

Seven Lies Orthodontists Tell Themselves

by Roger P. Levin, DDS

In a difficult economy, could one of the things holding you back from greater success be... *you*? Maybe.

Having little or no business management background, many orthodontists tend to latch onto nuggets of perceived wisdom picked up from colleagues. Unfortunately, many of these “nuggets” turn out to be lies. If acted upon, they can be very counterproductive. At a time when orthodontists are down anywhere from 5 to 10% because of the economy, you can’t afford to be sidetracked by ortho lies.

Levin Group has identified seven marketing lies that orthodontists commonly tell themselves. Know them. Avoid them!

1. “Dentists need me. I don’t need them.”

Wrong! Without referrals from general dentists, your practice couldn’t survive. It’s not something many orthodontists want to admit or verbalize, but it’s the truth. Referrals from your general dentists make up the majority of your patient base. Sure, you may receive referrals from patients, but could you build a thriving, growing practice around *just* patient referrals? Not really. Patient referrals are important but your referring doctors are even more valuable. You need dentists more than they need you—that realization is the foundation of a successful referral marketing program.

2. “Marketing is beneath me.”

Beneath you? That’s like saying *success* is beneath you. This mentality may have worked 20 or 30 years ago but in this uncertain economy—not a chance! Most dentists have three or four options on where to send patients who need orthodontic treatment. You can sit back and wait for dentists to come knocking at your door. But you can bet your competitors won’t be doing that. They’ll be working to expand their referral base by targeting your referring doctors. Taking your referring dentists for granted is no longer an option. For orthodontists, Levin Group recommends implementing a referral marketing program that emphasizes regular, consistent contact with current and potential referring doctors.

3. “Dr. Jones would never refer his patients to another orthodontist.”

Don’t be so sure. The relationship between orthodontists and their referring dentists can be a fragile one. Some orthodontists assume their long-term relationships with referring doctors are written in stone. Don’t make that mistake. You should have regular contact with your referring dentists, whether it be a monthly phone call, a quarterly visit or a recurring lunch at a favorite restaurant. Levin Group recommends that orthodontic

practices survey their referring doctors and their team every two years to see what is working well in the relationship and what can be improved.

4. “I don’t have the time to market my practice.”

No, you don’t. And you shouldn’t even try. You should be chair-side providing excellent care to your patients. This is one reason that Levin Group advocates the use of a Professional Relations Coordinator (PRC). The PRC runs your referral marketing program, which may include arranging lunch-and-learn training sessions as well as sending out fact sheets and flyers, and corresponding with referring offices. When properly implemented, a referral marketing program is a uniquely positive experience that helps you find new orthodontic referral sources and maintain the relationships you have already established. In short, referral marketing is critical to your future.

5. “Meeting with referring doctors isn’t a great use of my time.”

If you think these meetings are unproductive, how do you think your referring doctors feel about them? If you harbor negative feelings about these get-togethers, isn’t it possible that you unconsciously telegraph such thoughts to the referring doctor? Consider your last meeting with a referring doctor—did you do everything possible to make it a good experience? Were you friendly and outgoing? Were you a good listener and not just a good talker? Did you pick the appropriate venue to meet? Meeting with referring doctors can be an enjoyable *and* productive experience. It’s up to you to make it that way.

6. “I send a fruit basket at the holidays. That’s enough.”

Is it? Don’t you want to *exceed* expectations? Why be just another vanilla ortho practice that sends the standard (and unimaginative) fruit basket? You can—and should—do better. And what about the rest of the year? Do your top referring practices only send you patients once a year? Of course not. Neither should your marketing efforts be just a one-time thing.

Think about how many patients each of your top referring practices send to your practice each year. One “A” referring practice can be responsible for \$100,000 or more in production. Is one fruit basket enough for that doctor and his or her team? If that “A” doctor stopped referring to you, how would you replace those patients and production? Exceeding expectations is the key to building long-term referral relationships.

7. “When things get better, I won’t need to bother much with marketing.”

This is a very common sentiment—and a dangerous one. Inconsistent marketing leads to inconsistent results. Implementing a referral marketing program is the best way to ensure a steady stream of new patients no matter what is going on in the economy. A good leader is always thinking ahead. You don’t want to play “catch-up” when you don’t have to. Consistent referrals should always be your goal. An effective referral marketing program is how you get them.

Conclusion

Lies are easy to create. They are much more difficult to destroy. Why? In every instance, they provide a false sense of comfort to their creator.

To have a growing ortho practice, you must tackle these fallacies head-on. These lies (and others) must be identified and shrugged off, not clung to. The success of your practice in a fragile economy hangs in the balance!

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