

SmartBox's Top 10 Dental Marketing "Secrets"

How You Can Work Less, Earn More, and Enjoy Life!

Yeah, yeah – everybody promises to tell you the “secrets” that you absolutely **must know** if you’re going to survive as a dentist, much less succeed.

What you’ll learn in this paper aren’t secrets, which is why you’ll often see that word in quotes. I don’t claim to have exclusive access to the marketing Oracle of Delphi or a hotline to the gods of marketing. I **do** claim to have helped **hundreds** of dentists on three continents **thrive** ... because it’s fact.

You’ll notice something very different about this list. Usually, top 10 lists are arranged so that you get to the most important item at the end. SmartBox’s Top 10 list of dental marketing “secrets” isn’t like that.

In fact, I’ll give you the most important “secret” right up front. But let’s not call it a secret. Instead, let’s call it a **Pro Tip**.

Pro Tip #1: You Need ALL OF THESE To Succeed!

That’s right. **Every Single Item** on our list is vital to your success. Using two, or six, or even eight of these techniques won’t get you anywhere **near** the results you can achieve by implementing all 10 secrets. And even implementing all 10 in a disconnected, nonsystematic way won’t bring you the success you **could** realize.

So, even though this list has numbers, **never** believe that one item is more important than another or that one is the “silver bullet” that will solve all your marketing issues. If it were that easy, **everybody** would be using it and somebody would be richer than Jeff Bezos. It just ain’t that simple.

Look at it this way – the problem with a one-trick pony is that it can only do **one trick**. But today’s online dental marketing environment is evolving at a mind-boggling rate. Today’s must-do’s are often tomorrow’s **don’t-do’s**. Success requires a multifaceted and flexible

approach. And if you only have one trick, or even two, you'll be at a huge competitive disadvantage.

The secrets you'll learn in this paper, when properly implemented, create a **marketing system** that works 24/7 to attract the new patients **you want**.

So, let's get to them. Remember, no one aspect works well enough in a vacuum. While some of these secrets are necessary to allow the development of others – SEO before fully responsive design, for instance – you'll do best to implement as many of these techniques as close together in time as you can.

Pro Tip #2: Your Marketing Strategy Determines Your Results

If all you want in your chairs are new patients **regardless** of their value to your practice, you can pretty much stop reading right now. You can do what dentists have traditionally done and continue to do: **chase** patients by advertising low price, insurance acceptance, and specials and discounts.

What they get for their efforts are price shoppers, insurance-driven prospects, and one-and-dones. That's the formula for "treadmill dentistry" that keeps dentists **working too hard for too long for too little**.

When you position yourself as a discount dentist, prospects see **no difference** between you and any other dentist. Your lower-value prospects are interested in paying the **least possible** for dental care – because they assume all dentists are competent. If you're going to get your share of those prospects, you have to cut your margins to the **bone** because that's the only way to provide appropriate services at a lower price.

Switch Your Marketing Focus

Low-value prospects aren't the only ones in your market. In almost any given market, some 30 percent (or even more) of prospects have the ability to **pay more** for the right dentist. Those better patients don't much care about low price or insurance. They're looking for something else in, and from, the dentist they choose to solve their dental concerns.

Your marketing has to position you as the dentist of choice for those prospects if you want to *work less, earn more, and enjoy life again*. Your **Marketing Strategy** has to wrap those better patients in proof that you are the relatable, likeable, dental expert they're looking for.

That's where the other eight **Pro Tips** on our list come in.

Pro Tip #3: SEO Still Matters

Dental prospects today overwhelmingly begin their search for a dentist online. By some estimates, as many as 9 in 10 people start by Googling dentists in their area. Let's face it – if prospects don't **see** you, they won't **choose** you.

Thorough and ongoing Search Engine Optimization is the key to being found online. As I mentioned earlier, SEO is rapidly changing. Even the specialists in this area can have difficulty keeping up with new developments in their chosen discipline.

