



ATHENA's 10 Points of Light

the how and why to market your unique practice

As a dental professional, you are part of an industry and marketplace that is evolving at a pace than was not conceivable 20 years ago. Dentistry has grown in technology and possibilities. Your job now is to keep pace with the evolution of a demanding consumer – both your new patients and your favorite patients – just as you do with the quality of the care you provide.

However, you were trained to provide quality dentistry, not to be a small business marketer. So it is not such a shock when even the best ideas are not utilized to their full potential or are sporadically implemented.

Successfully translating your image and message to your targeted customer, consistently and repetitively, is what dental practice marketing is all about. Providing accurate and accessible information about who you are and what you can provide to your patients is the game you are playing, whether you realize it or not. Below is a quick guide for planning your strategy.

1 } your Vision

Who are you and why?

The purpose of marketing is to convey your message to your marketplace. Your vision is the beginning of all your marketing efforts – from planning, to creation, to implementation. If you're like most dentists, you may have a vision statement but chances are you haven't looked at it since you wrote it. Now would be the time to re-evaluate your vision and think about whether it is truly in line with what you stand for. Marketing will help you grow your practice towards your vision, rather than the reverse.

2 } your marketing Goal

What do you want?

Your Marketing Goal is basic and quantifiable – to begin, look at your numbers in terms of the amount invested per new patient (quantity) as well as the production amount each new patient brings to the practice (quality). Instead of just upping the quantity of new patients, you should focus instead on upping the quality of the new patient on an individual level.

For example, begin by dividing your marketing expenses by the number of new patients for the past year. Let's say you spent \$150 per new patient, brought in 18 new patients per month and averaged \$3000 in production for each new patient.

A good marketing goal for our example for the next year would be to increase the investment per new patient to \$200 while lowering the quantity to 15, with the goal being to up the

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production to, say, \$4000 per patient. This means that you would go from spending \$32,400 for revenue of \$648,000, to spending \$31,200 to bring in \$780,000 – not a bad return on your investment and a lot less stress.

Obviously, an important aspect in increasing the amount of production brought in per new patient directly correlates to internal factors such as your quality of service, case presentation skills, and basic level of comfort with appropriate clinical skills. This is where your vision becomes so important. How you characterize yourself to the marketplace must match the patient's experience in your practice. The better you can personalize and target your message to your marketplace, the “warmer” the new patients will be (the more they will value your service), and the easier it will be to retain them in the practice.

By thinking of the relationship between the amount of money and time you are investing in each new patient and the return on that new patient, you start to see that the uniqueness of your vision – and, therefore, the message you put out – becomes most important. The value that your patient places on you and your services starts to become more about relationship than services provided. The result is a happier patient, one who is getting what he wants because this is where he belongs and he feels it. In the end, everyone wins.

3} the Budget

How much personnel time and money are you willing to invest?

Marketing is an investment, not just an excuse to throw money away. When deciding how much you are willing to invest, chose a number that “feels good” and not just what “they” say you should spend. However, they happen to say that you should be spending between 3% and 10% of your production on marketing – this includes the planning and creation fees, personnel time, production costs, and implementation costs.

The “percentage budget” is an easy way to choose a number. A good guideline for choosing your percentage is that if your practice is where you want it to be, you are seeing the patients you want, and you feel confident that your marketplace knows who you are and what you're about, then maintain that with a 3% Marketing Budget. If you are steadily growing into your practice and marketplace, and want to continue to modify your image and refine the patients you are drawing in, then shoot for a 5%-7% Marketing Budget. If you are brand new, totally revamping your image, or struggling to maintain a healthy practice, then investing 7%-10% is your best bet.

As your marketing begins to bring a return on your investment, your Marketing Budget will grow with your production in terms of actual dollars while the percentage might remain the same. It can be hard to spend money that you don't receive a return on immediately, but by allocating a certain percentage of your production ahead of time, you make sure that you're spending the right amount and you keep that amount at the forefront of your mind when you begin to brainstorm methods for your Marketing Plan.

4} the Timeline

How much grace will you give yourself to reach your Marketing Goal?

