



How Strong Is Your External Marketing?

Both internal and external marketing actions can create a good new patient flow with the appropriate payor mix for your practice. The theme of the past several *PMM* articles has been “it’s not business as usual anymore”. Doctors must adapt and take proactive actions to work smarter not harder, to create a livelihood and retirement, as well as provide excellent pediatric dental care in their community.

The previous *PMM* article discussed internal marketing and its importance in creating relationships with parents and children that gain loyalty and treatment plan acceptance. External marketing actions create awareness and need of your services. Many parents and physicians did not experience a pediatric dentist as a child or understand the importance of a child having a dental home by age one. People don’t purchase services they don’t know exist or they don’t know they need. **Pediatric dentists must educate their community on what they offer and the benefits of their services.**

Your internal marketing house must be in order before beginning to work on an external marketing program. This ensures that new families, who are attracted to your office through external marketing activities, feel they made a good choice by becoming one of your patients. If external marketing has not been part of your practice operations in the past, consider some of the ideas below to help increase your new patient flow or change your payor mix; full fee vs. reduced fee. Target your external marketing actions to attract the type of patients you desire.

Marketing to Health Care Professionals

Existing families should be your biggest referral source due to your excellent customer service, and pediatricians should be your second. Other referring health care professionals are general practitioner physicians, general practitioner dentists,

obstetricians and school nurses. These health care professionals and their staff must be educated about the importance of a child having a dental home by age one and what a pediatric dentist can offer. Be aware that it is not just the physician that refers; parents ask nurses and front desk staff where to take their child for dental care. Therefore, it is just as important to educate the staff of referring offices as the physician.

The main message about Early Childhood Caries (ECC) that you want to impart is:

- Early childhood caries is a preventable disease that left untreated increases in severity, causes pain and has a strong, lasting effect on a child’s overall general health. Therefore, all children should have a dental home by age one to reduce ECC.
- A Dental Home provides preventive education to the child’s caregiver in how to prevent and reduce ECC through providing information about proper brushing and flossing, healthy diet and snacks, fluoride and preventive visits.
- Research has shown that if a child does not have a preventive visit by age three they were more likely to need emergency and restorative care.¹
- If a child has a dental home by age one there is an increased likelihood of having more preventive care and less restorative and emergency care.¹

Steps in Contacting Health Care Professionals

1. Have a staff member call and ask to speak to the office manager of the pediatrician’s office. Try to schedule a lunch meeting for the doctors to meet and discuss a mutually referring relationship. If all goes well with this meeting, the pediatric

¹ Matthew F. Savage, Jessica Y. Lee, Jonathan B. Kotch and William F. Vann, Jr. Early Preventive Dental Visits: Effects on Subsequent Utilization and Costs. Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics 2004;Oct:e418-e423.



dentist should offer to do a lunch-and-learn for the other doctor and their staff. At their convenience, you will provide lunch and a short informative message on the importance of having a dental home by age one. Also, answer any questions they have been asked by parents and not know how to answer them about baby teeth.

Get a map of fluoride levels from the county and have it laminated to give to the pediatrician. This is very useful to the doctor in making sure his patients receive the benefits of fluoride, if it is not in the drinking water.

About four weeks after the lunch and learn, a staff member should stop by with additional educational material and business cards to replenish the physician's supply. If referrals have been made, a box of treats with a thank-you note should also be left.

