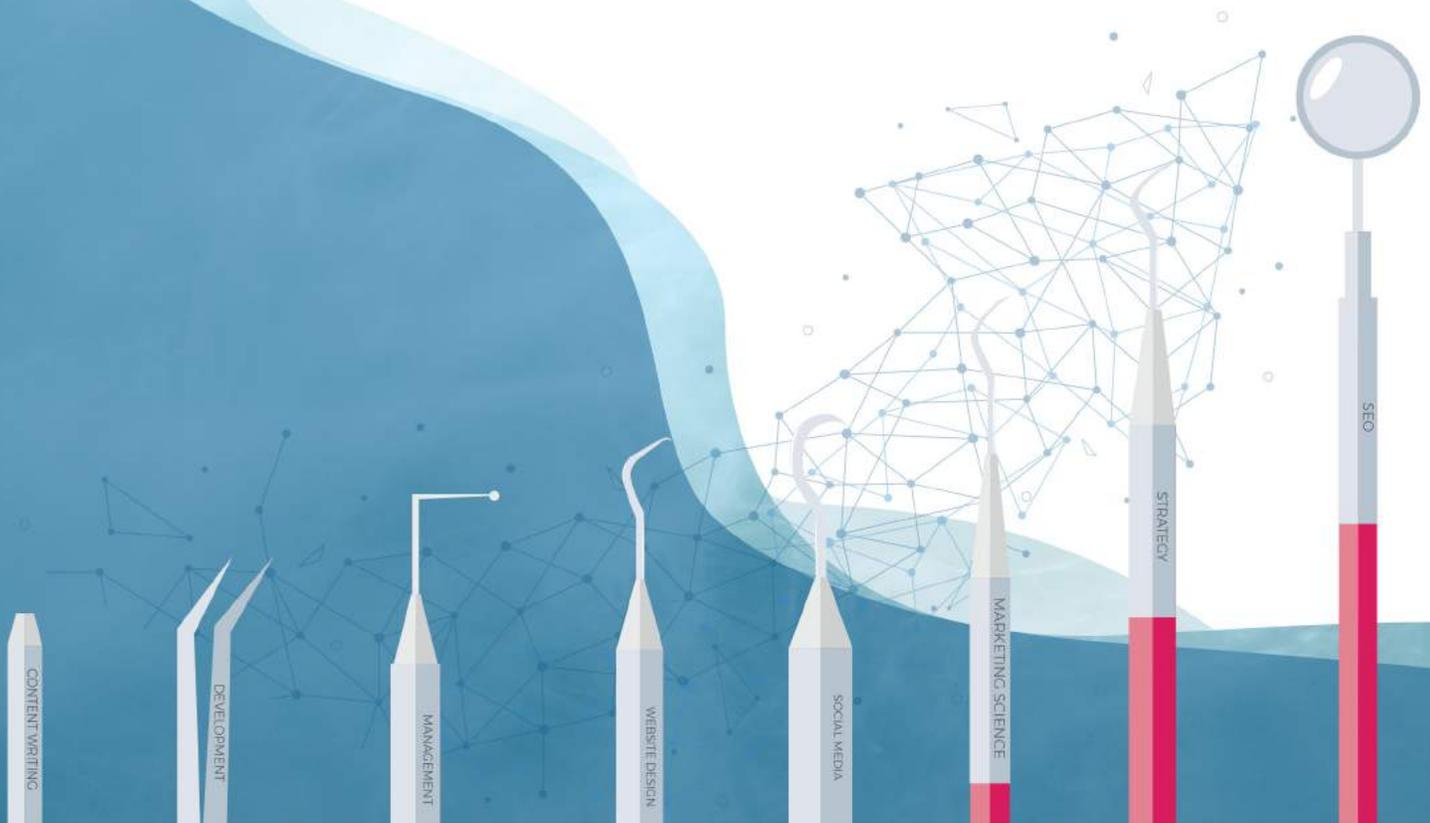


6 WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR DENTAL PRACTICE DURING COVID-19

It's easy to get caught up in the wave of panic and uncertainty right now with the world coming to what seems like a standstill... but for creative entrepreneurs there is always opportunity.

