

Reception Area and Office Décor

The reception area and office décor communicate your philosophy of dental practice and your attitude towards patients. It's the first physical contact your patients have with your practice and it leaves an all-important first impression. Everything from clutter to furniture in need of repair – or replacement – will impact the patient's perception of you, your staff and the quality of care that you provide.

The first and best way to evaluate your reception area and office décor is to enter the front door just as your patients would. Step out of the practice and enter it, viewing everything from the patient's perspective. The checklist below will help you determine which areas, if any, of your practice could use a little updating.

Reception Area and Office Décor Checklist

- Is the reception area cheerful, comfortable and welcoming?
 - Is it tasteful without being showy, fancy or too trendy?
 - Does it make a positive impression without making patients think that you're charging too much or that they won't be able to afford services?
 - It is neat and clean, without any visible clutter?
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- Are the furnishings modern, tasteful and comfortable?
- Is the furniture in good condition without any visible signs of wear and tear?

Keep in mind that a reception area that's seen better days may cause patients to think that your techniques and equipment might be a little outdated too.

- Is the temperature comfortable?
- Can patients sit in any area without feeling any direct air flow?

Make sure it's comfortable throughout every season and not too hot, too cold, too muggy or too stale.

- Do the pictures on the walls and any decorations on tables or counters match?
- Is there a single, unified theme to the artwork?

Artwork or other visual elements are key to your décor. Some practices integrate tropical fish tanks (make sure they're clean and quiet) and others use textile art since it provides a calming visual effect and prevents echoes by absorbing sound. Make sure that whatever you use fits the décor of the practice and isn't too showy.

- Is the background music soft and soothing?

Many practices play "smooth jazz" since its timeless sound appeals to most age groups and demographics. Practices that play a specific radio station should choose one that doesn't have a lot of commercial breaks or on-air talent that makes remarks that some might find offensive. You may want to consider subscribing to a service that provide the type of music that you want and takes care of any licensing and copyright arrangements for you as part of the agreement.

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- Does your décor appeal to your primary patient population?

Practices with a mature patient base shouldn't have too many toys or children-oriented objects since adult patients may think that the majority of your patients are children and that you won't be knowledgeable about state-of-the-art treatments for adults.

Materials for children can be kept behind the reception desk and offered to children when they arrive. Appropriate materials include kids' magazines, drawing and coloring supplies, and books and puzzles.

If your practice has a mix of young and old patients, see if it's possible to have a separate room where children can play under the watchful eyes of their parents.

- Are any reading materials current and age appropriate for your patient base?

- Do they match the interests, demographics and age groups of your patients?

- Are magazines arranged neatly?

Keep a variety of current magazines available on low tables or a rack/stand and have someone up front neaten them up several times each day. Provide magazines that promote general health and wellness in addition to those that promote special interests.

- Is your diploma visible?

- Do you display your certificates of membership in leading dental organizations?

- Are any special awards or citations you've received visible for patients to see?

While you don't need a "Wall of Fame" that highlights every professional achievement, knowing where you went to school and a little more about your professional accomplishments can boost patients' confidence. It can also spark conversations that allow you and your patients to relate on non-dental topics, which goes a long way in boosting loyalty.

Having these plaques and certificates in a main area, rather than in a single operatory, ensures that every patient sees them.

- Do you have an album or picture frames that highlight "before" and "after" pictures of successful treatments?

These types of images can promote treatments and services available through the practice without being a "hard sell." Make sure you have written authorization from patients in the pictures to take and share those images. A sample photo release follows this checklist.

- Are print copies of your current practice newsletter available?

Even though you may email the newsletter to patients, some may not open or "click through" the email to read it. Or they might plan to read it later and forget to go back to it.

- Have you assigned someone on staff responsibility for monitoring the office décor and letting you know when something needs to be repaired or replaced?

Assign your office manager or receptionist responsibility for noticing patients' reactions to the reception area and take note of what catches their eye and what causes them to cringe. That person should periodically inspect the furnishings to see if anything needs to be cleaned, repaired or replaced. They should also assess areas beyond the office itself, such as the lobby and exterior of the building.
