

Buddy, Can You Spare a Patient?
by Thomas Giacobbi, DDS

New patients are the lifeblood of every practice, but do you know where they come from? Some patients are referred by other satisfied patients, some see your office sign, and some see your name on a list of providers. Give yourself a gold star if you just said: "you forgot to mention marketing as a source of new patients".

There are many dentists that think this is a dirty word, and others that have lived happy lives without ever uttering the phrase 'marketing plan'. Times have changed, and no matter who you are, if want to be successful, you need a plan.

Last week I was up to my eyeballs in new patients; specifically ***Unlimited New Patients*** and ***MORE Unlimited New Patients*** by William Howard (Howie) Horrocks. Weighing in at 600+ pages, these 10 pounds of paper do not belong in 5-pound bag. In fact, I had a difficult time with my 60-second summary because there are so many different ideas in these books.

Both books are filled with enough ideas that you would be hard pressed to walk away empty-handed; however, your wallet will be lighter by the purchase price of \$300. The simple fact is this: open the books at random, select one project and you will recover your funds many times over.

Unlimited New Patients has many simple 'do it yourself' projects that can easily be incorporated into your practice. There are also a few short marketing lessons to explain why positioning is critical, how to write a press release and the importance of surveys. I particularly enjoyed the notion of forming alliances with local businesses; this concept is certainly not new, but this is one that the anti-direct mail dentists will find easier to accomplish. Each idea or project is spelled out in step-wise fashion with examples you may copy suit your needs.

The sequel is ***MORE Unlimited New Patients***, and it picks up the marketing crusade with updated suggestions for alliances with hairdressers, chiropractors, bridal shops and plastic surgeons. Practice websites received a 60 page chapter, most of which is reproductions of web pages to illustrate

the do's and don's of website design. This is timely information and will serve as a good primer for web neophytes.

Common threads that are repeated in both volumes are the recommendation to use direct mail, and that some of your marketing should include an offer of free or discounted dental services. My own bias is to avoid discounts and offers of a free exam, but Howie is quick to explain that advertising without some compelling reason to respond will fall on deaf ears. Many patients need a reason to visit your office over the other three in the neighborhood.

I would recommend these books to any open-minded dentist that is getting ready to improve their marketing program and needs ideas. If you would rather pay someone to do the work for you, call Mr. Horrocks.