Here are 6 ideas to support you through these uncertain times.





1. Handle Cancellations

Cancellations are inevitable during times like these. How you handle them is crucial to retaining that business for the future. Start by preparing a script for your team when answering the phone or email.

Here is an example:

Patient: "I want to cancel my appointment"

Employee: "Of course, no problem. As I bring up your file may I ask why you are cancelling? We want to ensure all patients know what we are doing at our office during the Covid-19 Virus. We have always been diligent about sterilizing our instruments and the interior of our practice but we are now taking additional measures to clean all surfaces, products and instruments used during your appointment. We are open for business unless circumstances change. If you want to keep your appointment, we are offering last minute cancellations with no fees and we are taking walk-in appointments. If you would still prefer to reschedule, let's re-book you for next month."

As you call to confirm booked appointments also utilize a well-prepared script:

Employee: "Good morning, Mrs. Smith. It is ABC Dental calling to confirm your appointment on Wednesday this week. In light of the current Covid-19 Virus we are asking patients who are displaying any of the symptoms to please reschedule for a time in the future. For patients not displaying symptoms we look forward to seeing you. We have always been diligent about sterilizing our instruments but are now taking additional measures to clean all surfaces, products and equipment used within our practice."



2. Advertise

Until circumstances dictate otherwise, advertise you are “Open for Business”. To fill cancellations and no-show appointments advertise externally and on your practice door or window that you are taking “walk in appointments” and waiving cancellation fees.

If schools, colleges & universities are closing there is an abundance of people with time on their hands. In areas where there is little or no immediate threat, people will still be doing some things as per normal, like getting dental care. Therefore, continue to advertise to connect to patients searching online for a provider.

Stopping advertising will also stop the phone from ringing. They predict that as people stay at home, they will be online more than they ever have been. It's a great time to do advertising to remind patients of your business and services so that when this pandemic passes you are in the forefront of their minds. Advertising can be done through social media posts, Google Display ads, Facebook & Instagram ads, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

Use your social media channels to remind patients to reschedule if they have symptoms, that you are open for business, and that you are a small business and that your community's support is much appreciated.



3. Get Ready to Rumble

Get ready to propel your business to new heights by spending this down-time proactively getting ready to come out swinging when the crisis subsides. This means taking the time to create a marketing plan that lets your community know that you exist.

People will be looking to get back to a normal way of life and pick up where they left off. Be prepared for this by building out that plan now. Showing up on Google is the first step...showing up well is the crucial step.

Here are a few items you should work on to be ready to crush it:

- Updated, engaging & modern website with SEO optimized, unique content that makes your website rank on first page of Google for eye care search terms
- SEO – Search Engine Optimization – if you're not showing up on Google get some expert help as you are losing patients everyday to competitors who are showing up
- Claim and monetize your Google My Business listing – many businesses make the mistake of just claiming the listing but don't realize that activity within the listing is what can make it show up ahead of the competition. Activity can be uploading photos, adding content and getting Google reviews.
- Invest in Google Ads. Google Ads done right hands down can equal booked patients in the door. Why? Because they actively go after the patient who is currently in the market for a dentist. They are actively searching the keywords indicating they are looking for services and are ready to book or buy.
- Stay active on social media. From posting to advertising keep your activity up so patients see you are there, supportive and open for business.

4. Use Time to Create Content

We always say we are too busy. Well now you can say I have the time to create some of the content you always wish you had the time to create. Get ahead of the curve by putting this time to great use.