SEO isn't something you can trust entrust to the kid down the block or even to a staff member who does it as an additional duty. It's simply too important to your success, particularly if you have a lot of competitors in your area. Research suggests that few people will look beyond the second page of search results. Quite a few will limit their search to the first page of results. If your SEO isn't up to snuff, you can expect that your organic search listing won't show up where people will find it.

There's a lot more that goes into effective SEO than selecting keywords and maintaining some links to and from your website. What you have **on** your website, how quickly it loads, and how it displays is just as important.

Pro Tip #4: Give Your Prospects A Website They Can Use

Searches from mobile devices overtook searches from desktop and laptop computers in 2015, and the gap continues to widen. **Fully Responsive Design**, which allows your website to load quickly and display promptly no matter the device, is crucial to your marketing efforts.

If your website doesn't load completely within 8 seconds on a mobile device, your prospects will click away. If it doesn't display properly, ditto. And if you don't choose the correct keywords for mobile search, as opposed to desktop search, they probably won't **see** your listing.

Those big, beautiful pictures on your website take a long time – too long – to load. That “intuitive” navigation is anything **but** intuitive on a mobile device. That compelling and exhaustive copy from one of your service pages requires **excessive and tedious scrolling** to read on a smartphone.

There's more, but you get the idea – fully responsive design is a complex and technical thing to implement, but it's something that has to be done and maintained if you hope to attract the patients you want.

So, we've covered making sure that your prospects can find you online. Let's talk about the content you put out there.

Pro Tip #5: Be An Online Original

Whoever said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery never tried it online.

Google remains the king of search with about a two-thirds market share, and Google favors **fresh and Unique Content** that is authoritative and trustworthy. On the other hand, Google is **death** on plagiarism, going so far as to impose penalties in search results and even outright banning sites that use other people's content.

So, your “stuff” has to be yours. **And** your stuff has to focus on providing the solutions to prospects' problems. Too many dentists focus on their training, their expertise, and their publications on their websites. They have what I call a “we-we” problem: we do this, we're using the most advanced technology, we provide this or that, blah, blah, blah.

NEWS FLASH: Your Prospects Care About Themselves and Their Needs ... NOT YOU!

Bottom line: Your better prospects are looking for the **right** dentist – not necessarily the most technically accomplished or experienced dentist – to solve their dental problems.

Your online content – website, blog, social media, email – has to satisfy that need, engage your readers, and give them reasons to choose **you** over a competitor.

Oh, and your online content has to be both **fresh** (meaning regularly updated or brand new) **and** optimized for search; both play a role in your overall SEO. That's not easy writing, particularly since the ideal online reading level is middle school, grades 7–9. Producing that amount of content, written at that level, and conveying that crucial information, is a **big** ask for a busy dentist or office staff.

But it's gotta be done, and one of the ways to do it is to tell stories.

Pro Tip #6: Stories Provide Social Proof

Seeing may be believing, but seeing **and** hearing is really powerful. And people love stories that speak to their situations or concerns. **Storytelling** is the principle behind providing “social proof” for your prospects.

Your own doctor videos are the place to start. Your prospects can see and hear you talk about your understanding of their particular dental issues. They can appreciate firsthand whether you seem likeable, trustworthy, and expert, far better than they could by simply reading words on a screen.

Of course, that means your videos have to be high quality. You'll need great, balanced lighting, the right setting or background, and clear audio without any distracting noises ... to begin with. You need to think carefully about what you're going to say and how you say it. Remember, it's not about you – it's about **them** and demonstrating that you're the dentist of choice for them.

Your patients are an excellent source of social proof, and testimonial videos are powerful “from the horse's mouth” recommendations. However, few people are comfortable speaking on camera, so there's a lot of reassurance, gentle guidance, and retakes that go into shooting **credible and effective** testimonials.

Finally, photos and videos of your staff help round out what prospects can expect from your practice.

Social media is another great venue for your videos and photos. There's another set of rules – best practices – for social media that includes how often to post, how quickly to respond, and the right balance of “dental” posts versus more personal and engaging posts.

