



Attracting The Right Patients

Joel Harris, CEO of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing, explains the importance of knowing your market and how to begin catering to it.

According to recent studies by major market research firms, 63% of online shoppers are women. Women control 75% of household finances and 80% of purchasing decisions. Women buy or influence the purchase of 80% of all consumer goods. Women also influence 85% of all health care decisions. Do you see the opportunity here? If not, you might as well stop reading this article right now. But, if you realize how lucrative addressing the needs of women in the dental world can be, then you'll need to understand what influences their purchasing decisions.

As we all know, men and women are different. We respond differently to the same communication and social situations. A man and woman listening to the same conversation might come away with completely different impressions of what was said. For example: men tend to choose a dentist based mostly on price and convenience, women utilize a more careful approach. Your receptionist's tone of voice, or the photo in your yellow page ad might not matter to a man, but might be a deciding factor for a woman. Why? Women are more likely to make buying decisions based not only on the dental services you provide, but also on what your practice stands for.



This once again reinforces women's relationship approach to purchasing. So, if you want to attract women, become focused on softer features and benefits that are important to them—and make sure your marketing message communicates it loud and clear. The premise behind this reality is simple: If women have to go out of their way to track you down... if you make them jump through hoops to get service... if your attitude is "take-it-or-leave-it"... they'll probably leave it—and take their dental dollars elsewhere. Your objective with female customers should be built on a long-term reputation of honesty, integrity, ethical behavior, and "off-the-charts" attention to detail. And most importantly, always remember that it's easier to keep her than to win her back.

Women are not afraid to stop and ask for help, so they will respond more to quality customer service standards and a polished office flow than any of their male counterparts. And even though men may not be as in need of these intangibles, if you

incorporate the higher standards of women into your practice, you are bound to give men a bit more than they even thought to ask for. Studies have also shown that graphic design and advertising that uses cliché women's colors (pinks and purples) or focus on "women's topics," will always alienate male patients. Women can also feel turned-off by such an obvious approach as well. Understanding that women are the number one target is only part of the equation.

Targeting the right women is a critical component in creating a great marketing strategy. Rather than just guessing whom these women might be, marketing experts rely on important demographic information that can be obtained from reliable marketing research firms. When accurate and valuable consumer information is integrated into a marketing tactic such as direct mail, the results can be profoundly more successful than just mailing something to any warm body with an address and a mailbox.

Demographic information can come from a lot of sources, but the best information is never free. In our company, we pay for an expensive subscription to consumer information that can be extremely detailed. For example, an Orthodontist may want to target homeowners and not renters. He or She may also want to target homes with children and parents in certain age categories. Additionally, home value, income level, and length of time in the community are other factors that can dramatically influence the success of a marketing effort. I teach dentists that a time sensitive offer is also a key component of any successful marketing tactic. The type of offer promoted can also have a huge influence on the type of patient that responds to your advertising efforts. A discount off of a cleaning and exam will motivate a particular type of consumer differently than a free whitening offer. A same day crown offer will create

interest and response from a different kind of patient than a discount on silver fillings.

Lastly, it is important to remember that the right kind of potential patient is usually slower to respond to advertising and offers than other patients. It doesn't mean that they don't respond, only that they take longer to switch practices. There is a saying in marketing that women don't buy brands, women join brands. With that said, a long-term consistent brand building and advertising campaign is an absolute necessity. A mediocre marketing program with a dedicated effort will always be more successful than an award-winning strategy that is executed halfheartedly. Dedication is the reason businesses and marketing efforts

succeed. Show me a successful business of any kind, and I will show you a dedication to marketing. The flaw in most dental practices, with regard to marketing, is misunderstanding this important concept. Marketing is not an expense, marketing is an investment. If it is executed properly, every penny spent will return to you multiple times. If I had a dollar for every time I heard a dentist tell me that he or she couldn't afford marketing, I'd be a rich man. When dentists start to see marketing like they see their dental supplies, they are headed in the right direction. When they start to see dental marketing like they see their retirement account, they are finally starting to get it.

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Joel Harris is a co-founder and President of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing located in Salt Lake City, Utah. His company provides powerful marketing tools to help dentists grow their patient base, increase the profit and improve their image. Joel is also the author of the book, Breakthrough Dental Marketing.