

# Increasing Your Patient Acceptance Rates

Improve performance in these 8 areas to see greater success

by Dr. Shalin Patel



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## Course description

This course details different practice management approaches to ensure a better patient experience. It explores ways to attract, convert and retain new patients for better long-term growth of the practice.

## Abstract

There are several challenges dentists must overcome to ensure a successful patient experience. To be successful, dentists must be able to manage both the clinical and nonclinical aspects of the practice by creating systems before, during and after the dental visit.

Before a patient sets foot in the office, the online reputation, call conversion and tracking of referrals are important to ensure new patients continue to come to the practice. Once those are achieved, it's also important to develop clinical systems to ensure patients have the

opportunity for same-day dentistry. Finally, we review specific ways to ensure retention and recall after patients leave.

## Educational objectives

After reading this article, participants should understand the following:

- Reasons and suggestions on how to manage your online reputation.
- How to monitor and create a system to turn a new patient phone call into an appointment.
- How to properly track referrals to ensure marketing dollars are spent appropriately.
- The importance of having a daily morning huddle.
- How to schedule effectively to maximize your schedule and allow opportunities for same-day dentistry.
- Methods and systems that will ensure consistent patient retention and recall in the office.

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### Disclosure:

The author declares that in the past 12 months he has had a financial interest, arrangement or affiliation within the field of dentistry or health care with the following: Deca Dental Group.

# 1

## Manage your online reputation

**Online reviews:** You can do all the marketing you want, but at the end of the day if you don't have reviews, then you can't expect to get calls.

Always ask for reviews and to focus on getting as many five-star reviews as possible. No matter how hard you try, you won't be able to make every experience a perfect one; if you do happen to receive a one-star review but already have a hundred other five-star reviews, then it doesn't matter as much. But if you have only four five-star reviews when you receive a one-star review, it will drastically reduce your overall score.

Always respond to reviews—even if they're negative. Take the high road, apologize for the problem and offer a consultation to see how it can be fixed. You may not win the patient back, but readers will see that you care about the problem and offered a resolution.

**Social media:** Studies show that people spend 30 percent of their online time on social media, so it's imperative that you take the time to have an engaging, up-to-date page—you can tell a lot about an office, its people and culture by looking at social media. Don't forget that sites like Facebook also have reviews, which are important to manage and respond to accordingly.

**Your practice website:** The content should include high-quality photos and brief bios of people who work in the office. Patients like to know a little bit about the dentist before meeting, so provide this information online.

Also, ensure your site is optimized for both search engines and pay-per-click, and constantly test to ensure that it's working correctly and that the contact information remains current and correct.



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# 2

## **Convert calls to appointments**

It's imperative to effectively measure how many phone calls turn into new patient appointments. Most offices offer little to no training or guidelines of what to do when the phone rings. Lay out a script or a template of expectations of how calls should be answered, including what information to collect, and to ensure appointments are booked before calls end. Several phone services offer call recording to ensure your staff is providing optimal customer service, or you can role-play with your team to ensure members use correct verbiage to create a lead into an appointment.

# 3

## **Track your referrals**

When spending marketing dollars, continually review what works and what doesn't. There's no "magic formula"—every office has a different mix of what brings in new patients. Your front office staff should always assign a specific category for each new patient who comes in the door (examples: "Online," "Radio," "Mailer," "Community Event," "Referral from Current Patient"). Review these categories at the end of each month, and make sure every new patient is accounted for in the system. Adjust your marketing dollars based on the results.

# 4

## Have a morning huddle

Set some clear expectations about the day ahead. The morning huddle is a perfect way to recap what happened yesterday and provide updates of the patients expected today. It should begin at least 20 minutes before the first patient is expected to arrive to ensure the staff realizes it's important that everyone be present and prepared. If you as the dentist don't attend your own morning huddles, don't expect your staff to be there on time.

# 5

## Schedule effectively

Make sure your entire staff knows how long dental procedures actually take. A front office person may see "four fillings" and assume it will be a quick appointment, but we dentists know that four MODs in different quadrants will take a lot longer.

My teams aim to schedule nonproduction (crown seats or finishing root-canal procedures) first thing in the morning and right after lunch. This ensures we stay on time for new patients and recall patients throughout the day.

Incorporate a staggered schedule to give more flexibility for patients who want to take care of treatment immediately. That means booking at least one chair empty while the others are filled with appointments to allow the opportunity for same-day treatment.



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## Offer same-day dentistry

Surveys report that up to 15 percent of all dental appointments are no-shows, which can have a huge impact on your practice thanks to decreased revenue and increased overhead. A willingness and ability to offer same-day dentistry is a key indicator of the overall efficiency of your practice. The world is changing, and people want things done immediately. Thanks to Netflix instant video or Amazon Prime same-day delivery, people appreciate the option of having something done in the most efficient manner possible; adapt your practice to follow such principles.

Your office and team should be trained on the importance of allowing time to offer same-day treatment. This all starts with saying the word *today*. Our team makes sure we use it multiple times throughout the appointment, which makes it clear that the office can offer a service that sets it apart from many others.

