We look forward to 2016 as a fantastic year for orthodontists through effective marketing. Spreading the message, “When it comes to braces, aligners and retainers, an orthodontist is the smart choice,” has never been easier. By mastering customer service, public relations, and relationship marketing, orthodontists’ reach, response, and return on investment (ROI) in acquiring new patients is sure to reach an all-time high. Here are twelve marketing tips for 2016.

**Internal marketing:**

**Customer service**

1. **Word of Mom**

   Target women as a key audience for direct-marketing efforts. Women have spending power. They are mothers, wives, partners, business owners and decision makers. Chances are, if a new patient is brought to your orthodontic office, it is due to a woman—a mother, a girlfriend, or a wife. Better still, moms are easy to reach on social media.

   Jay Conrad Levenson’s book, *Guerilla Marketing*, reveals that women control the majority of purchasing power. They also tend to handle the family finances.

   Find local women’s and mom’s groups in your community and get involved. Host a meeting at your office or become a guest speaker for a women’s group. Engage women on Facebook and on your personal Facebook page. Yes, that’s right, your personal Facebook page. Women want a conversation. Be friends with moms. Make a list of the top 10 moms in your practice and appoint them practice ambassadors. Keep them informed on practice activities and events. Let them help spread your office news.

   No one will appreciate outstanding customer service more than busy moms. Don’t keep moms waiting. Always maintain open and honest communication with moms—they are on a tight schedule. If there is an unfortunate wait, communicate this and ask Mom if she can wait or needs to reschedule. To a busy mom, quality service is even more important than price and location. Customer service is the new marketing with Mom. Spread your orthodontic office news by “word of Mom.”

2. **Prizes, treasures, gift cards and rewards**

   An orthodontic office would not be complete without toys and prizes. These rewards are a motivational tool and
popularity builder with kids under the age of 9. Children love receiving a prize for a job well done or even just for showing up.

Let’s not forget teens and adults. Have small treasures ready for that special moment when you need to give recognition and thanks to a fan for referring family and friends.

You might be thinking, “What’s up with all the ephemera?” Whether it is pens, pencils, hats, T-shirts, wristbands, Frisbees, magnets or keyrings, the truth is, all of these personalized items are walking billboards of your orthodontic practice in your local community. These things will have reach in your immediate area, leading to word-of-mouth conversations, recognition, branding, response, and return on investment (ROI).

Don’t be frugal when it comes to giving appreciation and thanks through rewards. Get creative. Make it permanent and physical with a small token. The more colorful, unique, and remarkable, the better. Twenty thousand kaleidoscope pencils have more of a marketing impact than many costlier, larger marketing items.

Give every patient a copy of her or his completed before-and-after photos. This will serve as an effective and powerful tell-a-friend tool that is sure to create excitement about your orthodontic services with your patient’s family and friends.

Prioritize email marketing. Build your email list. Keep score of how many current email addresses you hold in your database. Have one person responsible for reporting this score at your monthly team meeting. A large email list is a valuable asset.

Studies have shown that 91 percent of consumers check email daily. Email marketing is roughly 40 times better than Facebook or Twitter for acquiring new customers. Grow the size of your email list and grow your practice. Use the automation in your orthodontic management software to improve email marketing performance, or consider Constant Contact or a text-message service such as Demandforce.

External marketing: Public relations

4. Events

“You’re invited to a special event just for you.”

Holding community events gives the orthodontist the opportunity to show her or his kind, generous, personal side. What would Christmas be without Santa Claus? These events also give the orthodontist an opportunity to meet new people in the community, and mingle with patients, their families and friends, community members, and referring doctors and their team members. Excitement preceding, during, and following the event will give your orthodontic practice buzz in the community.

Pick a popular community venue that holds more than 1,000 people. Make arrangements to have a venue buy-out. Print flyers seven months in advance and invite every patient: past, present, and future. Encourage them all to bring friends, family members, and colleagues. You will find that your community will look forward to your special event, year after year. It will become a community tradition as you become the neighborhood orthodontist.

5. Speaking at schools

Whether it’s at preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, junior colleges, or continuing education in your community, be a community helper by speaking and participating at schools. What is the best method to get started speaking at a school? Send a flyer. Then sit back and wait for the calls to come. They will come. Schools are always looking for guest speakers and special educational guests, and you are it.

Whether you’re talking about oral hygiene instruction, or dental development, or speaking at a career day, make your presentation fun. The more props, the better. After your presentation, give out a descriptive flyer and leave toothbrushes. A school visit can be accomplished during lunchtime.
6. Mobile-friendly websites

How does your orthodontic practice look on a cell phone? It is anticipated that the growth in the use of mobile devices for search in 2016 will be up 7.9 percent from what is already an all-time high. It is essential that your website be mobile friendly. Prioritize the new customer’s experience by speaking directly to him or her and having call-to-action buttons on the home page of your mobile-friendly site.

