



Internal Marketing Basics to Increase Dental Referrals

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For dental practices, the distinction between external and internal marketing is critical. External marketing involves reaching out to prospective new patients through advertising of various types and community activities. In contrast, internal marketing focuses on encouraging dental referrals using your existing patient, and it is far more economical and effective.

If you're not yet making the most of your "captive audience" of patients, initiate internal marketing strategies based on these steps:

- 1. Give your current patients something good to talk about.** Your aim is to generate persuasive word-of-mouth advertising... your patients telling everyone they know how great you and your practice are. If you haven't made a strong, positive impression on them, what will they say (if they bother saying anything at all)? Set your practice apart by implementing superior new systems, providing "WOW" customer service to your patients and turning your office into a showplace. Also script your staff to praise your clinical skills and credentials (which even your long-term patients may not fully appreciate).
- 2. Ask for referrals.** If your patients are happy with you and your practice, they should also be happy to recommend your practice to family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors and others acquaintances. You and staff members can literally ask patients to refer. You can also post simple signs where patients will see them, indicating that you welcome new patients. Beyond these simple approaches, you can give patients referral cards (perhaps offering a free exam) that they can give to people they know. Many practices produce a simple brochure to generate referrals. You should also include simple statements on the practice's printed materials and emails. Work with your marketing coordinator to come up with creative ways to "ask."

- 3. Thank patients for recommending your practice.** When new patients join your practice as a result of referrals, make a point of thanking the patients who recommended you. This is not only courteous but also a subtle encouragement to refer more.
- 4. Set a target as a benchmark for measuring performance.** Track the number of referrals received (and from whom) and compare actual results with your target weekly: based on experience with numerous practices, I recommend that you seek to obtain one referral per year from 40–60% of your patients. If your running total lags, you'll have time to adjust your internal marketing systems and strategies.

No form of practice promotion is as cost-effective as internal marketing. Make sure you're taking full advantage of this potent tool.