

Managing Marketing

ADA's Guidelines for Practice Success™ (GPS™)

CHECKLIST FOR LAUNCHING A MARKETING STRATEGY

1. Identify – or create – your practice's "brand."

If you're not sure what this means, refer to the three articles in the "Defining and Managing Your Brand" section of this module. Those sections cover [What Is a Brand?](#), [Your Brand and the Name of Your Practice](#), and [Your Logo and Tagline](#).

2. Devise a strategy and establish benchmarks.

Before you create a marketing plan, make sure you know:

- Who your target audience is, for instance, who do you want to respond to your marketing materials?
- What result do you want to realize from your marketing? Do you want to increase scheduled appointments, social media engagement or something else?
- What tactics do you want to invest in and which ones are the most important to you? Do you prefer to use print, mailers, your website or social media?
- What other dental practices are in your area and what advantages does your practice offer to prospective patients?

Once you determine your strategy and create your marketing plan, it's time to develop measurable goals, also called benchmarks, so you can assess the campaign's success. Possible benchmarks include:

- Increased calls
- More scheduled visits
- Fewer no-shows
- Greater engagement in social media
- More referrals

Additional, higher-level benchmarks or milestones to consider include:

- Confirming that all aspects of branding, including your logo, colors and brand message, are consistent
- Optimizing the website so it supports your efforts to turn prospective patients into active patients of record
- Implementing strategies and consistently receiving positive reviews on the leading online business review websites
- Tracking calls from prospective patients to measure ROI of marketing efforts
- Finalizing the 12-month marketing budget
- Setting the 12-month marketing goals
- Selecting marketing channels (direct mail, search engine ads, social media, traditional media such as TV or radio)
- Implementing the marketing plan
- Measuring performance to date as it compares to goals every three months
- Assessing the campaign's success after 12 months and determining your campaign for the next 12 months

3. Build a great – and responsive – website.

Your website is your practice's most powerful marketing tool because it lets prospective patients know how your practice differs from the one down the street.

Another reason it matters is that patients consider themselves healthcare consumers. They research potential health care partners and use the provider's digital presence to determine whether or not they want to pick up the phone – or submit an online form – to make an appointment.

Your website has to do double duty: not only does it have to attract prospective patients, it has to be a resource for existing ones.

There are different approaches to creating websites: you can build one yourself, often by using a readily available template; you can completely outsource the responsibility to a professional; or you can operate somewhere in the middle. Consider what you want to achieve, what internal resources you can dedicate to creating or updating your website, and then decide on the best approach. More information on website development is available in the articles titled [Content Development](#), [Custom versus Template Websites](#) and [Design and Content](#) in the Website Development section of this module. Some practices hire a professional web design firm with extensive experience in working with dental professionals to create their websites since this can help ensure that the website attracts prospective patients and is an effective resource for existing patients.

4. Track patient calls at the front desk.

Make sure the staff at the front desk consistently asks every first-time caller how they heard about the practice and tracks the responses. Review this data monthly so you can assess how many prospective patients are becoming active patients. This information can also alert you to opportunities to enhance front desk staff training or streamline intake processes that might be having a negative impact on your marketing efforts. It will also help you determine which marketing tactics are or aren't producing an acceptable return on investment (ROI).

5. Ask satisfied patients for referrals and online reviews.

Word of mouth has moved to the digital platform. Most prospective patients read online reviews when researching prospective healthcare partners. Patient reviews and testimonials can influence their decisions. Encourage every patient who gives you or your staff a compliment or who expresses genuine appreciation for your skills and expertise to post their feelings online. More information on how to do this is available in the article [Online Reviews](#) in the Social Media section of this module.

6. Just say no – until you have a strategy in place.

Marketing a dental practice can be a challenging and time-consuming endeavor. Be wary of unsolicited sales pitches and promises that sound too good to be true. Always check the references of any potential vendor before doing business. It's a good idea to have your business attorney review any contract before you sign it to ensure that it complies with any applicable federal and local laws and regulations and that it offers reasonable requirements for terminating the agreement.

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