

# COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING FOR SPECIALTY PRACTICES

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



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Levin Group<sup>Inc.</sup>



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## The Evolution of Practice Marketing

Dental practice marketing has gone through dramatic changes since 1985, when Levin Group first began showing dentists and specialists how to achieve greater business success.

Originally, very few of our clients had any reason to market their practices. There were plenty of patients and production for all practices, so why invest any time or money in promoting their services?

As the total number of doctors increased and innovative clinical techniques and technologies created new growth opportunities, we showed our clients how to take advantage of changing market situations. In addition, many clients came to us because their production numbers were flat or declining. During this period... beginning in the early 2000s... Levin Group created and refined numerous methodologies for acquiring new patients, upgrading case presentations and strengthening relationships with referring offices.



When the Great Recession stunned the overall economy, the field of dentistry was particularly hard-hit—a blow from which it has not fully recovered. Fortunately, Levin Group was prepared. Having already developed effective marketing strategies for struggling and stagnant practices, we have been able to apply this expertise to the many practices trying to regain their footing in the new, more challenging dental economy. Today, we provide clients—and recommend to all specialists—a comprehensive marketing program based on everything we've learned, tested and proven in diverse practices across the country.

## A Comprehensive Approach to Marketing Communication

Following are some general guidelines for developing an effective comprehensive marketing program for your practice:

### 1. Designate a Practice Marketing Coordinator (MC)

To compete effectively today, you need to begin upgrading your marketing program. The quickest and most effective way to do this is to either hire a new, part-time person or train a current team member to take on additional duties as your practice MC.

Although your marketing activities need not be costly, creating and implementing your comprehensive program will be labor-intensive at times. Doctors who attempt to take on marketing responsibilities personally end up stressed and frustrated because they lack the time and expertise required to do the job well.

As the practice owner, you should make major marketing decisions, set performance targets with deadlines and review results, but you should delegate the many detailed tasks involved in conducting a marketing program to your MC. Otherwise, much of your time will be spent handling logistical details rather than production.

To do well in her role as MC, the person you choose should be trained properly. This requires more than reading a book or searching for advice online. Arrange for intensive training sessions from an expert in this field, conducted at your practice, at a dental marketing training site, or both. This is not only a necessary expense but also a wise investment.

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## 2. Build Relationships with Referrers

Traditionally, specialty practices rely heavily on referrals from other doctors and, depending on the specialty, from current adult patients and the parents of young patients. Although these two broad referral sources share some common characteristics (e.g., high patient satisfaction can generate positive results in both areas), you and your MC should develop a distinct marketing program for each. Following are some guidelines:

### • Patient and Parent Marketing

It may not seem like marketing in the usual sense, but making strong practice-patient-parent connections serves as a foundation for your ongoing success. By learning personal facts about patients (and sharing similar information about you and practice team members with them), you can form relationships with them just as you would with others in your life.

The more your patients and parents appreciate your skills and caring commitment, the more likely they are to speak well of you to dentists who referred them to you (bolstering doctor referrals) and to refer prospective patients to your practice. Provide a WOW experience and you will benefit from excellent word-of-mouth advertising... a potent marketing tool.

### • Doctor Referral Marketing

Cultivating and capitalizing on relationships with doctors and their teams—who can have a strong influence on who gets referrals—require a distinct set of strategies, which may include...

- Educational events, such as lunch-and-learns and presentations by guest speakers
- Group activities, like parties, tickets to games, etc., for doctors and staff
- Deliveries and fun contests
- One-to-one doctor lunches
- Sponsorship of charitable programs that involve joint participation

Maintenance of productive relationships with referring practices entails frequent contact initiated by your MC as well as your direct involvement on referred cases, in the form of professional communication with referrers. If there's a drop in referrals from a doctor, you should arrange a meeting to discuss it and determine how you can restore the flow of referred patients.

