

Leveraging Referrals to Power Your Practice - Part 1

ADMIN · REFERRAL PROGRAM



Humans love to complain, just take a look at social media. A bad cup of \$5 coffee can generate a squall of fervid Facebook posts. People don't need much motivation to say what they don't like. But getting them to say what they do like...now that can take some motivation. That's why generating referrals takes some creative encouragement.



Growing your business is not top on your patients' priorities. Word-of-mouth can seem as random as balloons in the wind. So, what you must do is get referring on their mind, and then give them darn good reasons to do it. There are several ways you can go about this, both in-office and out-of-office.

Let your patients know you want referrals. Asking face-to-face makes it personal but often staff members simply don't have the time or don't remember. Studies have shown that consistency is the largest factor in gaining referrals and keeping you in a patient's mind. Many practices think asking for referrals after each appointment is too frequent. Not so. Patients rarely mind being asked to share their amazing experience. A solid referral-generating system requires automation because most manual efforts fail over time. By using an automated system, you can easily remind them that you appreciate those referrals. Bottom line: consistency is the most influential contributor to driving up referral rates.

As we mentioned earlier, people sometimes need a goose and nudge to get them chanting your praises. You can do this by making their visit an *experience*.

Experiences are worth talking about. A basic filling or root canal doesn't generate oodles of applause - as long as it's painless and done properly, not much to discuss. But you can make it an *experience* by offering creature comforts like warm blankets, a variety of movies to watch, comfortable stress-point chairs, noise-canceling headphones, etc. Make the 30 minutes in your chair closer to 30 minutes in a spa. A spa with drills.

Make your waiting room welcoming and warm, a place patients want to go. Warm, deep colors are soothing, and a massage chair is glorious while you're waiting to be poked and prodded. Offer beverages - water is a must - and free WiFi is a perk that many patients scooting out of work for an appointment will appreciate. Also, a magazine selection that is current shows consideration and care. No one wants to see the same ten *People* magazines they've been reading for the past seven years.

A compassionate staff will get you big talking points, especially for those with dentist-induced anxiety. It's one of the most common reasons people stay with their dentist.

And remembering. Having a visual reference often helps people remember. If you have a referral program in place, giving patients a brochure, flyer or punch card – something they can hold and see - makes it more real.

Offer a suggestion box in your office. The job of the suggestion box has largely been taken over by the online review, but why not offer your patients every opportunity possible to give you feedback? Especially for the older patients who aren't so computer savvy and like to do things the paper way. Generating feedback lets you know where you may need to make improvements to get those referrals rolling.