Be sure to give yourself enough time to meet your goals – if you don't, you will experience an undercurrent of urgency which will stifle both your creativity and your energy. Usually, the entire process of creating and implementing an initial Marketing Plan takes about 15 months. The first three months are dedicated to the planning and creation stage, and the implementation stage runs for a year. You should begin the creation stage of the second year's marketing plan three months before the end of the current year's implementation stage, and so on.

5} the Plan

What methods will you use over what period of time with what resources and to what goals?

Now that you know who you are and what you want, begin to brainstorm the marketing methods that are most in line with your vision, your goals, your budget, your timeline and your previous experience. Some people prefer to get out into the community and would rather network and put on open houses. Others like to create beautiful ads and direct mail pieces to get their message out. Still others focus exclusively on their current patients, making internal marketing an art form. No matter what you do, you will get results, so choose the methods that actually sound like fun to you and your staff and plan them out.

First make a list of your preferred methods, then make lists of the Tools you'll need for each project, action items and estimates of the time and money you will need to invest to complete the project. For example, if you chose to do a direct mail campaign you will need to do the following: chose the frequency of the mailing, chose the demographics of the list, chose what types of pieces you want to send and in what order, have those pieces created, find a mail house to buy your list from and to do the actual mailing, and devise a tracking system for responses.

Keep brainstorming and making lists until you have more than enough methods to choose from, then choose the ones that are most fun, most cost effective and, of course, are within your budget.

After you have chosen the projects you want to do, lay them out in a spreadsheet according to time, including your estimates and the projected milestone deadlines. Be sure to allot enough time for someone to manage the completion of each of your projects. Keep tweaking the spreadsheet until you feel that you will get your message out according to your vision, goals, timeline and budget.

6} the Elements

What do you have in place to build Tools with? What else do you need? Are your Elements in line with your Vision?

Your Elements truly are the foundation of your marketing success. Without a logo, colors, font and layout guidelines, photography, copy, and graphics in place, it is impossible to create the tools you'll need to implement the methods of your marketing plan. If you are missing any of the elements, you are not ready to create a comprehensive set of tools, which are the means through which you communicate your message such as a business card or website. If you wait to create your elements on an emergency basis, you will be rushed during the creation process and end up with tools that are not in line with your vision, or worse, will look just like the guy's down the block.

Your elements are consistent and repetitive throughout all of your communication with your marketplace. You do not see Nike or Coke's elements changing from tool to tool, or from year to year. This is because the customer begins to associate a "shorthand" of the message with the elements – the customer does not want to work hard to decide whether your message is relevant. By maintaining consistency in your elements, you give him or her a break. By maintaining repetition and focus in how your elements are used, you make it easy for your potential patient to respond.

Similarly, you do not see Mac trying to look like Microsoft, or The Gap borrowing elements from Guess. This is important to understand – while the examples are technically selling the same products (computers and clothing) the experience and expectation of the customer is widely divergent. The customer expects a unique experience, not the same product.

Elements work best when they represent your vision perfectly, and your vision is unique because you are unique. Why would you buy someone else's vision of a "dentist" when, as we all know, the best patients are those that value you even more than they value your dentistry? If you think you are saving time and money by buying a pre-made, cookie-cutter identity package, you are mistaken. Instead, you will lose that much more money and time because you'll be attracting cookie-cutter patients who don't truly fit with you and your practice and you'll be forever struggling to maintain a positive flow.

7} the Tools

What Tools do you have in place? What else do you need? Are your Tools in line with your vision?

Your marketing Tools are the tangible objects that you will use to implement your marketing plan. Tools include everything from stationary, envelopes, and business cards, to a brochure or website, to an event like an open house or even a PowerPoint presentation – anything you need to complete your marketing projects, anything to give you an excuse to send your message to your marketplace.

Because you will already have thought about who you are and what you want, determined how much money you have available, decided what marketing projects you will undertake and

gathered all of the necessary elements, the actual creation of your Tools will be an easy and fun process.

