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Top 10 dental marketing New Year's resolutions

6th Dec 2010



As we race towards the coming New Year, many practice owners look for ways to make their business resolutions become a reality and not something forgotten by half-past February.

Poorly planned New Year's resolutions will not survive and will destroy your determination to fulfil

business goals.

Resolutions are far different than a wish list, and as a practice owner, you have to resolve first and foremost to take action – and create an even more successful practice this 2011.

Let's look at the top 10 New Year's resolutions that can sharpen the business aspects of your practice – improving profitability, increasing exposure, and keeping your practice a cut above the competition.

1. Court your client base

When courting the love of your life, you want that person to relate everything they do, say, and think with you. And how do you accomplish keeping your image in the forefront of their mind?

Constant contact!

Resolve in 2011 to conduct a love affair (not literally please!) with your practice client base – creating a familiarity and acceptance that keeps your name, your logo, and your practice in the forefront of your client's minds – an intimate piece of knowledge. Your practice name should be their automatic response when dentistry is mentioned, whether that may be over ladies at leisure afternoon tea or a morning natter with a fellow dog walker.

- Famous philosopher Pareto's 80/20 Principle: 80% of your new business will come from 20% of your existing patients. Nurture your client base and they will reward you.

Take action

Email flyers and newsletters, plus postal mailings should be sent out regularly keeping your practice client base updated on a new treatments, incentives or achievements plus personal client notes, such as birthdays, appointment reminders or new treatment options. When making conversation in the dental chair, take note of any special events taking place in your patient's life – send out a good luck on your driving test, enjoy your holiday or congratulations on your wedding card – make sure the cards are branded.

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook can create an online presence that is friendly and promotes interaction – your website should carry icons that reference your social media pages.

Pros Increased practice recognition and client loyalty, more referrals and more business

Cons Takes time and must be well executed and kept current

2. Dress it up and be seen!

If your practice location has outside space that isn't being utilised for marketing, then resolve in 2011 to take advantage of this opportunity to impact passers-by with your branding. Not all practices have the benefit of this 'real estate', so if your practice does it's time to capitalise on its marketing potential!

Take action

Design and print fantastic temporary banners that invite clients to take action – with you! Think a-boards, window displays or even flags. Your message can be anything you want it to be, but the idea is to draw positive interest and attention to your practice.

WARNING: Poorly designed and executed outdoor marketing can do more harm than good. Use a designer that designs to make impact. A good designer will suggest to you the best way of executing a design through the use of the most appealing imagery and wording.

Pros A highly effective, yet affordable marketing solution that impacts the attention of street/passing traffic – plus if banners are switched out regularly, passersby will be trained to anticipate and look out for your latest message.

Cons Poorly executed temporary signage can potentially do more harm than good and could look tacky!

3. Expand your 'sphere of influence'

Your sphere of influence is the area from which you can capture an audience – resolve in 2011 to make sure your



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online presence capitalises on this concept with an online strategy that ensures high Google rankings for main keywords associated with your town, postal code, and specialty service area. Potential patients looking for a dentist are 85% more likely to contact a practice found in local searches – and you want to be one of the first practices they see listed.

Take action

Ask your website designer for information on your Google rankings and how your keywords are set up, how they have been chosen and if they are working.

If it has been awhile since you have contacted your website designer/marketing company, feel confident in contacting any proven, experienced professional dental marketing expert to get a second opinion.

Pros Expand your sphere of influence exposure and expand your business. More new faces will bring in more 'other' new faces (friends and family)

Cons A poorly designed website or one not designed for dental patient conversion will significantly shrink your online sphere of influence.

3. Service with a smile!

Smile is the new buzz word for 2011 and should be one of your 2011 resolutions for customer service at your practice. Start with training for your team to make smiling the greatest tool for endearing, supporting, and reassuring patients at your practice.

From the moment a patient walks in to the moment they leave, a genuine heartfelt smile is the most positive expression of your service.

