

## **Five Key Ortho Practice Expanders™ & How They're Critical to Your Future**

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### **Introduction**

There was a time when production declines in orthodontics seemed almost unthinkable. Now, it's a fact.

Today, the economic consequences for ortho practices are unavoidable. Everyone is feeling the pinch. The effects are clearly being felt in ortho offices across the country. Parents of observation patients are often delaying starting treatment for months or even longer, waiting for the economy to change course.

Yet, many ortho practices continue to grow and flourish in this economy. How is this possible? These orthodontists understand what grows their practices—Key Ortho Practice Expanders™.

### **Key Ortho Practice Expanders™ Define an Ortho Practice's Future**

After working with thousands of orthodontists during the past quarter century, Levin Group has identified a set of Key Ortho Practice Expanders™ for practice success. Here are five of the most important:

- 1. Doctor Referrals**
- 2. Patient Referrals**
- 3. Starts**
- 4. Observation Patients**
- 5. On-Time Debonds**

#### **1. Doctor Referrals**

Consider the fact that adding one top referring doctor can increase practice production by as much as \$100,000 to \$300,000. A consistent, ongoing referral marketing program can add millions to your bottom line over the course of a career. The greater the number of top referring doctors, the stronger your practice will be in *any* economy.

Practices that maintain an effective referral marketing program enjoy a high level of regular and new referral sources. Referral marketing is an investment in time and money, but, when done right, it can offer huge returns and increase referrals today, tomorrow and for the rest of your career.

The referral marketing program is run by a Professional Relations Coordinator (PRC). A PRC is not a full-time employee, but rather a part-time team member who averages 12-15 hours per week. This individual builds and strengthens relationships with referring doctors, staff members, and patients.

## **2. Patient Referrals**

A steady flow of new patients is critical to every ortho practice. To avoid a plateau or a decline, practices need both effective referral marketing *and* a strong patient referral program.

Usually, patients are quite happy to refer friends and family, provided they know referrals are welcome. Orthodontists can tap into this potential with a strong patient referral program. To name just a few strategies, internal marketing can involve approaches like incentive programs, patient testimonials, scripting, and messages on patient correspondence, brochures and mailers. Ortho practices that enjoy the greatest marketing success rely on both referring doctor and patient referrals.

## **3. Starts**

During consultations with potential new patients and their parents, practices should set a goal for starts of more than 90%. But is this possible? Sometimes patients visit other offices first, others may cancel and some may never show for even the initial consultation. When new patients come into your practice, you must ensure that you've generated some excitement and given them ample reasons to feel motivated and willing to stay.

A well trained Treatment Coordinator is an important asset for increasing the new patient start rate well beyond the orthodontist's capabilities. However, whether practices have a Treatment Coordinator or the doctor handles all new patient consults, it is still critical to start 90% or more of patients coming into the office. A well-organized and systematic method of starting patients needs to be implemented, measured and periodically enhanced.

## **4. Observation Patients**

Observation patients should continually be moving into your new patient pipeline. They are your future production. The more observation patients you have and the more you can convert over time, the higher your practice production will be. This patient group should be managed with the same intensity and focus as your new patient starts. Start bringing siblings of patients into the office as soon as possible for a no-cost observation.

Many orthodontists indicate that observation patients are a challenge because they take up valuable chair time. What this indicates, however, is that practices need to work on systems to correctly manage observation patients.

It is important to create a system for tracking observation patients. Offer complimentary examinations to siblings of every patient entering the practice to convert them into observation patients. Schedule these patients as early as possible and then evaluate their status on a six-month basis. Calculate a weekly statistic for overdue observation patients and aim for a goal of less than one percent.

## **5. On-Time Debonds**

Orthodontic practices are often excellent at managing the early stages of the treatment cycle timeline. From the evaluation phase to successive stages of treatment, practices for the most part efficiently schedule patients during the course of orthodontic care. Patients have their braces applied quickly, their adjustment appointments run smoothly and treatment follows an efficient, well-run pattern.

One treatment phase, however, poses scheduling problems for orthodontic practices—debonding. A high number of overdue debond appointments routinely clog up the orthodontist's schedule. In fact, Levin Group sees many orthodontic practices that have between 10% and 40% of patients overdue for debonding.

Practices should aim for a goal of no more than 2% of patients who are overdue for debond. Make sure patients are called when their debond appointments are past due. Also, confirm debond appointments in advance. Patients should be moved quickly through this process. It is inadvisable to allow the number of overdue debonds to get out of hand. When this happens, it will hinder production and slow practice growth.

## **Conclusion**

By understanding and abiding by these five Key Ortho Practice Expanders™, ortho practices can experience dramatic growth. Do you have systems in place to reach out to referring doctors? Are you currently tracking your patient close rate and scheduling debond appointments promptly? These steps can spark dynamic change and unlock your potential—even in this economy. The negative effects of the economy needn't cause ortho practices to remain trapped in a no-growth phase any longer. The five Key Ortho Practice Expanders™ are the answer to ortho practice growth.

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