Most people go into their marketing aspirations backwards – they'll create Tools then try to make the Tools work for them. Invariably, this means wasted time and money because many revisions become necessary and you never quite feel right with the final project. And if you're not feeling enthusiastic about a tool, you'll probably just throw it back in the drawer. It's much better to decide what you want first, and then create the Tools to match. Plus, since you've already gone through the creative process, finalizing layouts can happen in weeks rather than months, saving time and money.

8} Implement

Who will implement and manage your marketing plan?

People often get lost at the most important stage of their marketing plans – implementation. It may feel as though you've already done everything at this point, but you haven't. Now that you have done all the hard work, you must actually follow the plan you have invested so much of your time in and see it through to the end. Otherwise, you will have lost all of your momentum, not to mention money and time and brain cells.

Nominate someone to be in charge of implementing your plan and to be responsible for staying on time and under budget. It does not matter whether that person is external or internal, only that the person has the time and energy to dedicate to your success.

Unless you actually set aside time to work your plan, it will get pushed aside in the daily grind and forgotten. And then, once again, you will have lost your investment because the key to a successful marketing plan is consistency and repetition, fueled by enthusiasm. If you work your plan only sporadically or at the last minute, you lose the awareness you are building one ad or mailer at a time. Remember, it takes 9 times of seeing your image before you'll register in the marketplace.

9} Evaluate

How will you keep track of your success? How much did you invest for each new patient you brought in? Did you reach your goals?

It will take about 9 months of following your plan before you can look back and see what's working and what isn't. After the first 9 month waiting period, schedule an evaluation process every quarter to keep your marketing on track.

There is no point in creating and implementing a marketing plan unless you also track its successes and failures. There will be parts of every plan that are working and parts that aren't. If you get impatient and don't wait long enough to gather your data, you will be flailing in the dark – trying to make changes to something that may or may not be broken. Over time you

must watch to see the differences and re-work the plan to include your growing understanding of your marketplace.

During your evaluation process, think about your vision and your marketing goals, as well as your budget and timeline. Are you reaching your goals? Is the message you are putting out in line with your vision? Have you stayed in your budget and are you meeting your milestones? The answers to these questions will vary, but try to see where you could be doing better and adjust your plan accordingly.

10} Repeat to eat

Do you want to eat next year? And the year after that?

Marketing is like planting a garden – you plan for the winter, buy your Tools, nourish your young plants and finally harvest your food. The key, of course, is to repeat the whole process as long as you feel like eating. It sounds simple, because it is.

If you don't market, you can't maintain a steady, quality new patient flow. And we all know what happens when you aren't getting quality new patients. Learn to invest in your marketing as a matter of course, as the cost of doing business. If you don't, you'll be left behind.

The sooner you begin to plan your practice's marketing, the sooner you will begin to reap the rewards. And once you find a marketing plan that works, that suits your individual practice, it becomes very simple to maintain a steady flow of new patients. If you pull your seeds out too soon, all your time and effort will be wasted. If you never plant your garden in the first place – because you are unwilling to invest your time or resources – then no amount of last-ditch effort will magically turn into food for the winter.

What's YOUR Plan?

IDENTITY PACKAGE

An Identity Package is the complete set of basic elements that is needed to create every marketing tool needed. This includes logo, tagline, colors, layout guidelines and the overall look and feel of your image which can then be easily expanded into more complicated tools, maintaining consistency throughout every facet of your practice. These basic elements are necessary to keep your marketing efforts focused towards your goal.

Athena packages your unique personality, specifically targeted to your perfect new patient and marketplace, and makes your new image usable in absolutely every aspect of your practice.

\$7000

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HOURLY RATE

The services that we provide at Athena Marketing are so wide and varied that using an hourly rate means that our clients always know exactly what their costs are, what we are doing for them and why. We are, as the buzzword goes, transparent, with no up-charges, hidden fees, surprises or kickbacks from vendors.

And best of all, because everything we create here is unique, our clients pay only for what they need, rather than for expensive tools that may not reflect their individual practice, achieve their individual goals or work within their individual budget.

\$150/HOUR

BE ATHENAED!

Visit Nancy's website at AthenaMarketing.com to view our extensive portfolio, see examples of projects, learn Dental Marketing 101 and more! Or call 800-433-4203 for more information. We look forward to Athenaing you soon.

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