

Out with the Old And In with the New

Why renovating your office with the latest and greatest will benefit you and your clients.

by Shelby Stevens

You might think you're saving money or being "economical" by keeping your office and its décor as it was when you first opened 20 years ago, but the truth of the matter is that you might actually be losing clients and preventing new ones from coming in. By investing in the appearance of your office you'll reap some major benefits and be able to show your clients that you care and you know how to evolve with the times, in turn growing your practice and reputation. Talk about being economical.

Who Cares?

Renovating your office isn't only about being able to show up to work in a fancy environment and showing your clients you have good taste, it's about creating a positive space for your staff and clients so that they feel confident about the space too. It's also about keeping up to par with the latest technologies and advancements in your field and beyond.

"If your office is pink and mauve, and hasn't been updated since 1975, what do you think your patients will think about you? They'll wonder if your services are as old as your practice is," Joey Wenum, vice president of sales and marketing of Blue Frog Construction points out. "Even if this isn't the truth, that perception will be there."

When your clients see you've invested time and money in your own practice and workspace, they will then surmise that you're a dentist who stays in touch with the latest trends. This will, in turn, lead them to trust you even more. And like a domino effect, this will encourage your internal referral base to grow extensively.

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“Renovating is all about being able to build out your office for state-of-the-art equipment, and that is what your patients want to see. They appreciate that you stay up-to-date with the latest. We want to provide for our community the utmost quality dentistry. It’s been my dream to have massage chairs and TVs with headphones for patients to listen to and not the drill.”

*— Dr. Daryl Kimche
Kimche Cosmetic & Sports Dentistry
Atlanta, Georgia
Renovation performed by Blue Frog
Construction of Suwanee, Georgia.*

“Just like when choosing a restaurant, you don’t want to go to the old run-down place that seems dirty and old, you want to go to the new place down the road that has the latest stuff,” Mike Rubio, vice president of operations of Blue Frog Construction says.

The Important Stuff

There’s more to renovating your office than just creating a more visually appealing place – it’s also about renovating your equipment, technologies and more. The typical design of a dental office has evolved greatly in the last 20 years and has become much more efficient, so check into what you’re missing.

One particularly important rationale to update your office revolves around the materials and chemicals that are currently present. Some materials used 15 to 20 years ago are likely highly toxic. For example, your cabinetry and the glue used to secure it can carry formaldehyde; your flooring and ceiling might have asbestos; and mercury has often been found in older lighting and ballasts. By keeping these and never updating, you’re subjecting yourself, your staff and each person who walks through your doors to unwanted health problems such as asthma attacks, mesothelioma and more.

HVAC systems are also much more efficient than the setups from years ago. If you notice your staff getting sick fairly often, taking sick days or not feeling well while at work, get the air system and its quality checked.

Newer HVAC and lighting systems also save a great deal of money, not to mention the hefty tax credits that are available. If your systems haven’t been renovated in the last 10 years, you might be paying almost five times what you could be.

Another important factor in updating your space is making sure that it’s ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. If someone who is handicapped gets hurt in your office due to a rule not followed on your part, that’s means for a lawsuit. This isn’t the best way to be economical! Examples of elements amidst your office and property that need to be checked based solely on wheelchair accessibility are the widths of doorways, counter heights and access into and throughout the building if there are steps and multi-levels. Other components to consider are levers on door knobs and fire exits and proper and accessible exits in the case of a fire or any other emergency.

You should also consider ergonomics. For instance, how many steps does it take to get to a specific area? Let’s say 10 for the sake of example. Now, multiply that number by how many times you make that trip each day, multiplied by five days a week and so on. Is this the most efficient way for this task to be done? Or can the sanitation devices be located closer to each dental chair? The printer closer to the computer? Think about your charts and patient information as well. Do you still use all paper files and have them located in file cabinets spread from room to room throughout your office? Consider going paperless and switching to electronic records – it’s much more eco-friendly, takes up virtually no space and is literally right at your office staff’s fingertips.

Time is Money

When it comes to the scheduling of your renovation, be sure to go over this in depth with your contractor before the first nail is hammered. If you chose the best contractor for the job from the competitive bidding stage you’ve already gone through, you should have one who will work with you closely to ensure your practice is closed for a minimal amount of time, if at all.

Typically, it’s ideal for you to be able to shut your practice down for roughly a week. If you think there are certain clients who just can’t go without their exam

being performed in that specific time frame, get in touch with your peers. If you have a good relationship with fellow dental professionals, they will usually allow you to take a few clients in their facility to keep you going and occupied. “Allot yourself time to renovate,” Rubio says. “Don’t expect it to happen overnight.”

Of course, contractors can work with you to not only work during the day, but to actually work overnight as well. You can get the work to take place on a 24-hour scheduling plan by shutting down for a short period of time, allowing the work to be fulfilled day and night to ensure it’s completed by the date originally stated.

Another option is to attempt doing the renovation in stages, although this is the least efficient way. This process will not only take longer but cost more, too. The benefit to this type of schedule is that you’ll be able to keep your practice open each day with normal hours, sparing no time with your patients.

Aesthetically Speaking

It’s a good idea to renovate and update your dental office every five years. If you feel as though this is too extensive and you don’t think an entire renovation is needed, at least consider updating the aesthetics. Keep in mind, too, that the life expectancy on the flooring in a commercial setting is roughly seven years.

As you gather ideas and samples for the interior décor of your soon-to-be freshly rejuvenated office, it’s highly recommended to hire a professional for this feat. Many non-interior design professionals try to take this on themselves but have a difficult time getting it right and connecting with their clients and patients in this way. You want to create a warm and welcoming environment, giving your patients a sense of comfortability and positivity. Remove yourself from the equation and trust a designer to give you what your clients want – it’s his or her job to know what that is and give it to you.

Great and Not-so-great Expectations

There are some things you should learn to expect when it comes to construction inside your office so you can prepare for what’s to come.

Hire a local dental company to move your equipment out and back in. You don’t want to rely on your contractor and employees to handle this because it’s a large liability.

Consult with a low-voltage company to update your computers, networking systems, phones, data, TVs, and audio and video entertainment.

Also, as Rubio points out, don’t be afraid to think outside of the box. Whether you realize it or not, your staff has ideas and expectations for their work environment also and, if asked, many of them will more than likely have a number of negative comments about their currently outdated office.

What Are You Waiting For?

By taking the time to create an environment that is pleasing to you, your staff and your clients, you’re creating a win-win situation. “The emphasis is to create a warm and welcoming environment that will reduce the stress of your patients and the add-benefit is a happier staff with increased productivity,” Wenum points out. Think of it this way: if you don’t do it, the next guy will. ■



Author’s Bio

Shelby Stevens holds a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism and History from Georgia State University. She has been published in multiple magazines, such as the local Atlanta publications *Jezebel*, *Tuxedo Road* and *Atlanta Home Improvement*. She currently resides in Atlanta where she is a writer and works in retail advertising.