## 3. Define Your Practice "Brand"

What sets your practice apart from others in your area? How will referring offices benefit from sending patients to you? Why should a prospective patient come to your office rather than any other? You need to come up with good answers to these questions... hopefully not just "me too" thinking, which will be ineffectual. The following list will help get you started:

- Your credentials and those of staff members
- Comfortable, attractive reception areas with exceptional amenities
- The latest technologies
- Educational resource for referring doctors
- Easy-to-reach location
- Reputation for collaborating well with area dentists
- Insurance acceptance
- Strong commitment to interoffice communications about referred cases
- Excellent customer service



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- Once you've defined your brand, familiarize your staff with it and then, along with your MC, begin looking at all marketing materials and messages to make sure they reflect your branding. Everything referring doctors, prospective patients and others see about your practice should project the brand identity you've chosen.

#### 4. Create a New, Impressive, Branded Website

In addition to brand messaging, your website should include your practice philosophy, biographical information (and photos) of you and your team members, descriptions of the various services you provide, visuals of your office, payment and insurance information, full contact information and map, etc.

People who've been referred to your practice will probably have no difficulty finding your website by using a search engine. Many other prospective patients will not discover your website—let alone your practice—unless you use search engine optimization (SEO). An SEO expert, who understands what “impresses” the automated programs that look for content relevant to users’ search terms, can tweak your website so it will appear high on the list of “hits.” If someone searches for a specialty practice in your community, your well-optimized site will appear higher in the list of results.... increasing the likelihood that it will be visited.

Similarly, you should get technical assistance to ensure that your practice is listed in local directories, shows up in online mapping results, and wins favorable reviews.

## 5. Take Advantage of Social Media

Whether you use social media personally, understand that it has tremendous potential value for your practice. Many people—including your patients, those who may become patients some day, and others who may influence decisions about where to go for dental care—rely on Facebook and other social media platforms for staying in touch. You may also find that LinkedIn, which focuses on building relationships among business people and professionals, can help you bolster referrals.

By participating actively in this virtual world, your practice can encourage positive word-of-mouth advertising by patients and parents, nurture doctor referral relationships, raise its public profile, and play a more active role in your community... all at no cost, except for a modest investment of staff time. Make a serious commitment to social media by putting your MC or some other team member in charge of managing your online presence.

## Conclusion

Few specialty practices can thrive today without marketing. To ensure your success, designate a practice marketing coordinator and develop a comprehensive marketing plan. By including both traditional and online strategies, as well as robust patient and doctor referral marketing programs, you can compete effectively in a challenging market.

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## Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Founder and CEO of Levin Group, Inc., the largest dental practice consulting firm in North America. A keynote speaker for major dental conferences, Dr. Levin presents more than 100 seminars per year. He has authored 68 books and more than 4,000 articles. In 2014, he received the Dental Excellence Award for Best Practice Management Consultant from *DrBicuspid.com*. For the past 12 years, he has been named one of the "Leaders in Dental Consulting" by *Dentistry Today* magazine.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

### The Platinum Library

Get all of Dr. Roger P. Levin's best-selling e-books in one easy-to-download purchase. Learn the practice management and marketing essentials for growing your practice from the foremost authority on the business of dentistry. **Save 10% when you purchase these books as a set rather than separately.** Go to: [www.levingroup.com/store/libraries.html](http://www.levingroup.com/store/libraries.html).



### The Practice Performance Analysis™

Get the peace of mind you deserve, with a Levin Group Practice Performance Analysis™. More than 6,800 dentists and specialists have used this analysis to gain a better understanding of their practices and increase production.

The analysis is conducted by a Certified Practice Analyst at your office with minimal interruption to your business operations. During the assessment, the analyst will examine your practice's operations... pinpoint under-performing areas... and give you solutions for increasing production. Special price is \$1495, a \$500 savings.

To find out more, call 888.973.0000 or visit [www.levingroup.com/analysis](http://www.levingroup.com/analysis).

