



Communication and Loyalty

The adage “friends do business with friends” is really true.

We most often choose to obtain products and services from those with whom we feel some sort of connection. The stronger the connection, the stronger the loyalty. So how is it possible to create strong relationships with hundreds if not thousands of patients? Is it even possible? Absolutely. Just ask Oprah!

Millions of people—mostly women—feel that Oprah is a best friend, even part of the family. What’s the secret? What makes you feel loyal to someone you are never or rarely with? Communication! She talks to them. She talks to them every day about something relevant in their lives.

I’m not suggesting that to create loyal patients you need to have a top-rated TV show. But the more you speak to your patients in a personal and relevant way, the more loyal your relationship grows.

The loyalty ladder

In the book *Relationship Marketing*, Regis McKenna describes the loyalty ladder. The loyalty ladder is comprised of segments ranging from suspects—those who have heard your name or seen your advertisement—all the way

Start thinking about how to reach patients where they are—not where they were.

up to advocates. At the top of the ladder, these advocates are not only fully committed to you as their dentist, but they will also insist that everyone they know use you as well.

Moving your patients up the loyalty ladder is relatively simple. First you have to provide a quality service or experience. We’ll assume that is the case. Second, you need to establish constant and relevant communication with them in a personal way.

Communication evolution

The dental industry is in the middle of a communication evolution. We are rapidly leaving the time when we can reach patients through the mail or hope to catch them on

the phone. We are entering the era of reaching patients on mobile devices wherever they are. It’s time to start thinking about how to reach patients where they are—not where they were. The American Board of Physicians says, “85 percent of patients say that electronic communication would be a good way to communicate with his/her doctor.” SMS, or cell phone text messaging, is rapidly becoming the de facto standard for instant communication.

How many personal communications, outside your office, do your patients receive from you? You certainly are not going to be able to speak personally or write to each of them enough times to turn them into advocates without

Terry,

Just a friendly reminder about your appointment with Dr. Kathy Frazar. Please confirm your appointment by clicking the button or text link below.

Your appointment is:

Saturday, February 10, 2007

11:00AM

CONFIRM NOW

We appreciate your time and look forward to seeing you then!

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathy Frazar

Kathy Frazar, DDS
4914 Blossomnet
Suite 200
Bellaire, TX 77401
Phone: 713-668-7137
Fax: 713-668-1708
www.drfrazar.com

Map it with Google

Add to My Calendar

Do you have a friend or family member you'd like to refer?
Refer a Friend
Click Here

Fig. 1 - The Smile Reminder system includes automated and personalized appointment reminders.

help. Technology is the solution. A good patient relationship management (PRM) system can help you communicate with your patients in a personal and relevant way, as often as you like – in a very economical manner.

continued on page 26

Reminder service

Jim Higgins, CEO of Smile Reminder—the premier dental PRM system—talks about the success some clients see when they use his Smile Reminder service. “We have practices that have created incredibly loyal patient bases,” he said. “The doctors that really understand the potential reward constantly communicate with their patients. They not only remind and market, but they also educate their patients about conditions, treatment options, products and services—even local news and events. They stay in touch with their patients and their patients stay loyal to their dentists.”

According to Higgins, one benchmark of a loyal patient base is the volume of referrals a doctor receives. “The Smile Reminder system tracks referrals and referral value,” said Higgins. “We clearly see a direct correlation between the level of communication with patients and the volume and value of referrals back to the doctor.”

Patient surveys

Patient surveys are another great way to improve communication and build your relationships. You cannot know what patients want and care about if you don't ask.

People love to express their opinion and give feedback—especially if they think their ideas will make a difference. In addition to questions about your office, your staff,

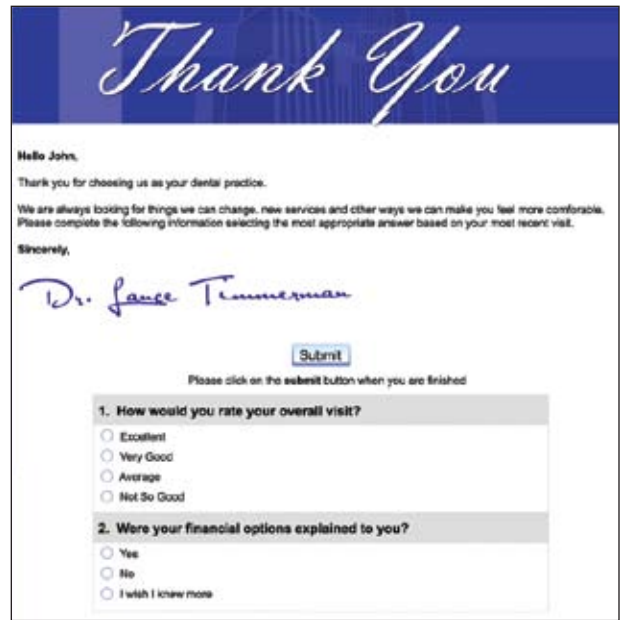


Fig. 3 - Patient surveys improve communication and build doctor-patient relationships.

birthday. Surveys and newsletters have also been fantastic. I use them to understand my patients better and to educate on what matters most to them. When patients come to the office with a prior understanding of conditions such as caries and oral cancer, they are more accepting of my examinations and treatment planning.”

Relevant and personal communication can be sent across your entire practice or just to a target group of patients.

and your service, ask about what kinds of educational information patients find helpful. When their opinions are valued and they see response to their suggestions, your patients will become more invested in your relationship and your practice because they have played an active part in improving it.

Dr. Ron Kaminer (Long Island, New York) talks about his experience using the Smile Reminder Service. “I was overwhelmed by the reaction of my patients when I started using Smile Reminder,” he said. “My patients love the increased communication! I get comments all the time about the personal text message they get from me on their

Appointment reminders

The Smile Reminder system includes automated and personalized appointment reminders, last minute cancellation notices, premed reminders, birthday messages, and value tracking recall/recare messages. It also includes custom newsletters, personalized marketing messages, and value tracking referral tools. All messages are personalized to each patient and maintain the practice's brand and identity. Relevant and personal communication can be sent across your entire practice or just to a target group of patients. No upload of patient information is necessary because the system will seamlessly interface with your existing PMS and obtain all the appointment and contact information needed.

You may never achieve Oprah status with your patients, but you certainly can improve your relationships and push them further up the loyalty ladder. The tools and technology are available; now you need to make yourself available. ■

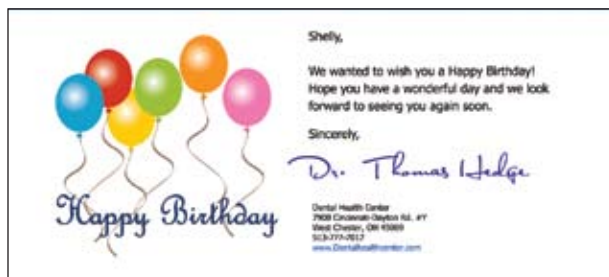


Fig. 2 - All messages are personalized to each patient and maintain the practice's brand and identity.

A graduate of the Marriott School of Management at Brigham Young University, Mark has 20 years marketing experience ranging from small start-ups to billion dollar companies. With particular focus on consumer marketing, his experience includes time with Marriott Corporation, Sundance Resort, Park City Reservations, Simmons Media Group, Ticketmaster/CitySearch, Iomega Corporation, and Communitect Inc., parent company of Smile Reminder.