2. If the office manager will not schedule a lunch meeting, ask to schedule a 15-minute meeting with her to get to know each other for a mutually referring relationship and leave a fluoride map and information about the importance of children having a Dental Home by age one. The AAPD website has a variety of brochures and educational materials for purchase.
 3. If the office manager can not accommodate your request for a short meeting, the doctor should stop by unannounced with informative material and a box of treats to introduce himself. The doctor should ask to speak to the office manager and give her the information and treats. If appropriate, ask to briefly meet the physician.
 4. Obstretician offices and hospital maternity wards often give a bag of information and samples to new mothers. Offer to supply a pamphlet about the importance of a Dental Home by age one and a toothbrush or finger cot with very soft bristles. Be sure to have your contact information on this material.
2. It is effective to get programs scheduled by having your practice mascot go to schools and daycares in costume and ask if they would be interested in scheduling a program. This creates a lot of interest when the decision-maker sees the costume. Have a flyer printed up with the character's picture and bullet points about the program: who you are, topics discussed, length, benefits, goody bag to be given out and scheduling availability.
 3. Make your program interactive with the children. The more children interact with the information you share, the more they will remember. Have a big tooth printed on 6-8 child size T-shirts that can be put on child volunteers who stand in the front of the room and represent teeth. Brushing with a giant tooth brush and flossing with a large rope can be demonstrated with the volunteer teeth. The kids have fun seeing their friends involved. Use your imagination for other ideas of involving the children or how your costumed character presents information. For example, silver glitter can be "fairy dust" that gets sprinkled on children's heads by a Tooth Fairy!
 4. A very important point is making sure you include a letter to the parents in the child's goody bag that has the following information; who you are, information about the presentation, information about ECC and a CALL TO ACTION about **the importance of having preventive visits and a dental home by age one**. The above information on ECC can be used. End the letter by letting the parent know you will be happy to answer any questions they have and how to contact your office.
 5. Your dental health education character can also be in a booth at health fairs, especially health fairs for expectant mothers and mother's of newborns. One community has an event called Bellies and Babies, this is the perfect target audience for educating the community about a child's age-one visit. With the appropriate software, using a laptop in your booth, you can schedule a child's appointment on the spot. This is a great convenience for the parent.

Dental Health Education Programs

Dental health education programs are a wonderful way to speak directly to children. They can be scheduled in public or private schools, day care centers or homes, vacation bible schools or summer day camps. Or, the above groups can be invited to your office for a field trip. Follow the tips below:

1. The program will be more memorable if you include a staff member dressed as a Tooth Fairy, superhero or popular movie character. The costumed character becomes part of your practice branding. Have a picture of your practice's mascot on your website and in your reception room. Get known for being the home of your practice

Monthly Marketing Meeting

It is very important to have a monthly marketing meeting between the doctor and a staff member who is responsible for helping the doctor carry out external marketing actions. Each month a new patient referral report should be printed and examined at this meeting to determine who is referring, how they



should be thanked, what marketing actions are working and what new marketing actions should be put into action. This meeting creates your monthly marketing battle plan. External marketing actions should be a year round activity to ensure a continuous stream of referrals.

Thanking Referral Sources

All referral sources should be acknowledged with appreciation. A new patient is a valuable gift to your practice. Parents can be thanked with a hand written note and a \$5 gift card. Health care offices can be thanked with a box of treats or a variety of small scented lotions for staff members. These can be dropped off monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly depending upon the amount of referrals sent. For high referring offices, occasional special treats can be the following:

- Massage therapist sent to do 15-minute chair massages for each staff member and doctor. Ask the referring doctor's permission before sending.
- On-site car wash for each staff member. Wash and detail the doctor's car.
- Take the referring office to a sporting event.

Above are only a few external marketing ideas. There are many more creative actions you can do in your community to get known for excellence in pediatric dental care. Get your staff involved by reading this article at a staff meeting, then ask your staff to use their imaginations for external marketing ideas and how the practice can inform your community about the benefits and importance of pediatric dental care as well as the age-one visit.

***Look for opportunity. You can't wait for it to knock on the door. . . .
you might not be home.***

~ Jinger Heath

Practice Tools to Increase Efficiency

<input type="checkbox"/> <u>New Item! - Top 10 Front Desk Verbal Skills Desk Reference</u>	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>New Item! - Team Meetings Kit: Morning, Monthly & Department</u>	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Benefits of Pediatric Dental Procedures Verbal Skills Flash Cards</u>	\$65
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Hiring & Training Manual</u>	\$125
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Performance Review System</u>	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Marketing Plan System</u>	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Overhead Budget Monitoring System</u>	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Bonus System</u>	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Practice Vital Signs & Goal Monitoring system</u>	\$495
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Full service dental practice management specializing in the pediatric dental office</u>	

These systems can be ordered directly from: www.julieweir.com



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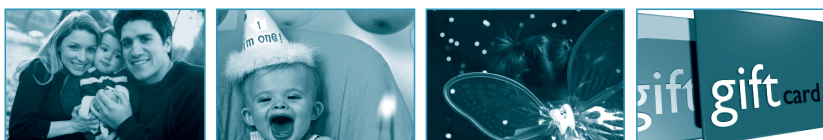




American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
211 E. Chicago Avenue-Suite 1700
Chicago, IL 60611-2637



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