



THE POWER OF INTERNAL MARKETING

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



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Levin Group^{Inc.}



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Introduction

Increasing patient numbers is a subject on the mind of every dentist. Unfortunately, the methods for accomplishing this vary widely in effectiveness. Some are proven methods with high success rates. Others drain revenue without producing the desired results.

Launching a major advertising campaign offers few guarantees of success, but it *will* guarantee high expenditures. In many cases, advertising, direct mail, and other forms of external marketing often end up losing money with very little gain to the practice. On the other hand, there is one logical, cost-effective and easy way to implement a series of strategies for increasing new patients that cannot be ignored—internal marketing.

Why Internal Marketing?

The most productive method of increasing new patients is through word-of-mouth referrals generated by internal marketing. Most of the best businesses recognize that word-of-mouth referrals, from happy and satisfied customers, lead to a powerful customer base. Internal marketing matters because it stimulates patients to refer others. It is much more predictable than external marketing and much more cost-effective.

Internal marketing is not a set of gimmicks or tricks but rather a proven method that allows a practice to increase referrals from patients through what Levin Group calls The Science of Internal Marketing™. There are two key factors in internal marketing—**quality** and **quantity**:

1. Quality of Internal Marketing

Quality refers to the interpersonal relationships the doctor and team have built with patients. Among other things, *quality* is about:

- How the patients feel about the office
- How loyal they are
- How much they appreciate the practice, how routinely they keep their appointments
- How often the practice has last-minute cancellations or no-shows
- Whether or not patients talk positively about the practice outside of their visits

Quality is about feeling. Do patients like the practice? Do they love the practice? The answer to these questions will determine whether any internal marketing program has a chance of working (but this is not the entire story). If patients are neutral or negative about the practice, they are unlikely to refer and also unlikely to stay with the practice.

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How does a practice determine whether patients are satisfied in a practice? Traditionally, the determination was made based on whether they returned once every six months. In The Science of Internal Marketing™, it will be judged on:

- Activities that build very strong relationships
- Exceeding patient expectations
- Much higher patient loyalty
- Increased patient referrals

Many dentists do not realize that many patients view the practice simply as a place to receive a service and not much more. In other words, the practice usually meets their expectations, but does not necessarily exceed them. This is why only a minority of patients refer other patients to the practice. To drive patient loyalty and retention, the *quality* of internal marketing should include:

- **Appreciating Patients**
Let patients know how much they are appreciated. Thanking patients for coming, recognizing them for referrals and learning about them as individuals—these actions all go to the heart of increasing patient referrals to the practice. It is not difficult to stand out as a practice by focusing on a positive patient experience and letting patients know that the practice recognizes that they are the number one concern of the office. This requires a combination of excellent dentistry, customer service and a well-trained team that truly cares for and about their patients.
- **Improving the New Patient Experience**
New patients are crucial to increasing production. Make your practice a destination for new patients by creating a unique experience and systemizing the entire New Patient Experience, from the first phone call to the first visit to future appointments. Each interaction of the New Patient Experience should be documented and scripted for maximum effectiveness. The practices that exceed expectations during patient interactions will be the ones to receive more patient referrals, achieve greater case acceptance and experience continual increases in practice production.

2. Quantity of Internal Marketing

Quantity is a critical element in internal marketing. Without it, the internal marketing program stands a far greater chance of failing. In truth, *quality* and *quantity* go hand-in-hand. Without the interpersonal skills, patients simply will not refer and no strategy in the world will be effective. However, even with excellent interpersonal skills, without a minimum of 15 strategies functioning at all times the internal marketing program will fail just as well.

Quantity is about having a sufficient number of internal marketing strategies to reach critical mass. Levin Group has determined that the *quantity* necessary for an internal marketing program is a minimum of 15 strategies that function effectively to increase referrals. When 15 strategies are functioning simultaneously, the number of patients who refer other patients inevitably grows. Over the course of 25 years, I have seen flat or declining practices begin to grow within just a few short months of the internal marketing strategies being put in place.

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Many practices spend a great deal of time and effort doing internal marketing the wrong way. Dentists should remember that highly effective internal marketing brings a scientific approach to gaining a result. Combining interpersonal skills training with effective ongoing strategies custom selected for each individual practice brings outstanding results consistently. That is the basis behind all internal marketing. Levin Group's Science of Internal Marketing™ strategies for *quantity* include:

- **Starting a Practice Building Program**

Anyone who refers one patient should receive a personal thank-you call. Develop a patient referral program that outlines all the benefits patients receive when they refer others to your practice. In addition, patients who refer others should be thanked in person at least four times on their next visit to the practice—by staff and the doctor. To ramp up patient referrals, Levin Group recommends creating a *Top 200*™ program where the top 200 patients most likely to refer are targeted with a separate marketing campaign, including email updates, special promotions, etc.

- **Training Your Staff to Ask For Referrals**

Training the dental team to ask for referrals can lead to a dramatic increase in new patients. Scripting will help your staff consistently deliver your marketing message. When patients remark how pleased they are with the practice, team members should be trained to respond with the appropriate response. The truth is that patients are often thrilled to refer friends and family.

Conclusion

Internal marketing is a predictable and inexpensive way to increase practice productivity. An effective internal marketing program requires interpersonal skills training combined with a selection of a minimum of 15 strategies that function together to effectively increase patient referrals.

Internal marketing should not be utilized only when it is most obviously needed, but at all times. Levin Group encourages practices to have an internal marketing plan each year that is implemented, modified and evaluated on a regular basis to maintain a high level of effectiveness.

Only through internal marketing can your practice achieve the level of referrals necessary for accelerated new patient growth. *Quality* and *quantity* strategies can assure you're putting your best foot forward at all times. Let your patients take care of the rest!

Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Chairman 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.



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