

dentalhype.com - I.

There seems to be a proliferation of practices in dentistry that are emphasizing form rather than substance. The need to create and stress the marketing aspects of dentistry has become the hot ticket of contemporary dental practice management gurus.

You understand that the specialist in prosthodontics should be as knowledgeable in modern day marketing techniques as any other practitioner in dentistry. There is good in this if controlled.

The latest *ACP Messenger*, announces that your College is providing new opportunities for you. You can attend a one day seminar that will offer six workshops "geared toward all levels of marketers." In presenting these seminars, your College sees the need for specialists to perk up certain aspects of their practices that relate to marketing. By all means take part in the seminar that is closest to you.

But as a specialist, use caution:

■ Read and review the April 1998 *ProsStars Newsletter*. It specifically addresses competition and the advantages of being able to provide treatments that the generalist cannot provide. Remember, as you plan your marketing strategy, these special treatments do not just increase your share of the pie, they increase the size of your pie. You are providing different treatments to different segments of the population. The specialty treatments that you carry out add value for every dollar spent by your patient. In the marketing world this will be invaluable to you.

■ Be aware that a seminar given by anyone other than a prosthodontist, such as the ACP seminars' keynoter, Dr. Roger Levin, DDS, MBA, might not include special marketing strategies for the specialist. You may be lumped into a group to which you do not belong. I'm sure he gives such seminars frequently to major groups of generalists. Such lumping immediately changes the dynamics of the competitive environment. You will hear things that will categorize you as a practitioner similar to all other practitioners. We've said again and again you are different as a specialist. You know this, but the keynoter and his group may not know it. Recognize it; point it out; and don't tolerate anything other than emphasis of your special differences in treatment. These special differences give you a tremendous edge in marketing strategies!

■ Being old fashioned or not, someone is going to have to prove, statistically, how being on the Internet, with a Web Page, is going to enhance an individual practice. Are we going to jump from the present day Yellow Pages to the Web Pages on the advice of some outsiders not knowledgeable in our specialty? Are we going to jump from the present day Yellow Pages that contain categories of practitioners listed as "prosthodontists" (practitioners who are no more trained in prosthodontics than any other dental school graduate) and seek an informed presence by the use of a Web Page -- the World Wide Web no less? That should well confuse the public on who or what a prosthodontist is!

And wait a minute—where does marketing strategy come in and blatant advertising go out? In defining the word "marketing" the connotation is buying and selling. Do we sell treatment? Does the patient buy treatment? If so, we have come a long way from Judge Louis A. Brandeis's definition of a profession. As his

1912 definition was repeated in the *ProsStars Newsletter* (Volume II, No. 1, January 1996), he said, "A profession is an occupation for which the necessary preliminary training is intellectual in character, involving knowledge and to some extent experience, as distinguished from mere skill. It is an occupation which is pursued largely for others and not merely for one's self. It is an occupation in which the amount of financial return is not the accepted measure of success."

In accordance with this definition, the consequences of a profession are personal, and not material. Professionals should be guided by good ethics, recognized responsibilities, kept obligations, high moral values and an abiding sense of integrity. The fee is the means; never the end.

When considering marketing strategies that are stretched to the outer limits of the state of the art, the focus changes rapidly! One loses sight of the patient and bores in on the payment. Commercialism overtakes professionalism. Outsiders begin to dictate the rewards in practice and how to achieve them. Our special trainings, talents and experiences don't count. The "strategy" of the practice counts. Is this what you want for your practice? Your specialty? Give careful attention to the following example.

dentalhype.com - II

A fake magazine cover, framed and displayed in the waiting room of two New York City dentists shows them as being in the 100 best (fictitious of course). They are described as "cosmetic dentists" who are eager to do "some image polishing." It further describes these "power dentists" hobnobbing with their celebrity patients. They promote "high-tech gum lasers and state-of-the-art laminating techniques." They "operate in opulent surroundings, with an attractive staff trained to deliver concierge services like cappuccino and massage." Wow!! It almost reminds one of the old "Disco Doc" who practiced in Honolulu, Hawaii in the early 80's! Disco Doc could deliver

your dental treatment with blazing lights and disco music. How relaxing!

This front page article in the Sunday Style Section of the January 31, 1999 edition of *The New York Times* went on to say that seminars in practice management for business-minded dentists can include such non-medical recommendations as: "When presenting a patient with a treatment program, always use a Montblanc pen."

The team is quoted as saying "It's no longer enough to have published in the journals, now people want to know if you've been on 'The View.'" But wait a minute, is all of this notoriety necessary? One of the team had his license suspended in 1987 according to the New York State division of professional licensing. The agency won't reveal the reason. He says someone stole some of his prescription blanks.

Is it true that in "the world of bionic beauty, the smile lift has become as familiar as the face lift"? Later this year one of the team is going to announce a consumer product line bearing his name "including an electronic toothbrush and dental floss" that he says will remove stains between the teeth. But really now, who would think of hiring a masseur to rub waiting patients shoulders or "to massage their feet as they recline in the chair"? And oh yes, let's not forget the practice's press agent, the guy who is being paid to turn "some of those famous names [the patient's names] into gossip items."

One of the team figures he has done 30,000 porcelain veneers, and the article says that his porcelain veneers can cost up to \$2,000 a piece. Does that compute to \$60,000,000 worth of good market strategy, or did my calculator just blow a fuse?

Thank goodness, it has been verified that these famed cosmetic dentists do not carry any advanced degree or certificate in prosthodontics. Specialists they aren't!

Some interesting responses appeared in *The New York Times*, Sunday, February 2, 1999. A psychiatrist wrote that he felt practicing in this manner would cause his license to be suspended. He said if he practiced in a like manner in some states he could be thrown in jail.