Here are ideas of things you put off that would be great to get a huge jump on so you are ready to rock and roll when business gets back to normal:

- Marketing Plan – build out a full-year marketing plan. Break it down quarter by quarter, then month to month. Detail out quarterly promotions, monthly tasks, weekly initiatives, daily items and who is completing them.
- Write blog posts – content is king in today’s digital world and blog writing for your practice website is a great tool in helping it rank higher. But writing can be time consuming so take advantage of this time by writing as many blog posts as you can muster. Topics can be varied from, “Importance of flossing” to “Dental myths” to “Children’s first dental experience. What to expect.”
- Social media posts – everyone tells us the issue with posting consistently and well on social media is finding and developing the content. Use this opportunity to create a ton of great social posts. Look at competitors, chains and other practices for inspiration. Either reach out to a graphic designer or utilize online tools such as Canva to make social posts. Build a plan of what and when you will post. There are tools you can use to build Instagram grids, plan out and schedule all posts as well as upload content and hashtags. During times of uncertainty, it is especially important to connect with your community. Social media is the easiest and best place to do this.
- E-books... ok this is a bigger task but could be very useful and worthwhile. Create an e-book (10 – 20 pages) on a specific topic you are passionate about. You can send this out to your patient base, have a download on your website, market on your social channels and have copies in your waiting rooms.
- Clean up lists and databases that you are able to market to. Research and join community forums in your geography like mom groups, senior chat lines and local business groups.



5. Keep Staff Busy, Calm & Occupied

Now that you have done a lot to mitigate damage from cancellations and are still prospecting for new patients, what else can you do to utilize time to your best advantage. Think about all the things you would like to get done around the office and set about a plan to get everyone busy. Keeping staff occupied is a great way to keep their minds off the negativity of the situation and focused on the good times ahead (because there are good times ahead soon).

- Spring clean the office. Well it is almost spring so get a jump on a full office scrub down. Make a list from walls, to floors to drawers. Not only will your office be sterile...it will give it a spring feeling which we all need right now.
- Stock up the office. Go through all of the office supplies and replace low supplies and items needing full replacement. You might have to search a bit if replacing the toilet paper. Add items like Lysol wipes, Lysol spray, hand sanitizer, soap dispensers and Kleenex if you have any on hand
- Declutter...along with the spring cleaning get rid of stuff that can be tossed like old POP (posters, counter cards, etc.). Clean out closets, cupboards and storage units to be organized for a new season.
- Staff training...let's face it, this is always needed. If you've got the time then take staff training to the next level.

6. Build Personal & Business Expertise

Whenever I have extra time, I like to learn. Learn about business, nutrition, personal goals and motivation. Stuff that we literally never have time for.

Well here you are:

Online CE. Since you can't get to provincial or international events right now take advantage of online continuing education portals.

Business reading to help you stay focused and motivated. Here are the top-rated business books & magazines to read for business owners in 2020:

- What It Takes: Lessons in the Pursuit of Excellence – Stephen Schwarzman
- The Non-Obvious Guide to Emotional Intelligence – Kerry Goyette
- The Bezos Letters: 14 Principles to Grow Your Business-Like Amazon – Steve Anderson
- The Surprising Science of Meetings: How You Can Lead Your Team to Peak Performance – Steven Rogelberg
- Click: Transform Your Business Through Digital Marketing – Kevin Wilhelm
- Forbes
- Harvard Business Review
- INC
- Bloomberg Business Week
- Entrepreneur

Catch up on the current trends and be a part of a supportive networks on Facebook and LinkedIn. Use this time to enhance your relationships within your industry.

THERE'S A SAYING... THIS TOO SHALL PASS...

There's a saying...this too shall pass...that keeps coming to my mind when I hear the news and the daily changes to this pandemic. As a business owner I know that what we do in the next few weeks will also determine how strong our business comes out on the other end of this crisis. Staying calm, thinking things through and preparing for better times is what I am doing to take advantage of a bad situation.

Last words. Smile...it could be worse. Help others where you can. Support local businesses and your loyal patients who need guidance and aid during this time.

**Kevin Wilhelm,
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