

# Bringing Treatment Discussions into the Technology Age

## *Does it matter how up-to-date your method of presenting treatment is?*

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### Everybody's Got Tech

Every day, almost every man, woman, and child uses a cell phone, DVD, iPod, or some other form of technology. Technology is even going to the dogs with GPS collars! You might be one of these high-tech consumers personally, but has it carried over into your practice? Health care marketing often focuses on technology competitiveness. This type of marketing capitalizes on the consumer's expectation that medical and dental providers will invest in the equipment necessary to provide increased comfort, decreased number of appointments, increased treatment quality, and even convey critical details to other practitioners, labs, and specialists when indicated.

How "technology competitive" your practice is can determine whether you attract new patients, quality staff, prospective associates, or buyers when it is time to transition. So are you asking patients to see a tiny crack in an amalgam and accept treatment by coordinating a mouth mirror and hand mirror? Do you expect a patient to invest time and money in a dental implant



Models may not offer a lot of valuable information to a client who is considering substantial dental treatment. Technology is key in showing the severity of the problem and show areas of treatment for each patient as it relates to them specifically.

based on a tyodont model example? Is your staff less efficient because they are working with and maintaining older equipment? Is your lack of technology costing you leading-edge candidates for your team? The businesses that thrive despite this economy are those that attract both clients and employees, and continue to be proactive in creating a better experience within that business.

### Communication Tool

Visuals are used to communicate and market because *they produce results!* Why does your favorite coffee place have a display case of baked goods? Why do clothing stores have display windows? A visual image, whether it is a digital panoramic radiograph, intraoral camera view, or digital extraoral photo, serves as a patient communication tool that complements your verbal presentation. Patients can appreciate that you've invested in technology when it helps them make informed decisions about their treatment. When the method you use to present treatment improves your patients' understanding of their treatment options, greater treatment acceptance is sure to follow.

You have probably learned that providing quasi-dental school level knowledge to a patient about a procedure does not always result in a scheduled appointment—patients tend to accept treatment when they are able to understand the benefit of the screening or visualize the treatment recommended. Digital frames that display before and after

photos and imaging can be one way to convey your treatment outcomes. Cone beam technology can help a patient understand if he or she is a candidate for an implant or to have a third molar extracted. The benefit of early detection can be provided by oral cancer screening systems. All technology specializes in providing more immediate and concise information for you and your patients, to ensure that better treatment decisions are made.

To use your technology effectively, don't keep those new toys all to yourself. Training your team so that they are comfortable using the latest equipment means that your patients will have greater exposure to that technology as well. The key to introducing your team to a new piece of technology is to develop a protocol for its use. Clinical and even front office team members' knowledge of technology can contribute to case acceptance and new patient referrals. Notably, technology beyond the clinical area can contribute to case acceptance



Technology like the Trimira Identifi 3000 is one of the more recent early cancer detection systems to enter the market and can really make a difference in what patients see and understand about the health of their own mouths.

# Practice Management



Above: Show your patients that you are actively invested in increasing the standard of care in your office by implementing technology like charting software from XLent.

as well. Many practices offer online applications for outside financing and have Web sites that feature patient testimonials as well as "after" photos to help establish confidence in your treatment recommendations among your newest patients.

## Payback

The dental oath refers to a responsibility to grow professional knowledge and improve skills to meet patients' needs. The intention of dental equipment and technology is to help patients complete treatment within a reasonable amount of time and assist them in avoiding more extensive and expensive treatment in the future. With respect to the current economy, most patients appreciate this patient-centered approach. Both advanced and updated equipment can save appointment time for you and your patients, which contributes to practice profitability and patient satisfaction. How many impressions do you not have to retake on patients who gag? Among patients with tori and small arches, how much more comfortable would they be using a digital impression system? How about the benefits of

a digital shade guide that avoids multiple visits to get just the right color for an anterior crown?

## Conclusion

Outdated technology can detract from treatment acceptance and the growth of new patients for the practice. Perception is everything, so it is essential that patients are introduced to the newest scans and screenings during medical appointments. Keeping up with technology advances the professionalism of dentistry. The "dinosaur" intraoral camera cart and Web site featuring long-gone staff members today could be compared to the spittoon on the floor and the belt-driven handpiece found in a dentist's office in the 1800s. They were the best of their time, but only for a time. Demonstrate that you are invested in the standard of care for your patients, and get those referrals from appreciative patients that will help carry the practice through to more profitable times. Given the number of us who continually upgrade our cell phones and computers, people clearly value technology and want the latest advances. What technology in your practice demonstrates your level of expertise and quality of care? ■

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<sup>1</sup> Source: 3M internal data

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