

## ***The Boring (but Essential) Side of Marketing***

By,

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Ah, marketing. What an exciting and glamorous field, most people think. After all, television sitcoms have been feeding us images of hip, smooth-talking ad executives sipping cocktails and talking about the next big “pitch”.... their future careers hanging on their ability to come up with just one more knock-out headline.

There is certainly a large element of that in the business; strong creative concepts, great copywriting and arresting images are the foundations of all great marketing promotion. But marketing is both an art and a science. And it is the science part – the known truths of the business that have been proven for decades – which most individuals new to marketing tend to overlook. And that includes a lot of dental practices.

### **Those Infamous Four P’s of Marketing**

If you’ve taken any basic marketing classes (which most dentists have not), you would know that there are four “P’s” of Marketing:

- **Product** (for dentists, that would be general dentistry, cosmetic dentistry, etc.);
- **Price** (obvious);
- **Place** (in the dental profession, that would be your physical location)
- **Promotion** (any combination of advertising, public relations, internet marketing, direct mail, etc. used to promote your “product”)

There are many people who use the terms “marketing” and “advertising” interchangeable. But as noted above, advertising is a subset of the larger universe of marketing, which considers other important factors like how your pricing structure works, where your office is (and what it looks like) and the specific mix of dental services you offer (i.e., dental implants, Invisalign®, in-office teeth whitening, reconstructive dentistry, etc.) These are not variables that you change every day, but they do have to be considered as part of your overall approach to marketing. When you begin your adventure in marketing, first look at Product, Price and Place and be sure they are consistent with the image and goals you have established for yourself. The final “P”, Promotion, can only come into play once the first three elements are set.

### *Let's Add the Four "C's"*

I have encountered numerous healthcare practices that have been very astute about marketing. They've hired the right professionals to support them, taken the necessary leap of faith, and have devoted sufficient budget to the effort. But I also come across practices who call me because they "want to place an ad." After a big sigh, I find myself launching into a mini-marketing class, which includes my own handy letter reference: the Four "C's"

**Number 1: Continuity.** With the possible exception of Apple's infamous Super Bowl commercial, "1984" (launching the first Macintosh computer in, you guess it, 1984), a single ad rarely has impact. It is the continuation of that message which, over time, will start to penetrate the public psyche and bring them to action. A smaller ad placed six times over a four-week period in the same publication will have much greater impact than a single large ad. In other words, marketing is a long-term proposition, not a one-time hit. It is important to go into it with that in mind.

**Number 2: Coordination or Integration.** The best and most successful marketing efforts are strategically coordinated activities that complement each other. This type of campaign is known as *integrated marketing communication*, another way of saying, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." One local cosmetic dentist, Dr. Joseph Capista of Broomall, applied this strategy brilliantly. After negotiating to be the "Preferred Cosmetic Dentist" of the Sixers Dancers, Dr. Capista promoted this relationship through a combination of print and radio advertising, trade show marketing and public relations. The campaign has brought him considerable exposure and more importantly, new patients, who have been known to come into his office carrying an ad or article that appeared three months prior. "It's probably been my most successful marketing effort in 30 years of practice," says Capista.

**Number 3: Consistency of Message.** It is important to establish a theme for your marketing that is consistently applied through all your marketing and communication efforts. That includes both language (i.e., a tagline or slogan) and images (consistent graphics, photos, etc.) which will be memorable and distinctive. This will build your "brand image" and allow for a greater cumulative impact.

**Number 4: Concentration on a Specific Target Audience.** Small businesses like dental practices rarely have the budget to blanket the universe with their marketing message. General dentists can focus their efforts geographically, concentrating on media that goes only to households in a specific radius of their offices. More specialized dental practices (i.e., periodontists, cosmetic dentists, etc.) can reach a little further since patients are usually willing to drive for experienced, specialized care that is elective. However, there are still opportunities to "target market" by choosing media outlets that provide exposure to certain psycho-demographic (age, lifestyle, interests, etc.) and socio-economic (household income, education, etc.) audiences. An experienced media planner

or marketing consultant can be invaluable in helping select the right media for you to target an optimal audience.

Boring but true....Continuity, Coordination, Consistency and Concentration will go a lot further than a clever ad or headline. Practice the four "C's" and you'll see your marketing investment pay off in dividends.

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