Henry Schein and Dentrix are both well-known and well-respected names in the dental profession. They're known for reliable products, cutting-edge software and excellent customer service. Kevin Bunker, president of Henry Schein North America Dental Practice Solutions, chats with Dentaltown Magazine about the brand-new Dentrix Ascend, a cloud-based system that completely reimagines dental practice management.

Why is Henry Schein adding a new web-based practice management offering for dentists?

**Bunker:** Cloud computing, with its ability to deliver fast access to data and applications from anywhere, is a growing technology trend. The cloud offers many advantages including 24/7 remote access, pay-as-you-go monthly fees and lower hardware costs, to name a few. Today, most of us do not give a second thought to banking, buying products and storing our data in the cloud. Many of our customers told us they now want to move their practice management system to the cloud, but only with a strong, mature company like Henry Schein that can ensure their long-term success. And with recent advances in web development tools, mobile broadband and new devices like iPads, we can now offer cloud-based services that weren't possible just a few years ago. The time is now right for Dentrix Ascend. We've harnessed our 25 years of software development experience to leverage new cloud technology and deliver a completely reimagined practice management system for today's cloud-based practice.

Is Dentrix Ascend just Dentrix on the web?

**Bunker:** No. Dentrix Ascend is a completely redesigned system. That's what makes it so exciting. In the same way we developed the original Dentrix years ago, we set out to build a new practice management system from a blank canvas. For the past two years, we conducted extensive research in dental practices to see how practice management has changed – what works well and what doesn’t. We combined this research with the best ideas that made Dentrix the market leader and developed a completely new, next-generation practice management system.
system and elevated it to the cloud, thus the name, Dentrix Ascend.

**When will Dentrix Ascend be officially launched?**

**Bunker:** Dentrix Ascend has been in beta testing since last November and was unveiled as a beta product at Chicago Midwinter to give dentists a glimpse of how the new system streamlines daily operations, blends electronic services directly into practice workflow and takes advantage of cloud technology. At that time we also announced the Early Adopter Program to let practices apply to be beta testers. Our plans are to complete testing and roll out the initial market release of Dentrix Ascend later this year.

**How will Dentrix Ascend improve upon today’s practice management systems?**

**Bunker:** Our team had one overriding goal in developing Dentrix Ascend – create the most usable system for today’s digital dental offices.

First, we gave Dentrix Ascend a “Natural User Interface,” which guides users through their actual practice workflow, highlighting the information and tools they need for their current task at hand. This eliminates clutter on the screen, making it easier to complete important tasks first. It also makes the entire system easier to learn.

Dentrix Ascend also recognizes each user’s unique role in the practice, including billing coordinator, receptionist, dentist and others. It prioritizes tasks based on each role and measures how effectively they are executed. It guides users in their work routines and gives them feedback on their performance. We call this workflow design: Goals, Problems, Solutions, or GPS. An example of GPS in action is when the billing coordinator logs into Dentrix Ascend and sees a graphical report showing the number of unattached procedures, unsent claims and overdue claims. Each graphic is also a navigation item that takes the user to a report where all the information needed to complete the task is available.
in a single view. When the task is complete the initial overview screen is updated to show there are no more work items for that task. This really helps new users quickly become productive in the office, even if they have never performed that role before.

The system’s patient-centered design presents users with everything they need to know about the patient in a single overview screen so they can focus more on the patient and not on the system.

Dentrix Ascend can also be accessed using multiple platforms, including PC, Mac or iPad. Because it supports Google Chrome, there is a wide variety of platforms that are potentially available to our subscribers. We will begin developing smartphone-specific views soon after our initial product release.

What will the launch of Dentrix Ascend mean for your 50,000 customers using other Henry Schein practice management systems?

**Bunker:** We recognize web applications are not for everyone. We are committed to offering our customers the choice of best-of-breed systems, whether they prefer the cloud or local systems. We have a wide array of products including: Dentrix for dental practices looking for the most popular, feature-rich system available; Dentrix Enterprise and DentalVision Enterprise for large group practices, Dental Service Organizations and public health; EasyDental for budget-conscious practices; and Viive for dentists looking for a purely Mac-based system. Henry Schein is committed to each of these products and we are continuing to deliver advanced features and support for the long term.

In fact, over the last year we have released major enhancements to each of our systems including Dentrix G5, EasyDental 11 and Dentrix Enterprise 6.5. We have a strong roadmap for future enhancements to support all of our current and future customers. If users are happy with their current system, there is no reason for them to ever switch.

How do dentists know if they are good candidates for Dentrix Ascend?

**Bunker:** Dentrix Ascend is well suited for small multi-site practices that need to share a common patient database. With a single-patient database, each office can access the full patient record without needing to create duplicate records for patients who, for instance, visit an office different from the one they normally visit.

The Dentrix Ascend “organization-within-organization” structure makes it possible to manage and report on offices within a larger practice by a single site, a subset of sites or by the whole practice.