Engaging with your followers on social media is another big ask for busy dental practices, but it's another “gotta do” marketing item. How you or a designated staffer responds to questions and criticisms is another source of social proof.

And speaking of criticisms ...

Pro Tip #7: Your Practice Lives Or Dies By Your Online Reputation

That may sound like hype, but it's anything but. Online reviews are the new word-of-mouth advertising, and studies show that people trust reviews nearly as much as they trust recommendations from co-workers and friends.

Just as with social media, engaging with your reviewers across multiple review sites is crucial for your success. Engaging with positive reviewers is additional social proof, but you also **must** engage with disgruntled patients.

Less-than-stellar reviews demand your **immediate** attention. Why? Because virtually every review site offers a “star” numerical rating, and that rating serves as a snapshot of your practice. If one or more of your competitors' ratings is significantly higher than yours, your prospect may never **read** your reviews.

And if they do read negative reviews you haven't addressed, forget about them picking up the phone to make an appointment.

You can minimize the impact of negative reviews in two ways. The first is to engage the reviewer and take the conversation offline if at all possible. Quite often, negative reviews are the result of misunderstandings or unmet expectations. An understanding approach, coupled with whatever you can legally do to set things right, can turn a negative review to a positive one.

Of course, you first have to **know** that a negative review has been posted, so your staff will need to monitor review sites regularly. Ideally, that would happen daily. In busy practices,

it's more like weekly, if that often. That's a long time (in internet terms) for a negative review to impact your online recruitment efforts.

The second way to minimize the impact of bad reviews is to have an **overwhelming** number of positive reviews. The more four- and five-star reviews you have, the less the impact of a negative review on your rating.

Busy dental practices often aren't very good at soliciting reviews from their patients. And just to be clear, asking for a review when the patient has spent **90 minutes in the chair and is still too numb to talk is not a success strategy**. An automated review request program is the solution to getting more positive reviews.

Reputation Enhancement is an essential aspect of attracting the patients you **want**.

Pro Tip #8: Make Paid Media Pay Off

Paid Media, including Google AdWords and social media advertising, is an excellent way to drive prospects to your website. And that should be the goal of your paid media – to get them on your site where the maximum amount of carefully crafted information is available.

However, if you're not savvy and careful, you can spend **way** too much for each qualified lead you get. And if you're advertising low price, meaning your margins are very thin, you can't afford to lay out a **chunk** of cash every month that doesn't return much value.

AdWords gets you paid placement in search results, which guarantees visibility. If you haven't used AdWords, it's basically an auction for keywords, and if you win you'll pay a certain amount for each click on your ad. Depending on your market, the competition for certain keywords can be anywhere from moderate to absolutely cutthroat. Savvy dentists will do considerable research into the most relevant keywords before ever making a bid.

You'll also need to set a firm budget (budget creep is a really good way to go broke) and consider how often you want your ad to appear in search results. After that, think about what you'll include in the ad to entice viewers to actually click.

Social media, particularly Facebook, has become a valuable forum for paid advertising. Facebook has features that allow you to specifically target the prospects you want. You can also use Facebook's "Promote Post" feature to turn a post into an ad. As with AdWords, strict budget management and considerable research are needed to make this form of advertising pay off.

Two things to keep firmly in mind: Both AdWords and social media have a learning curve, and clicks, likes, and follows are **not** new patients in your chairs. They're a means to an end, not the end itself.

However people reach your website, the next step is to convert your prospects to qualified leads, and that's where **Drip Marketing** comes in.

Pro Tip #9: Stay In Touch

The better prospects in your market can afford to be choosy, and they are. They'll do a considerable amount of research – Google says people consult an average of 10.4 sources of information – before picking the dentist they want. It's vital that you stay in front of them – top of mind – while they're deciding,

Your website must have an offer for which prospects will exchange their email addresses. The offer can be a white paper, article, e-book, or something else of value that speaks to prospects' concerns. Depending on your particular state, you may be able to offer something of financial value, but check regulations carefully first.

