



COVID-19 Recovery Resource

Why S.W.O.T. is essential for a successful COVID-19 recovery

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

All our focus at Levin Group is on helping dentists move from the crisis stage to the recovery stage of the COVID-19 crisis. Along with the 1-Page COVID-19 Strategic Recovery Plan, which is available at www.levingroup.com, conducting a S.W.O.T. exercise for your post-COVID-19 practice is also critical.

A S.W.O.T. analysis is not new to the business world. S.W.O.T. stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Good companies engage in an annual S.W.O.T. analysis to better understand their companies and their future. Levin Group has been doing this in strategic planning sessions for clients for many years. It is a tried and true traditional business technique that allows companies to perform at the highest possible level.

And then came this crisis, and it is a crisis. It will end. It may be back. There is a great deal we don't know.

So, we need to focus on what we **do know** and that is your S.W.O.T. But It is not as easy as it sounds. It is not difficult or unpleasant, but it does require a process and some thought time in order to determine what your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats will be in the COVID-19 era.

Strengths

The strength of your practice prior to the crisis may not be the same when you enter the recovery phase. For example, you may lose 10 to 15% of your patients. You may lose 20% or more of your annual revenue. You may now have loans, which represent debt that must be paid back. You may not be able to hire back all your team members. The strengths that allowed you to be successful and move forward in the past may be different from the ones that will make you successful in recovery.

Weaknesses

In any crisis the weaknesses change and, unfortunately sometimes expand. Perhaps pre-coronavirus your weaknesses were needing an office manager, inadequate time for team, an absence of step-by-step documented systems, not running on time or others. Following the COVID-19 crisis you will have a different set of weaknesses. Patients who for safety reasons are afraid to come back to the practice. Limited financial options in a time when an economic recession is causing severe financial challenges for many patients. Attracting new patients using traditional marketing if the practice fees and options do not change. Not participating with dental insurance in a fee-for-service practice (which was not necessarily a weakness in the past but may become one post COVID-19). These are just examples to get you going.

Opportunities

In any crisis there are opportunities. Perhaps you've heard the quote "never let a crisis go to waste". Well, having a crisis may be good for certain businesses, but not for most. Unless you were about to manufacture gloves and masks and ventilators there is not much about this situation that is good for

dental practices. But you can shift the curve. Opportunities could include expanded hours, added weekend hours, the ability to hire highly trained team members who we're not able to remain with other practices, reducing labor costs, reducing supply costs, reevaluating all expenses with companies that are soliciting business and willing to except lower fees or prices.

Threats

This coronavirus has awakened dentist to the reality of threats. It will probably never be business-as-usual again. Threats include patients who will no longer go to dentist unless they have an emergency. Patients who cannot afford or choose not to afford treatment and stop returning for regular preventive care. Patients who leave the practice because they do not participate with their insurance plans. Other threats include the return of coronavirus, the lingering recession from the crisis, loss of income, higher taxes to pay for all of the loan and bail out programs, increased regulation of dental practices for safety concerns and others that we have not even thought of yet.

Take some time to think about your S.W.O.T. from a post-COVID-19 perspective. You won't have all the answers yet, but this is the time to get realistically prepared for the most effective recovery you can achieve.

Here is the right way to do your S.W.O.T.

1. Take a pack of Post-it Notes and, beginning with Strengths, identify every strength you think the practice will have once you are operational again following the COVID-19 crisis. List them out, one per Post-it, and stick them individually on the wall. If at all possible, do this with your team, even if it must be done by Zoom or phone. If the team is unavailable to you, work alone or with the other doctors in your practice. Do the same for Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Write down every possibility that you can think of. Don't judge them as right or wrong and don't evaluate whether they make sense from affordability, implementation, or even realistic standpoint. Just come up with as many as you can in each category and write one on each Post-it Note.

When you've completed this part of the S.W.O.T. analysis you should have a wall (or a notepad if you're on Zoom) with a group of Post-its under Strengths, a group under Weaknesses, a group under Opportunities in a group under Threats. Now you're ready for the next step.

2. Start with Strengths and prioritize every Post-it into priority order. Just lift them up and move them around until they are in order of priority and if you can communicate with your team then everybody should discuss their opinions and come up with the priority order in each category.
3. Then select the top five in each category. The 80/20 principle applies which states that you will get 80% of your results from 20% of your actions. In this case you will get 80% of your S.W.O.T. from 20% of the Post-it Notes. You now have the "Top 5" in each category or 20 Post-it Notes total. NOTE: Don't discard the ones that do not make the Top 5. They are important to keep.



4. Take a piece of paper or large poster board and divide it into four quadrants. Put your Top 5 Strengths in the upper left quadrant, Top 5 Weaknesses in the upper right quadrant, Top 5 Opportunities in the lower left quadrant and Top 5 Threats in the lower right quadrant. This is your S.W.O.T.

You've now identified where you were strong, where you are weak, what your opportunities are and what threats may occur. This way when you begin identifying high value strategies by completing your 1-Page COVID-19 Strategic Recovery Plan you will know what to focus on. It makes sense to work from your S.W.O.T. to understand what your practice will be capable of going forward. This might not be a time to buy an expensive new technology with a large monthly payment. It may be the time to expand your hours and calculate how many extra hygiene patients need to be seen in order to increase the revenue per month and begin to recapture some of the lost revenue.

S.W.O.T. Insight

Performing a S.W.O.T. analysis will allow our practice to better understand its current situation. This is a time when it is critically important to be realistic about what is working and what's not. The S.W.O.T. gives you a deep understanding of factors in practice performance and which ones need to be accelerated and which ones need to be addressed.

The more input you get from knowledgeable people such as your team members the better the S.W.O.T. analysis results will be. Ask your team to be bold. Think outside the box, challenge Ideas openly in the prioritization stage of the S.W.O.T. analysis and be open to the ideas of others because things will not be business as usual when you reopen your practice. No practice will operate exactly the same way it did in the past, at least for the foreseeable future. The S.W.O.T. analysis should help to point the way.

Use the attached worksheets to capture the your S.W.O.T. analysis and review it at least weekly.



Strengths – Internal – To be capitalized on

Weaknesses – Internal – To be managed or corrected

Opportunities – External – To be seized

Threats – External – To be identified and confronted

All four factors must be considered

Strengths

Attributes of your practice that will help you recover.

For example:

- What do you do well?
- What are your unique skills and services?
- What expert or specialized knowledge or resources do you have?
- What experience do you have?
- What do you do better than your competitors?
- Where are you most profitable?



List Strengths of Your Practice That Will Help You Recover

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Weaknesses

Attributes of your practice that could hurt you.

For example:

- In what areas do you need to improve?
- What resources do you lack?
- What parts of your business are not very profitable?
- Where do you need further education and/or experience?
- What costs you time and/or money?



List Weaknesses of Your Practice That Will Hinder Recovery

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Opportunities

External conditions that are available to you during recovery.

For example:

- How can you do more for your existing patients?
- How can you use technology to enhance your practice?
- Are there new target audiences you have the potential to reach?
- Are there any additional skills you can develop or services you can offer?



List Opportunities for Your Practice Unique to Your Recovery

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Threats

External conditions that could damage your practice.

For example:

- What obstacles do you face?
- What is going on in the economy in your specific location?
- What is going on in the profession and with regulation?
- What are the strengths of your biggest competitors?
- What are your competitors doing that you're not?



List Threats to Your Practice During Recovery

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____