Now read on>

Another letter writer, a dentist, said the article was so full of dollars and cents that it was disgusting. He also suggested that the *Times* write an article about the "greater-mass dentist" who treats the average patient. He wanted to be sure that his suggested article included facts about the current lack of dental research funds and recent dental school closings.

Well finally, never mind the patients. The Style Section's good doctors wanted to emphasize that they treat clients rather than patients, "because they're not sick" (the clients, that is). "This is the era of the designer dentist and dental salons," as they put it. One can't help but think if these guys only practiced out in Wyoming, they could actually have a dental salon—and a dental saloon. Just think of how that would widen their numbers of clientele? Now that would be an outstanding marketing strategy!

dentalthype.com - III

A new matter of concern in marketing strategy is beginning to raise its ugly head! Since the advent of the implant and the highly competitive sales arena it has created, we see temptations to market ourselves and our practices by being involved in lectures, seminars, and continuing education events sponsored by the implant manufacturers.

Let's back up a bit! Dentistry should take great credit for what it has done in this century. There are pioneers in dentistry too numerous to mention that have changed the face of dentistry in this century from a barbershop sideline to an involvement with proprietary sponsorships to a highly regarded and academically accepted profession. Those are great hurdles to leap! The jumps were made by wise, dedicated men who absolutely believed that our profession was worthy of academic involvement with proper academic recognition. Their struggles literally tore us away from the proprietary involvements that

had become the norm, and insisted that we reestablish our learning processes in universities. This meant, of course, creating learning standards; developing curriculums to satisfy them; instigating research and publishing literature to document it; and above all, accumulating a corps of academicians worthy of the titles earned and granted by the universities.

This takes nothing away from the clinicians who labored in the companies and factories, and who spread the knowledge of dentistry as best they could in the proprietary settings of the day. There are so many of them. Russell Tench, Professor Alfred Gysi, George Clapp, Leon Williams, Frush and Fisher, McGrane, Slack to name only a very few. There were other notable contributors to the science and art of dentistry that traveled and lectured on their own, based on their firm beliefs that their system, their techniques, their instruments were the best. Charlie Stewart, Ralph Boos, Terrell, Fournet and Tuller traveled and labored on their own, as many did in the first half of the century.

Finally, other greats came along who established and verified dentistry and its disciplines in academia. Boucher and Boucher, M. M. House, Devan and Trapazzano, the Applegates, Swensen, G.V. Black, Corwin Wright, Chester Perry, Lucerne Jordan and literally thousands of others who labor to this very day to insure that the highest of standards of learning take place in academia. Let's face it, they verify that "the universities are where it's at, and that's where it should be!"

So when any practitioner of dentistry accepts an invitation to conduct training in the name of a company or a company's product, technique or other, that practitioner begins to turn dentistry back from whence it came. It becomes training not conducted in the academic setting. It is training or instruction or enlightenment about a specific product or technique unrelated to all others; and certainly it is not presented as evidence based research, except in a very biased way. The presenter is bought and paid for in a way that insures that the product will be looked

upon with favor. This is because the presenter is looked upon with favor, or he or she wouldn't be accepted as the presenter.

It becomes a much different environment than the academic setting. The honesties imparted and guaranteed in academic presentations are not usually implicit in proprietary presentations. The presenter, many times with innocence, thinks a great service is done to the profession because of the endorsements given and the enthusiasm shown for the product. Little does the presenter know that the picture seen of dentistry by academic outsiders is one of a "snake-oil-salesman" making a "fast-buck" off wide-eyed, little-knowing practitioners who don't want to read and research, but want to get on the fast-track as easily as possible. The presenter does a great disservice to the profession! All to the satisfaction and glory of the company and its commercial goal of pushing its product in a decidedly economic arena.

Yes, academia needs dollars as well! Our dental colleges and schools need the well-meaning support of the "dental industry," an industry that in turn makes its dollars from dentistry and dentists. Great good has been done in academia with dollars gifted, endowed, and entrusted from the dental industry. That can and never should cease. The dental industry knows it has an obligation here, and there is every indication that more and more support will come to the dental schools from industry, as well it should.

Getting back to market strategy, the weakness in all of this probably lies with the practitioner. Name exposure, gratifications from audience, a sense of importance gained from the amount of honoraria received, all are enticing to the practitioner wanting to market himself or herself. The participations of certain practitioners who place marketing and salesmanship above all else cannot and will not be prevented.

What can be recommended in a positive way is:

- ▶ participation as a faculty member, paid or unpaid, part-time or other;

- ▶ active participation in learned academies and societies with lecture presentations

that reach the high standard the academies will demand;

- ▶ study for Diplomate status in the specialty and following that a dedication to mentoring those trained who are pursuing the same goal of Board status;

- ▶ and finally, a strong consideration of financial support to one's dental school as a way of saying thank you for preparing me for my life's work.

All pretty heavy! All quite lofty! All very esoteric!
All very non-market strategy oriented!

A last statement: Great care must be exercised in dentistry to maintain it as a learned profession, academically based and supported. Our deans have a tremendous task each and every day to defend dentistry to their university presidents and trustees of their universities. It takes only a small intrusion of the entrepreneur, the market strategist, the advertiser, the company-sponsorerd clinician, or the aforementioned cosmetic dentists to wreck havoc with the work done by so many to establish dentistry as it is today— an honored profession.

Take care industry, and take care you practitioners who are looking for fast recognition! Recognize you are in a great profession, and recognize your extra training in prosthodontics is really worth something!

Market strategies—who needs 'em?□

NDW, April 1999