In website design, less is more. The average viewer spends seven seconds on your home page. A contrasting-color, call-to-action button on the home page will allow the new viewer to make her or his initial appointment, or send you a direct email. Be sure to have your site connected to all social media and review sites, as well. Answer all inquiries daily.

7. Valpak

This may surprise you. Nothing reaches homes more effectively than Valpak.

For a low cost (about $.026 per home), it is easy to reach thousands of homes in your local community. I know what you’re thinking: “That little piece of paper?” Of all the print advertising, guides, postcards, bulletins, magazine, programs and newspapers available, Valpak offers the highest reach, response and return on investment.

In addition, Valpak offers a powerful online association that’s linked to Google, to help drive the consumer search to make your phones ring and keep your exam chair occupied. If you are seeking effectiveness rather than prestige or glamor, this may be the correct channel for your marketing dollars.

8. Yelp

Orthodontists will continue to rule Yelp in 2016. Why? Because orthodontists offer outstanding customer service, and when patients are happy, they can’t wait to tell someone about it.

Some 88 percent of consumers make choices based on online comments from other customers. Yelp is the new phone book. In terms of public relations marketing, Yelp is an orthodontist’s dream.

Take time to let your patients who love you know that you are on Yelp, and how much a five-star review would mean to you. Update your Yelp site periodically to keep it attractive and fresh. Answer all inquiries and contact all reviewers who rated you less than five stars. Make things right and keep things right so you can shine on Yelp.

Don’t forget: “Find us on Yelp!”

9. Optimization across social networks

Strategize social and interactive ways for your future orthodontic patients to find you online. Content will continue to be king in 2016. Content marketing includes news regarding your products (braces, Invisalign, retainers) and services (tooth straightening, smile makeover, improved function, oral health and patient happiness). This content will be shared on your social media sites in posts, video and blogs.

In 2016, emphasis will continue to shift from pure search-engine optimization to optimizing across all social media networks. A professional video posted to YouTube will help customers find you.

Tell the truth; make a video; change the world. Your video can be on YouTube, your website, and all social sites. Video can also be played on local cable TV.

According to research analysts at Seeking Alpha, regular TV viewers will continue to drop in 2016 as mobile drives online video. There is an anticipated 19.8 percent increase in video consumption for 2016, according to Online Video Forecasts. Don’t miss this wave by not having a professional video ready.

For assistance with social networks, visit My Social Practice at MySocialPractice.com.

External marketing:
Relationship marketing

10. “Can’t do lunch? How about dinner?”

Time with professional colleagues is time well spent. We’re all busy, but nothing beats one-on-one interaction for generating referrals. The list of possibilities is endless: breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, girls’ night out, or even a round of golf.

Relationships are the spice of life. I, for one, know that when a colleague takes the time to get to know me and shows interest in what is important to me, he or she gets my next ten referrals. It can be the same for you. Take time to get to know your colleagues and to love your colleagues, whether they are general dentists, specialists, physicians or other health-care professionals in your local community.

11. Before-and-after photos

Education will increase orthodontic acumen regarding orthodontic problems and how they can be fixed by a professional. For this, before-and-after photos presented by the orthodontist are critical. All forms of education—whether it’s participation in a Seattle Study Club, distribution of an interesting
article, or an orthodontic book of before-and-after photos—all forms of education will generate interest in orthodontic treatment. The more you can remind others about the benefits of orthodontic treatment, the more top-of-mind you remain. Photographic evidence of your results can provide a way of achieving this.

Before-and-after photos are our orthodontic product. These final photos are a powerful marketing tool, not only for referring offices, but also with your patients and the community. Give every patient a copy of her or his completed before-and-after photos. This will serve as an effective and powerful tell-a-friend tool that is sure to create excitement about your orthodontic services with your patient’s family and friends.

12. Personal phone calls and thank-you notes
Take time to get to know your colleagues and show them how much you appreciate them. Visit their offices. Call them on the phone. Ask them how they are doing. Recognition goes a long way to ensuring that you’re memorable. The greatest business executives in the world start their week with 10 personal phone calls or 10 handwritten notes. Being nice spans all orthodontic marketing, from patients to community, to colleagues. Show everyone you meet how much you truly care about him or her and the orthodontic treatment you provide. Give your practice a personal touch.

Try these ideas and watch your practice bloom in 2016! ■

Do you plan to implement new marketing techniques in 2016? Comment on this article at Orthotown.com/magazine.aspx.

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