Creating a Lasting Impression

Sirona Dental Systems continues to lead the way in the arena of CAD/CAM dentistry as it paves new ground with the unveiling of its CEREC AC.

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When most dentists think of CAD/CAM dentistry, the first thing to come to mind is Sirona Dental System’s CEREC system (which stands for Chairside Economical Restoration of Esthetic Ceramics). Since CEREC 1 was introduced in 1987, there are more than 9,000 CEREC owners in the United States and Canada, and more than 13 million CEREC restorations have been placed worldwide. Now, four years in the making, Sirona is unveiling its newest CAD/CAM system – the Acquisition Center – and Dentaltown Magazine interviewed Sirona President Michael Augins to learn more about this new development.
CEREC has been the leader in CAD/CAM dentistry for more than 20 years. Is this segment developing at the speed you would expect?

Augins: After 20 years we feel CAD/CAM in dentistry is well on its way to becoming mainstream. The pace of adoption of CEREC in all of its forms is accelerating and we believe that CEREC utilization will continue to grow. With the introduction of our new Acquisition Center (AC) and pricing models we believe that today there is a CEREC system that is right for just about every practicing dentist.

On the lab side, CAD/CAM has been rapidly adopted because it is more productive, economical and repeatable than traditional lab processes without the need for highly skilled labor. The number of ceramists is steadily decreasing and competition from offshore labs has had a tremendous impact on the lab business. They need a way to compete. Additionally, the rise of Zirconia restorations has resulted in increased CAD/CAM use because, by far, the best way to process Zirconia is via CAD/CAM. We think that labs want a complete system that provides an extremely broad range of materials and indications. CEREC InLab offers labs of all sizes a way to stay competitive in an increasingly competitive market.

On the dentist side, efficiency is important but there are other considerations as well. Patient demand, increasing ease of use and the proven quality of CEREC restorations have driven adoption in recent years.

Obviously single-visit dentistry without physical impressions and temporaries resonates with patients, and in today’s economy CEREC is a great way for dentists to build value for their patients. This makes them more willing to pay for dentistry and come back to the practice. Software advancements, like the recently introduced Biogeneric software, have made design so much easier and faster — many dentists are delegating much of the procedure to their auxiliary staff making chairside CAD/CAM even more efficient. Lastly, we hear repeatedly from new CEREC owners that their CEREC restorations fit at least as good, and typically better, than what they were getting from their lab. Digital restorations can be far more accurate than models made from traditional impressions.

Speaking of impressions, the interest level in digital impression systems has been growing in recent years. Laboratory surveys overwhelmingly indicate their number-
one challenge is the quality of physical impressions coming through their door. And it’s not like it’s the dentists’ fault! Physical impressions are hard to get right and that speaks to the antiquated process. A digital impression camera, like our new CEREC Bluacam, just makes taking impressions so easy, fast and convenient for the patient, dentists are telling us, “Yeah, why wouldn’t I do it this way? Everything in my practice is going digital, why should impressions be any different?”

How would you describe the recent release of Sirona’s Acquisition Center? How big is this leap?

Augins: I’d say we’ve made a big leap in both accuracy and ease of use. The camera’s blue LED light source is extremely powerful allowing us to incorporate an anti-shake feature in the camera. The camera also senses the right time to take the image and does so automatically. It’s pretty clever. Blue light, by the way, has a smaller and more precise wavelength than anything else on the market. These advancements mean even beginners can jump in with that camera and begin taking precise digital impressions easily. Half and full arches are easy and quick, even for new users. That’s a big advancement.

Additionally we’re adding a new way to pay for CEREC called Pay as you Go. Buying a Pay as you Go CEREC AC means you have a lower capital cost up front and you only pay for the restorations you make. Each unit milled is deducted from a pre-paid activation key. We’ve been offering this on the lab side for years and it allows a new, lower price point for people who want to get into CAD/CAM. Of course you can buy the new CEREC AC the traditional way, which is by far the most economical way of getting into CAD/CAM in the long run, but we think the Pay as you Go pricing will be interesting for some dentists.

What are some of the software’s new features?

Augins: We made improvements in several areas – all focused on making the system easier to use. Dentists don’t want to work on software, they want to fix teeth. Whenever we look to software development we keep this at the forefront of our thinking. So we made our digital impression interface is easier to use with more powerful features, we’ve made it easy to see (and fix) when the restoration is too
thin and we've incorporated 3-4 unit provisional bridges into the software.

**Certainly you have previewed this new technology with some of your users prior to launch, what were their reactions? What are some of the favorite features?**

**Augins:** We've been testing the CEREC AC since the summer and the response has been very positive. Our testers are unanimously enthusiastic about the increased precision and speed of the Bluecam. They are also impressed with the improvements we've made to the software to make digital impressions easier. We recently asked for a few of the units back and not one of them put their hand up, so I guess that answers how they feel about the new unit.

**Is there a plan in place for your customers who have recently purchased CEREC 3? If so, what is it?**

**Augins:** All existing CEREC owners have an opportunity to upgrade their CEREC 3 Acquisition units to the new CEREC AC. When they trade in their existing Acquisition unit we'll give them a credit toward a new AC unit. The credit amount is related to the age of their CEREC 3 Acquisition unit. But each CEREC owner will be contacted personally by their Patterson representative who will explain the program in detail.

**What are your plans for the official launch later this month at the 144th Chicago Dental Society Midwinter Meeting?**

**Augins:** We're going to make a big splash in Chicago. People need to understand “CAD/CAM for everyone” is not just a slogan, it is a reflection of the times. Every industry, which traditionally relied on extensive manual labor, has adopted digital technologies to increase their efficiency and improve quality. Dentistry is no different and, as Gordon Christensen said recently, dentists just won't be making too many physical impressions in the near future – we see this changing over completely to digital. The reason we say “CAD/CAM for everyone” is because you can get into the technology with Sirona at any level – just digital impressioning all the way to chairside milling with the MC XL. We have price points from $24,000 to $60,000 to more than $100,000. We're the only company that offers every kind of CAD/CAM and we want to make sure people know about it.

Also as everyone who has been to the Midwinter meeting knows, Chicago is a great place to have a party, so look for us to be advertising a special “blue” party to go along with our new Bluecam theme!

**Is this launching simultaneously in Europe and worldwide for that matter?**

**Augins:** Yes, we're launching simultaneously worldwide. In the U.S. we're going to make a big push at the Chicago Midwinter Meeting while the International Dental Show in Cologne, Germany, will be the big event in Europe.

**What is the relationship between chairside CAD/CAM and our current economic conditions? Is there a positive connection to be made?**

**Augins:** CEREC has proven to be an outstanding investment for the vast majority of our owners. Few if any dental products offer a superior return on investment. CEREC lowers practice overhead, increases patient satisfaction and treatment acceptance and reduces or eliminates lab fees.

Patients are willing to pay for goods and services they value. Many are still taking vacations, for example. How can a dentist add value to a crown procedure? You can start by taking a digital impression rather than a physical impression. That's value. You can follow that up by seating the crown in the same appointment. That's real value! Patients love single-visit dentistry and are willing to pay for the added convenience. Plus, how is your practice different from the one down the street? People have choices.

Second, dentists, like any CEO, should be looking how they can leverage the capital in their practice. That is, can you do something that lowers costs while simultaneously increasing efficiency? Time and again CEREC shows the ability to do this. And in the current economic climate there are few better opportunities for a dentist to invest than his or her practice.

For more information about Sirona, please visit www.sirona.com.