A sincere commitment to each patient having a positive experience can be achieved – and you will be rewarded with a happy clientele that enthusiastically refers your practice to others. Fake greetings can be seen through and will often result in less positive experiences with a client, so make sure your staff understands the importance of genuinely projecting their smile at all times.

Take action

Meet with your team separately and as a group to determine their professional goals as individuals and as a team. Work together to develop a pro-active plan to raise all aspects of your practice's customer perception levels.

Pros A happy, loyal clientele, a happy practice team, more referrals and more business.

Cons This is hard work for old attitudes! Make a realistic plan and approach your team carefully, old habits can be difficult to change. (Get your friends to be mystery shoppers).

5. Yes - I DO need a website that works for me!

Resolve for 2011 to face your website – whether it exists yet or not. Existing websites should be reviewed – is it meeting your goals and is it doing what you want it to do for your practice? Does it reflect your key team and ethos? Is the website design appealing? Do you have and understand information about how many hits your website is getting and what level of enquiries you are receiving? Your website is your secret salesman – are you ready to give it a raise or fire it?

If you don't have a website or are unhappy with your existing site – what are you willing to do about it? Ask yourself some questions: does your designer understand your industry? Does your creative marketing team understand the goals of the site? Is the design 'connecting' with potential patients? Is your website better than those of your competition? Some of these questions will need expert advice to be answered accurately.

Take action

Review your website and decide if it has the look, information and appeal you want. Contact a dental website design specialist and ask for a free consultation and analysis of your website. If you haven't made the move online, take the first step by contacting a dental marketing specialist to schedule a free evaluation of your practice needs. Look out for proven results and avoid template websites and template website designers – impersonal design bespoke for your brand is a big no-no.

Pros An excellent website is an unailing tool for reaching your patients, building trust in you and your practice, and establishing a solid understanding of your ethos and care.

Cons Without the expert help of a designer that understands the dental profession, you can blow your budget and accomplish little to grow your practice. It can take courage to step away from your current designer when your website isn't generating the results you need and expect.

6. What a difference words make!

Is the text written for your marketing material and website created in-house by yourself or an employee who is not a professional writer? If so, resolve in 2011 to allow a professional dental copywriter to review your copy and content. Your existing text could contain serious errors or simply not properly say what is of most benefit to your patient and your brand or is not actualising the ultimate goal: getting potential patients to make contact.

A professional dental copywriter can provide free advice on how your text could be improved – this should be a service available to you from any reputable dental marketing expert.

From there, your creative team can determine how to help people recognise your 'superpowers'.

For example, if you are an exemplary cosmetic dental practice, does your copy showcase that expertise or has this aspect of your work been given the same importance as general dentistry on your website?

Copywriting is a small price to pay to give a professional image. Too often, text is recycled from various resources by the in-house 'writer' and becomes not only an unpleasant read, but doesn't achieve what marketing text should achieve for you.

Take action

Speak to a dental marketer and ask them to review your content through their copywriter. Then, based on recommendations given, update your content – within your budget and comfort zone.

Pros Image is everything. Better text means better image and client perception. A professional copywriter provides well-researched content that insightfully portrays your practice, ensuring your ethos is reflected throughout – and, ultimately, saves you time.

Cons There is a cost involved and you do need to provide comments on the drafts produced for you.

7. Dental supplier leaflets – Just say NO!

For those of you with a display of leaflets from suppliers of whitening trays, implants and such – 2011 needs to be the year you just say NO! to supplier leaflets that do nothing for your brand and clutter up your practice.

Supplier-provided leaflets have a generic appearance, say everything about the treatment (often too much) and nothing about your practice.

Take action

Clear the clutter, and then make your own set of leaflets that are streamlined, to the point and well produced. Be proud of your practice and bring your brand image to the forefront. Let patients make the most of your services by providing information that allows their fullest understanding while helping them to feel they are at the best possible dental practice. This may seem like a daunting task, but with the right professional support this will be made easy for you.

Pros Intense brand enforcement, conversions into clients through well designed, practice-branded leaflets

Cons Time consuming, poor design and production can do image damage.

