

Marketing Technology *by William Howard Horrocks*

Many of you have intraoral cameras, lasers, video imaging and other equipment that was not even part of dentistry a few years ago. These technological advancements have made it possible to deliver better dentistry to more people. And that's good. But new technology can also present marketing problems unless you understand how your patients and potential patients are going to perceive it. Among other things, marketing is about perceptions.

A skill any good copywriter has to master, if he or she expects to be able to write response-getting advertising, is to view the product or service being sold from the perspective of the end user. An intraoral camera may be good for you, but what is it going to do for the patient? If you can't communicate clearly and convincingly how the camera will benefit your patient they won't even care that you have one.

Dentist Benefits vs. Patient Benefits

Let's stay with the intraoral camera as an example, though the following principal applies to marketing any of the latest advancements. The camera gets marketed in many ways, but rarely do you see it promoted with purely patient benefits. Usually it's advertised with dentist benefits. The salesperson who sold you the camera (if they were doing their job) figured out what problems you were having and demonstrated how the camera solved some or all of those problems. If they hadn't done that you wouldn't have bought the camera, right? But as far as the salesperson was concerned you were the end user not your patients. It now becomes your task to take it a step further and consider your end users. Patients have a different set of problems than you do, and therefore the camera needs to provide different solutions for them than it does for you.

Using the camera solves certain problems and gives definite benefits to you. (A benefit is nothing more than a solution to a problem.) However, to the patient the benefits you see are absent, or at best simply implied. For example your ability to see their problems better will ultimately benefit the

patient, but it's an indirect benefit that could in fact be viewed by the patient as a negative. Why? Because patients will compare their dental experience with the camera vs. without the camera and they will perceive that if you have a camera their bill is going to be higher because you will "find more things wrong." Or, they'll feel guilty for not buying the treatment plan you recommend, which is based on the "extra" problems you uncover with the camera. Not good.

Whose Problem Are You Trying to Solve?

You have to be cognizant of just whose problem you're trying to solve, yours or the patient's. Let's see what might happen in the mind of the patient if you were to market your camera using only dentist benefits:

Dentist Benefit: I can see better so even the smallest dental problem can be found.

Patient Response: Uh, if the problem is that tiny, can't we let it go until next time?

Dentist Benefit: I can diagnose more dentistry.

Patient Response: Humm, my bill's going to be higher. I think I'll go see someone who doesn't have one of those cameras.

Dentists Benefit: The patient can see what I see.

Patient Response: I'm already nervous, what makes you think I want to watch?

What you view as a solution can be perceived by your patients as a problem. Your marketing task is to present the camera as a solution to a problem your patients have. We need to discover what problems the camera will solve for the patient and communicate these benefits directly rather than by implication. Never depend on your audience to deduce or infer anything from your marketing.

Problem Solved = Direct Benefit

So what problems do patients have with dentistry or dentists that an intraoral camera might solve? There are several but, by survey, two of the biggest are honesty and trust.

What do you think a patient means when they say, "I like Dr. Smith because he's honest and I can trust him?" Is it because the parking really was free, just like your yellow pages ad said? No, patients trust you when they feel you're not over-diagnosing or over-treating them. In the patient's mind it comes down to this: Am I getting the actual care that I need or am I getting more than I need?

Patients don't want the MOST dentistry, they want the CORRECT dentistry. And they want it in the correct amount. What is the correct amount? That's up to you to determine based on your practice philosophy and other factors combined with the goals and acceptance level of the patient.

The camera can help you raise the goals and acceptance level of the patient. But because it allows you to diagnose more dentistry, it actually can end up being a marketing liability or weakness. But within that apparent weakness lies a strength. It all depends on how you communicate the camera to your patients. Choose your words wisely.

Accuracy is Good

With the camera the patients can assure themselves that over-diagnosing and over-treating never occurs in your practice because they can see your diagnosis with their own eyes. The camera allows you to prove what you say. The patient can now trust you fully because they can verify. If you want to reduce this down to a marketing message it might go like this: "Our intraoral camera magnifies your teeth 40 times for unmatched diagnostic and treatment accuracy."

Accuracy is good. The opposite of accuracy is error ridden. Who wouldn't want their dentist to be accurate? When it comes to having sharp instruments inserted into my mouth, believe me, I want accuracy. And

when it comes to diagnosing my problems, I also want accuracy. I especially want accuracy in treatment so that I don't end up paying \$600 for a crown I don't need.

Remember, we're looking at this from inside the patient's head. It might go something like this: "Camera - accuracy, correctness, verifiable = getting the right treatment = not being over-treated = not being over-charged = actually saves me money = I trust Dr. Smith."

Doctors with cameras can be perceived to be more accurate if it's presented this way. Accuracy directly benefits the patient by alleviating the fear of over diagnosis and treatment, a fear that most patients have whether they express it or not. This definitely solves a problem that they have.

You still get to diagnose and sell more dentistry, but it doesn't come across that way. You say that you now can be more accurate than ever before, so they can be assured of a correct diagnosis and treatment. Accuracy and correctness are good things everyone wants.

How Will Patients View It?

When considering buying or marketing any new technology, ask yourself these questions:

1. What clear, tangible, direct benefits with the patient get from this?
2. What problems will it solve for my patients?

Seeing every aspect of your practice from the customer's point of view will allow your marketing to speak directly to the very things they are most interested in - themselves and their concerns.