

> Do Sales Reps Still Matter?

Did I write that headline to elicit a reaction? You bet. Do I think this is a legitimate question to ask? Yes, now more than ever. For years, I've discussed technology's influence on our profession and have written a number of columns on the ongoing saga of Amazon and its relationship to our industry. In many ways, the explosive growth of Amazon and the shrinking of bricks-and-mortar retailers has been an ongoing debate since the first internet bubble burst. In fact, according to a recent report from *Bloomberg Businessweek*, of the four major retail peers with an online presence—Target, Best Buy, Walmart and Amazon—Amazon captured a whopping 89 percent share of spending during the five-week shopping period that started on Thanksgiving. According to CNBC, nearly 7,000 retail store closures were announced in 2017, a 229 percent increase from 2016. And now, starting off 2018, Sam's Club plans to close 63 stores around the country.

What does this have to do with your dental practice? For starters, it's likely that you have a relationship with one of the major distributors and at least one sales rep who visits your office regularly. If you manage to buy all of your supplies from faceless entities, you're likely to meet with a sales rep the next time you buy a piece of equipment bigger than a suitcase. If you use any name-brand dental products from companies that employ a field sales force, then you've likely been visited by a sales rep. The point is, you have—and will continue to have—a relationship with one or more sales reps. Back to the question posed in the headline: They absolutely still matter.

My first experience with a dental rep was when I opened my practice in 2002. I selected Henry Schein for my equipment, supplies and practice management software. I'm proud to say I still do business with the same supply rep after 16 years! This is a testament to his focus

and swift handling of anything that needs his attention. It's no surprise that he is one of the best in their company.

I recently purchased a new piece of technology from Henry Schein and spent a few hours in my office with the company's technology rep, who showed me how to use the device. The time he spends answering my questions after the sale is proof of his value to my practice. His demonstrated commitment to my satisfaction will not only build value in my purchase, but also set him up as a primary resource for future investments. In fact, during his visit I told him that he was a big part of my decision, because he had many years of experience with this technology. I knew there would be questions as I incorporated this into my practice. I was also reminded through our conversations of what can happen when a less competent rep is involved with a transaction. We exchanged stories of dentists who vowed to avoid certain companies because of a poor service experience.

This was certainly not my first experience with a terrific rep. In my December 2014 column, I described the terrific team from Patterson Dental who coordinated the purchase and installation of seven rooms of new A-dec equipment. The purchase, planning and installation were a team effort. My Patterson rep was such a big help coordinating the team that when he moved to Benco, so did some of my business. Personal relationships like these cannot be duplicated with a mouse and keyboard. There are two levels of product success: First, they must perform as advertised, and second, they must be supported by knowledgeable people who ensure your success.

If you have stories to share about the dental reps in your life, please share them in the comments section of this article online. You can also reach me via email: tom@dentaltown.com or on Twitter: [@ddsTom](https://twitter.com/ddsTom). ■



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