Once prospects have opted in to receive further communications from you, they become qualified leads. Your email marketing has to further engage them and move them steadily down your new patient funnel until they book an appointment. If you're looking for better patients with a variety of dental needs – implants, cosmetic dentistry, full-mouth restoration – you'll need an email content stream for each income stream.

Of course, you then have to get the **right** emails to the **right** leads at the **right** intervals. You might have several hundred leads at different stages in your funnel at any given time, so manually sending out all those emails is very challenging.

“Drip” Marketing is the ideal way to stay in front of your leads without taking up tons of staff time. Drip marketing uses automation to send the correct email to each prospect at predetermined intervals. That frees up your staff to focus on caring for patients.

Remember, though – **somebody** has to write all those emails.

As with most automated computer programs, email marketing programs vary tremendously in price, features, ease of use, and learning curve. I’ve seen many dentists buy a program that was far too expensive, was too hard to learn, and had features the practice would never use. You can guess how that turned out.

Done right, drip marketing turns leads into appointed patients. Congratulations! You’ve successfully fine-tuned your marketing system to attract, convert, and appoint the patients who will allow you to **work less, earn more, and enjoy life.**

There’s just one thing, though – **which parts** of your marketing are actually delivering new patient butts in your chairs?

Pro Tip #10: Hone Your Tracking Skills

I hate to be the one to tell you, but dental patients lie.

Oh, sure, every dentist and hygienist is well aware that a mouthful of tartar and gum disease is **not** consistent with regular brushing and flossing. That’s par for the dental course.

Your new patients lie about how they found you. Or, to be charitable, they don’t recall exactly **which** ad, post, or review was the deciding factor in making an appointment. So they make something up.

That’s not just me saying that – that’s the result of some careful research.

But it presents a problem in trying to figure out **which** parts of your marketing are paying off and which are a money sink. Very few dental practices out there can afford to waste hard-earned marketing dollars. The odds are that yours isn’t one of them.

New Patient Tracking is the effective and elegant solution to this problem. New Patient Tracking assigns a unique phone number to your marketing that's forwarded to your practice phones. When a new patient call comes in, the source of the call and the call itself are **automatically** recorded in a database.

New Patient Tracking has two very important benefits – you can precisely identify which parts of your marketing are bringing in the most new patients calls, and you can identify any issues with your front desk's phone technique that may be costing you new patient opportunities.

One caveat – you're a busy dentist, and reviewing the recordings of all new patient calls every month is a **huge** time suck. That may be a duty you can delegate, but someone will need to spend the time if you want maximum return for your marketing investment.

Or, you can keep throwing away money on marketing that doesn't work and missed new patient opportunities that could have been yours.

Now You Can Get Your Marketing “Act” Together ... But Can You LIFT It?

Congratulations! You know SmartBox's **Top 10 Marketing “Secrets.”**

Have you ever noticed how one person's “secrets” sound like a whole lot of **work**? I'm not going to sugarcoat this – implementing a systematic approach to dental marketing is **beyond** the reach of most dentists. There's a huge investment of time and energy, not to mention the ability to learn all the skill sets necessary to make the system work.

Besides, dentists don't make money by marketing. They make money by seeing patients and solving their dental problems.

Dr. Jonathan Gilbert of Hagerstown, Maryland, figured that out, and this was his solution.

“I've had different companies in the past,” he said. “They're good at this, they're good at that, but they don't put it all together. I don't have time to put it all together. I want to focus on my patients and focus on what their needs are. I like to tinker with the stuff, but to be honest, I'm not that great at it. So, I wanted to find a company that could do everything, as far as marketing, for me.

“I decided to make the leap of faith, and I’m glad that I did because I’ve been very happy with SmartBox and their ability to take all the stuff, put it together, and handle that aspect so I can focus on my patients.”

So here’s the fork in the road:

If you’ve got the knowledge, skills, and time to implement your own systematic dental marketing program, go for it! My hat’s off to you, and I mean that sincerely.

If you’d rather enjoy doing the dentistry with higher-value patients, so you can **work less, earn more, and enjoy life**, you’ll need to find a company that can do everything for you.