Extra con Avoid freebie leaflets where you are asked for your logo in order to personalise the leaflets. Very often these leaflets are stock design templates and are made through a conveyor-belt process and these designs will not work for you as well as your brand expert could have created them.

8. Tapping into the local rag

Does the mention of newspapers for marketing bring a sour look to your face? Recalling a memory of an advert that put a dent in your budget, and then bought in no business?

Resolve in 2011 to use your local newspaper and become the local brand hero. A local newspaper can be a BIG source of patients for you. The key is to form a very good relationship with your newspaper and commit to regular advertisements.

The main reason why many newspaper adverts do little for a practice is that they are designed by the newspaper for free or by a graphic designer without the understanding of how to carve out a message for maximum impact. The design of your advert is important; it must connect with your specific local market. Before ruling out newspapers altogether because of previous failed attempts, show your adverts to a dental marketer and ask for their opinion on the design and message delivery – it could be that you fell short of a potent design with all the right buzzwords and visual appeal.

Take action

Contact your local newspaper and take a step towards establishing a solid commercial relationship. Your advertising represents income for the newspaper. Call a well-established dental marketing designer for quotes on newspaper advert designs and a package price to support you throughout the year.

Pros Tap into a huge local audience of potential patients that will respond to regular exposure and also re-enforces your brand.

Cons Time necessary to establish a productive relationship with the newspaper and the cost of adverts.

9. Does your branding still represent your practice?

If you can't answer 'yes' to this question, then resolve to update your logo and branding in 2011.

Too many practices spend money promoting themselves without investing sufficient time on one of the biggest marketing decisions they will ever make – their practice logo and branding. Your practice logo is your promise, your vision, and becomes your clients' perception of your practice. A logo that mis-states or misrepresents your practice can dilute almost every marketing activity you undertake.

Take action

If you feel your branding and logo no longer represent your practice, then look to a design and marketing firm with experience in the dental industry to renew and re-vitalise your brand image without alienating clients. If you are unsure if your branding is serving its purpose – get a professional appraisal. Changing for the sake of change alone is not a good idea, but if a change can bring about a whole new visual perception to your brand for the positive, then it is highly advisable.

Pros Create a long term positive impression and put your practice in the vanguard of local competition.

Cons Inexperienced design of a logo, which should speak for itself, can undermine your best marketing efforts.

10. Testimonials that talk the talk

Get testimonials from your client while their life-changing treatment or general pleasant routine experience is fresh in their mind.

Make a point to take before and after pictures and if you are ahead of the game, get them to sit in on a video testimonial for you. 'Social proof' new patients will often want to be reassured by looking at those around them (your existing patients) to make a well informed decision on whether to use you. Strong patient testimonials triggers will offer the same sense of confidence and intimacy with potential patients.

Written referrals are powerful in peppering your marketing – leaflets, adverts, and websites. When you begin a new treatment option, testimonials and related before-and-after images can do much to create a patient comfort zone. Testimonials express happiness with your work and trust in your practice – so much trust that a public statement of support is made.

Take action

Review your existing testimonials and select those that reflect the services you wish to promote. Revise your marketing copy to incorporate your selections.

If you need new testimonials, contact patients and kindly ask for a testimonial. To ensure you have a continuing supply of fresh testimonials, set up a simple form that any patient can complete to offer a testimonial. Testimonials could be submitted online at your website and also be posted in your email flyers or newsletters. As soon as you collect a new testimonial, don't delay and zip it over to your web designer to update your site immediately.

Pros Testimonials can support new treatments, bring in new patients and cost you nothing.



Cons Time and effort to review existing testimonials, collect new testimonials and create form for continuing collection of testimonials to get patient consent. Also getting in the habit to take before and after pictures, but once you 'snap' you just won't be able to stop.

For more, visit www.digimaxdental.co.uk.

Author
Shaz Memon

Shaz Memon is creative director for dental digital marketing experts, Digimax Dental. For more on their work, visit www.digimaxdental.co.uk. The studio is at 113 Crawford Street, Marylebone, London, W1H 2JG.

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