan

Tracking is perhaps the most essential aspect of your marketing. Without it you're shooting, or rather spending, in the dark. You have to know in detail how many patients each type of advertising is generating. This can easily be done within your practice management software. Virtually all practice management software programs have a place to enter 'referral source', and most will run a variety of reports that will tell you exactly how your advertising is working.

If a certain strategy does not yield acceptable results, it does not necessarily indicate that the idea was a complete failure. Sometimes simple tweaks can produce improved results.

Case study

The importance of knowing your numbers is constantly brought home to me when I talk to practices who have existing Google Adwords (or Pay Per Click) campaigns. These campaigns, if not tracked and managed well, can be a large hole in which to tip your money.

I was recently talking to a general dental practice in a suburb outside of Melbourne. This practice had been spending \$7,000 a month for a period of nearly two years. They wanted to know if I thought that they were getting a good return on investment.

I asked them if they had been tracking where their new patients had been coming from and luckily they had.

When they ran the report, we found out that they had been attracting fifty-two new patients a month on average over the last six months. Of these, forty had been word of mouth and twelve were found 'online'.

Even if 100% of the new 'online' patients had come from their Google Adwords campaign, this still meant that they were paying \$583 for every new patient this way.

We then looked at the Google Adwords and found out that 97% of their Google Adwords spend had been targeting keywords for the whole of Melbourne. They had been spending \$7,000 a month to get a click on an advert by a majority of people that were located nowhere near their practice.

We worked with them to change their Google Adwords set-up, reduce their spend, and increase the number of patients coming to their practice via Google.

If this practice had known their numbers and had been looking at them months (or even years) before, how much wasted money could they have spent on better campaigns and how many more patients could they now have been treating

Step 2 – Checklist

- Do you know the growth needs of your practice?
- Have you set SMART goals?