The assistant: "The doctor will look over your teeth and can address any concerns today."

The dentist: "I really want to focus on this today, because I don't want it to get any worse."

The front office staff: "Here is the treatment plan that the doctor recommends, and he has time to complete it today."



# 7

## Ask for referrals

Any successful office's No. 1 source of new patients should come from referrals. Ask for referrals three separate times—on the initial call, during check-in and during checkout. Think about it like this: If patients come in from referrals, it means they've already been told by someone else how great you are as a dentist and how great your team is in the office. This will ultimately lead to higher case acceptance.

## Focus on recall

Recall is the lifeblood of your practice. It doesn't matter if you get 100 new patients every month; if they don't return, you can't sustain your office. A few ways we manage recall:

Use practice management software to print a list of patients who are past due for cleanings, and have your best front office person work this list.

Remember, you're interrupting someone's day when you're making these calls, so be prepared with an offer. Don't just say, "We're calling to get you back in"; create a sense of urgency by stating, "We're doing a back-to-school special, and anyone who comes in for a checkup before the end of the month will receive a free whitening kit." Such discussions will lead to higher recall conversions.

Often, if you ask patients which day they'd like to come back for their next appointment, they can't give an answer because the date seems so far away. Always schedule patients' six-month recall visits at the same time on the same day of the week as their initial ones. If their appointment began at 7 a.m. Monday, fill out an appointment card for 7 a.m. on the Monday six months from now and assure them you'll call a few days before to remind them or see if they need to move the appointment. This is better than just letting them leave saying, "I'll call you back when I'm ready to come in again."

# 8

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1. **When should you ask for a referral from a patient?**
  - A. During the initial call
  - B. During check-in
  - C. During checkout
  - D. All of the above
2. **Which of the following is not an effective way to manage your recall?**
  - A. Using scheduling software to create a list of patients who are past due for a cleaning
  - B. Asking the newest member of the team to work the recall list
  - C. Offering an incentive for past-due patients to come in
  - D. Creating an appointment for every patient before he or she leaves the office
3. **What do studies suggest is the average no-show rate of a dental appointment?**
  - A. 5%
  - B. 15%
  - C. 25%
  - D. 50%
4. **True or false: You should only respond to positive online reviews—there's no salvaging a negative review.**
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. **Which of the following is not an important part of your online reputation?**
  - A. Practice website home page
  - B. Online reviews
  - C. Office location
  - D. Business Facebook page
6. **True or false: To track marketing dollars effectively, every new patient who calls and books an appointment should be linked to a referral source.**
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. **Which of the following should be reviewed during the morning huddle?**
  - A. Recap of the previous day
  - B. Update on patients coming in that day
  - C. Expectations of everyone being on time every day
  - D. All the above
8. **Which of the following is not an effective way to increase same-day dentistry?**
  - A. Creating a staggered schedule allowing for time
  - B. Recommending patients start any treatment the following week
  - C. Putting seat crown patients first thing in morning or right after lunch
  - D. Discussing with staff the importance of taking care of patients at the initial visit
9. **It is important your home page has which of the following characteristics?**
  - A. SEO optimization
  - B. PPC optimization
  - C. Current and correct contact information
  - D. All the above
10. **What do studies show is the average percent of online time that a person spends on social media?**
  - A. 10 percent
  - B. 30 percent
  - C. 50 percent
  - D. 70 percent

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### CE Post-Test

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3. A B C D

4. A B

5. A B C D

6. A B

7. A B C D

8. A B C D

9. A B C D

10. A B C D

Please circle your answers.

## Program Evaluation (required)

Please evaluate this program by circling the corresponding numbers: (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree)

1. Course administration was efficient and friendly	5	4	3	2	1
2. Course objectives were consistent with the course as advertised	5	4	3	2	1
3. COURSE OBJECTIVE #1 was adequately addressed and achieved	5	4	3	2	1
4. COURSE OBJECTIVE #2 was adequately addressed and achieved	5	4	3	2	1
5. COURSE OBJECTIVE #3 was adequately addressed and achieved	5	4	3	2	1
6. COURSE OBJECTIVE #4 was adequately addressed and achieved	5	4	3	2	1
7. COURSE OBJECTIVE #5 was adequately addressed and achieved	5	4	3	2	1
8. COURSE OBJECTIVE #6 was adequately addressed and achieved	5	4	3	2	1
9. Course material was up-to-date, well-organized, and presented in sufficient depth	5	4	3	2	1
10. Instructor demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the subject	5	4	3	2	1
11. Instructor appeared to be interested and enthusiastic about the subject	5	4	3	2	1
12. Audio-visual materials used were relevant and of high quality	5	4	3	2	1
13. Handout materials enhanced course content	5	4	3	2	1
14. Overall, I would rate this course (5 = Excellent to 1 = Poor):	5	4	3	2	1
15. Overall, I would rate this instructor (5 = Excellent to 1 = Poor):	5	4	3	2	1
16. Overall, this course met my expectations	5	4	3	2	1

Comments (positive or negative): \_\_\_\_\_

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