Some practices want to offer flexible working conditions, letting their business staff work from home during days or hours when they aren’t seeing patients. Dentists who love their iPads, social media and consumer web applications will like Dentrix Ascend because it fits so well with their mobile, web-driven lifestyle. These are all great candidates for Dentrix Ascend.

How will Dentrix Ascend integrate with electronic services, such as eClaims and Appointment Reminders?

**Bunker:** Dentrix Ascend has built-in electronic services that naturally appear in the application wherever they are needed. This natural blending lets users complete work with less steps so they can focus on the task at hand instead of trying to use disparate products.

And all electronic services, including electronic insurance claims, appointment reminders, kiosk for electronic forms, patient portal website and more are included for one monthly subscription fee.

A few services will still be billed on an as-used basis. Credit card processing fees will continue to be collected by our associated merchant account vendor. Printed statements and postcards will be charged per piece. Printed insurance claims and Medicaid claims also will be charged per claim.

How will Dentrix Ascend be priced?

**Bunker:** We will charge $500 per site per month. Ten log-on IDs and 20GB of storage are included for each site. The subscription includes software, support and electronic services as described. Customers can also order additional log-on IDs in five-packs for an additional $250 per month.

“...recognizes how we actually work or should work if the system allowed it and presents the scheduler not with a digital book, but with easy links to the functions and data we need to do the job.”

– Dr. Larry Emmott, author, technology consultant
If multi-site practices want to start using the Dentrix Ascend beta today, how do they get it?

Bunker: Anyone can apply to join the Early Adopter Program at www.dentrixascend.com to begin using the Dentrix Ascend beta. Slots are limited and testers will be selected based on our application testing needs.

How do you plan to handle image acquisition and storage?

Bunker: We are working with digital imaging vendors to build bridges from their desktop image management software to our cloud application. Dentrix Ascend also stores documents for users who wish to store images in the cloud.

“Dentrix Ascend is the answer I have been looking for. The new system makes operating multiple sites super easy, and I am confident that with Henry Schein, my new Web-based practice-management system is in the most reliable hands.”

— Dr. Jeff Burg of Burg Pediatric Dentistry in Sandy, Utah, and a beta tester for the past three months

What is your vision for adoption of cloud-based practice management systems?

Bunker: We believe initially we will see the greatest adoption for Dentrix Ascend in small multi-site practices, mobile clinics, new practice build-outs and among dentists who want to use iPads and Macs in the practice. Overall adoption of cloud-based dental software will be driven by a variety of factors including the strength of the vendors offering the systems, because most dentists want to buy from a company they trust can provide long-term support. We expect to see further growth of small multi-site dental practices that need to access a single database. More dentists are beginning to offer remote access for employees to work at home. And more and more, patients want access to their patient information just as they have for other medical records. We believe Dentrix Ascend will be best suited to meet these demands.

Do you have a solution for loss of Internet access?

Bunker: Technical failures are a reality. So the best way to make sure they don’t adversely impact you is to plan ahead. For more than a decade, Henry Schein has delivered secure electronic services for Dentrix users in the cloud, using our data centers located throughout the United States. We will deliver the same Henry Schein guarantee of quality service for Dentrix Ascend as we do for customers of our current Dentrix system and its eServices. In fact, Dentrix Ascend will run from these same data centers that have redundant Internet connections, power sources, routers, servers and data storage devices.

If some part of our infrastructure fails, we can repair it without shutting down. In the unlikely event of a major environmental catastrophe at one of our data centers, practice information is protected by a completely redundant data center.

Our Henry Schein TechCentral division also offers network management services to dental practices to help them keep their own network and Internet connections running at peak efficiency. TechCentral can also help practices source redundant Internet providers and tie them together at the local router for load balancing Internet traffic and shifting all traffic to one provider if the other goes down.

Is it easy to switch from one platform to Dentrix Ascend and back again if a customer isn’t satisfied?

Bunker: As with other practice management systems, moving from any existing system to Dentrix Ascend requires a data conversion. We assist our customers converting from their current system to any of our practice management software. If customers wish to transition to a different system, we will give them their data in a standard format that can easily be inserted into another application’s database.

Can the program be used on Wi-Fi-connected computers and tablets?

Bunker: Yes. We are excited to be able to offer full system access to iPad users on Wi-Fi or 4G mobile broadband.

Is there a need for a server in the office?

Bunker: Dentrix Ascend does not require an in-office server; however, most offices do require a server for digital imaging and other server-based applications. Practices that are currently using digital imaging or taking digital impressions will most likely need a server in the office for those applications.

Does this eliminate the need for an offsite backup as everything is already in the cloud?

Bunker: That’s right. Dentrix Ascend does not require off-site backup because the entire application is offsite. We protect that data through redundant storage at each data center, redundant data centers and tape backup that is stored in a secure facility offsite from the data center.

“The sneak peek demo I got of Dentrix Ascend at the Chicago Midwinter confirmed one of my favorite high-tech adages: ‘A car is not just a faster horse.’”

— Dr. Larry Emmott, author, technology consultant