With over 32 years of dental practice experience, Dr. Bernard Fink knows dentistry. In 1969, Bernard B. Fink, DDS, CEO of Ciraden, started his career in dentistry as the co-founder of Dental Associates, a dental practice located in northern Virginia. The practice began as a two-person, single-site dental office and quickly grew to 24 dentists practicing at nine sites. Dr. Fink has been the Chief Executive Officer of Dental Associates since 1987.

According to Fink, dentists were focused on the same thing 30 years ago as they are today—delivering dental services to patients with ever-increasing rapidity, allowing the dentist to service more patients and increase productivity. Easier said than done...

After 27 years of dental practice management, Dr. Fink knows what dentistry needs. In 1997, Dr. Fink made great strides to fill that need. After years of struggling with traditional practice management software, he set out to create a truly unique software solution. What prompted his innovative quest were the extensive problems he encountered with practice management software over the course of his career, making him question the productivity, reliability and efficiency of nearly every system he had integrated into practice. Furthermore, dealing with temperamental practice management systems while managing nine practices proved to be especially problematic.

“Historically, practice management software has never really factored in the multi-site practice” said Fink. “I was using a Unix-based system because that was what would work with a central server. The system was quite cumbersome, not at all intuitive and extremely difficult to use, unfortunately, that was all that was available at the time.”

Having served as an associate in a single-site practice, a member of a group practice and the CEO of nine dental offices, Dr. Fink led himself through a diverse career in dentistry at Dental Associates. Encountering practice management obstacles and inefficiencies at every juncture led Dr. Fink to create Ciraden, a practice management system built on a Web-based platform to meet the needs of every practicing dentist. It is a rare breed of practice management software because it is available to users as an Application Service Provider (ASP), which means dentists can now utilize their existing PCs to manage their entire practice. Grounded on the fact that dentists go to dental school, not business school, Dr. Fink built Ciraden to function almost as the dentist’s silent business partner. Ciraden software puts a tool into the hands of each owner/operator that can manage all the business aspects of their dental practice, and allows them to focus more on their main objective—caring for patients.

“This all-encompassing practice management tool, put at the dentist’s fingertips, gives him or her the power to call into play a wide range of internal data management systems, such as billing, marketing and scheduling,” said Fink. “In addition, the system is unique because it also employs a myriad of external services through its affiliated business service programs.”

The Future of Practice Management
It took a while, but dentistry has finally joined
the rest of the business world—virtually every dental practice in the nation now has a computer in the office. Initially, computers were used in the dental practice to automate billing, insurance forms and recall notices.

Then, the growth of the Internet drove dentists and office staff to communicate via the Web, research industry information electronically and potentially purchase products online. Today, personal computers can be used to automate and manage virtually every aspect of the dental practice.

In 1969, when Dr. Fink got his start in dentistry, “A.S.P.” were the initials of a couple of his patients. In 1997, when Dr. Fink brought Ciraden to market, ASP became synonymous with cutting-edge practice management technology. Ciraden is the first truly comprehensive Web-based practice management system. Generally speaking, an Application Service Provider (ASP) hosts and manages software for small- to medium-sized businesses, “renting” the software and managed support services rather than selling them outright. By allowing users to rent the software, ASPs eliminate the high upfront costs associated with traditional practice management systems.

The early fears associated with Web-based practice management software were concerns over security, support and privacy. However, Ciraden has taken decisive steps to ease dentists’ fears by offering secure back-end administration networks, hardened router configurations and comprehensive access policies.

“The security of an Application Service Provider is a huge benefit. When patient information is kept in a dental office, the files are vulnerable to everything from accidents to disgruntled employees,” said Fink. “With Ciraden, all patient information is encrypted and protected off-site, but at the same time it is easy for the doctor and staff to access data from anywhere. I’ve even accessed patient records from my boat!”

An added benefit of an ASP is that it was designed to readily adapt to change, and by offering automatic software upgrades an ASP will not require the dentist to purchase an entirely new unit. While the system itself is kept within the office, the data can be sent back and forth to any kind of computer anywhere, creating a streamlined process of communication.

Ease of Use, Ease of Integration
If you’ve successfully integrated a PC into your practice, you’ve done the hard part. Incorporating the Ciraden software into your practice is as simple as checking your email. The software is extremely intuitive and user-friendly.

“Of course I tried the software on my practice first,” said Fink. “Even in the infancy of the Ciraden software, we were able to change over the data for 42,800 patients in eight hours, and seven of those hours were spent testing the data. The system works with the user, not against him, so there really isn’t any change over the data for 42,800 patients in eight hours, and seven of those hours were spent testing the data. The system works with the user, not against him, so there really should be no fear on the patient’s part.”

The Ciraden user interface is accessible from any computer with Internet access and is available for download at the Ciraden Web site. The software is regularly updated through the Internet, so there is no need to modify or reinstall the software, only to update it via the Internet.

Ciraden’s corporate staff includes over 50 employees in information technology, customer service, sales, operations, practice integration, accounting, marketing, business development, and human resources. Their team is dedicated to building and enhancing resources to ensure each practice’s success.
"Computer Conversion in the 21st Century"

By: Dr. Alan Marx


I did a hospital residency and joined up with an experienced dental practitioner in 1976. This is when I first discovered computerization in dentistry. I had no idea that a dental office housed giant servers and printers. Is this what I had to look forward to? This was bookkeeping and billing at its peak.

In 1978, when I opened my practice, I went with an outsourcing computer company to handle my accounting. I received billing and production reports on a monthly basis. This was one of the first signs of dentistry becoming a business with some control. Computerization still had a long way to go, but dental office automation was beginning to make some headway.

In the 1980s, I started a practice and couldn’t afford a computer right away—a standalone was about $20,000 and a multitasking one was about $35,000. In nearly two years my practice started to grow exponentially so I invested in a two-station front desk network. The maintenance on the entire system was about $250/month. During thunderstorms, I hoped that the battery backup worked but unfortunately most of the time it didn’t withstand the storm. Furthermore, the system took about three days to complete a backup. I was growing very tired of wearing the cumbersome hat of an IT manager.

After five years, I made the switch to Doc Aide, but the conversion proved to be a disaster. Only names, addresses and telephone numbers converted. My staff came in for three days to add data and it took an entire six months to get up to speed. My next practice management conquest led me to Dentec, but the conversion problems and cost were still an issue.

I became extremely disenchanted with practice management computer systems until I heard about Ciraden—no back-up, Internet-based, low start-up cost, discounts on supplies, automated billing, no maintenance fee. That was enough to convince me, so I went for it. Honestly, I figured it really couldn’t get any worse. What I discovered though is it really can’t get any better! All patient data converted easily—overnight! It’s so user-friendly that I learned the software in one day.

Hands down, Ciraden was the best surprise I have ever received at work, because it has allowed me to virtually take my “hands off” the tedious business management aspects of dentistry. It has completely rid me of the worries of practice management and allows me to concentrate on taking care of my patients.