

# Top Challenges for Dental and Orthodontic Practices

## Results and Observations from the 2015 Practice Readiness Survey

A December 2014 survey of 475 dental and orthodontics professionals asked participants to name the common problems of practice management that they anticipated to be most challenging to their practice in 2015. The questions covered three major areas of successful practice management, including attracting new patients, building loyalty among existing patients and handling the day-to-day communication and workflows between doctors, staff and patients.

This report shows a breakdown of responses for each area, along with additional observations around the top-ranking challenges in each category.



Thinking about attracting new patients to your practice, which of these common problems do you feel will be most challenging to your practice in 2015?



- Lack of referrals from current patients or other doctors - **27.8%**
- Obtaining more organic Google Reviews - **19.6%**
- Lack of web traffic from search engines - **12.2%**
- Need a new or updated practice website - **10.3%**
- Not converting website visitors into business - **9.9%**
- Need for simpler website editing - **5.7%**
- Current website is not mobile-friendly - **5.3%**
- Other - **9.2%**

## 1 Lack of referrals from current patients or other doctors

Dental Rank #1, Orthodontics Rank #1

As practices seek ways to drive more referrals from their current patients, a successful guiding principle has been to make it as easy as possible. Practices have experienced strong results from adding "Refer-A-Friend" or similar buttons to emails for patients and practice newsletters - a convenient way for patients to click and refer. Incentive-based referral programs have long been popular for generating new business, and practices should work to promote these programs through a variety of outlets, including the practice website, social media channels, patient email communications and in-office signage.

## 2 Obtaining more organic Google Reviews

Dental Rank #2, Orthodontics Rank #2

Statistics show that 79% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, and reading positive reviews shows potential patients the level of rapport the practice has built with those patients they currently serve. But the importance of online reviews also crosses over into website performance and search engine results. Best practices for obtaining reviews include coaching the staff on when to encourage patients to submit a review, including signage with catchy calls to action, adding links to review site on the practice website and email signatures, and printing small handouts or cards as a takeaway reminder for patients after their appointment.

## 3 Lack of web traffic from search engines

Dental Rank #3, Orthodontics Rank #4

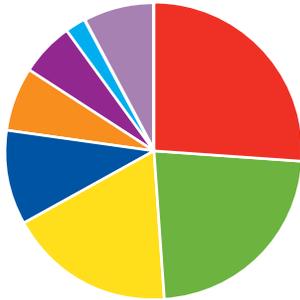
Generating new business from search engines is about making sure patients find the practice in an online search. After all, 15% of a website's visits from search engines convert into new opportunities for the practice. The ranking in that search also matters, as 60% of all clicks go to the top three organic (non-paid) search results. Additional attention to search engine optimization (SEO) in initial setup of a practice website and on an ongoing basis can help practices solve this common challenge.

### Additional Challenges Listed:

- Competing with other practices in the area.
- There is a general lack of desire in obtaining dental care.
- Having insufficient space in the schedule to see patients in a timely manner.
- Unsure of where to most effectively spend marketing dollars.



Thinking about building loyalty from current patients, which of these common problems do you feel will be most challenging to your practice in 2015?



- Improving results from social media efforts - **26.1%**
- Low response to recall efforts - **22.9%**
- Need more patient-specific marketing between visits - **18.1%**
- Lack of patient awareness about additional services - **10.3%**
- Promoting practice events and specials - **6.7%**
- Inefficient process for recall notifications - **5.9%**
- Unable to send routine wellness reminders to patients - **2.3%**
- Other - **7.6%**

## 1 Improving results from social media efforts

Dental Rank #2, Orthodontics Rank #1

Quantifying the results of social media efforts is no easy task for any business, and the same challenge holds true for dental and orthodontics practices. A great first step is defining what “success” means. If it’s getting more Facebook likes, Twitter followers and other fans in social media channels, marketing programs can include a greater emphasis on connecting patients to these channels. If “success” is about increased conversions and production, social media posts may gain from increased promotional language about pricing specials and other offers.

## 2 Low response to recall efforts

Dental Rank #1, Orthodontics Rank #3

For many practices, the challenge with recall efforts is lacking the resources to sufficiently communicate with patients about their next visit. In a 2013 TeleVox survey, 39% of practices considered lack of staff time to be the primary reason they are unable to contact patients. Practices who experience this challenge might consider automating communications about recalls with communications that offer immediate opportunities for patients to take scheduling action, such as pressing a phone keypad button or clicking an email link.

## 3 Need more patient-specific marketing between visits

Dental Rank #3, Orthodontics Rank #2

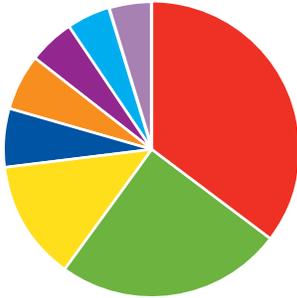
It’s no surprise that consistent between-visit communication is a top-ranking challenge for building patient loyalty. Unfortunately, the old adage “out of sight, out of mind” has proven to be applicable in the healthcare industry. Practices who are not already doing so stand to gain a lot from planning regular communications to patients through channels such as email newsletters, birthday and holiday calls and more.

### Additional Challenges Listed:

- Keeping patients when their employer changes insurance carrier.
- Maintaining interest in patient rewards programs.
- Exceeding today’s high standard for customer service in a way that truly stands out.



Thinking about your patient and staff communication and day-to-day operations, which of these common problems do you feel will be most challenging to your practice in 2015?



- Too many no-shows and late cancellations - **34.5%**
- Measuring success of marketing efforts - **24.0%**
- Staff too busy to focus on patient communication - **12.8%**
- High cost of patient communication - **6.1%**
- Patients need more convenient ways to make payments - **6.1%**
- Low recovery rates from A/R accounts - **4.8%**
- Supporting patients after business hours - **4.6%**
- Other - **4.4%**

## 1 Too many no-shows and late cancellations

Dental Rank #1, Orthodontics Rank #2

While staff time concerns and communication costs were popular choices as top challenges in the survey, patient no-shows and their financial impact still ranks as the top challenge for more than one-third of practices. Practices who are communicating with patients about upcoming appointments via postcards might consider implementing an email, text or automated phone system that allows patients to actively confirm their appointment. Many practices have successfully included cancellation options as well, leaving ample time for staff to fill potential openings with other patients and retain that planned appointment revenue.

## 2 Measuring success of marketing efforts

Dental Rank #2, Orthodontics Rank #1

This challenge is somewhat different from the objective of attracting new patients and building patient loyalty mentioned/addressed in the first two survey questions. From a day-to-day practice management standpoint, practices are challenged to show which marketing activities delivered the most return for their dollars. While many local advertising and awareness campaigns can drive response, many online marketing programs have ROI tools built in to demonstrate the effectiveness of marketing spend.

## 3 Staff too busy to focus on patient communication

Dental Rank #3, Orthodontics Rank #3

A staff that is too busy to communicate with patients will often experience high no-show rates and frequent turnover in the patient base. Recommended solutions to the challenge include automating routine communications while leaving staff to handle patient discussions that truly require a conversation. Basic appointment reminders, wellness tips and other common practice communications can often be automated with a personalized feel that does not put the provider-patient connection at risk.

### Additional Challenges Listed:

- Too many patients, not enough doctors.
- Needing to communicate in multiple channels - social media, email, text, etc.
- Inability for patients to complete forms online.