

Give patients a place to call home

Retain patients with greater
ease using advice from our
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Odds are you spend a lot of time (and money) on getting new patients. Unfortunately, while you've got the welcome mat out and the front door wide open, those very patients can end up slipping out the back door.

They don't come back for recall. They're not interested in any restorative or cosmetic work. Ultimately, they are little more than drive-by patients of yours.

Just how bad is this attrition? According to DentistryIQ, 57 percent of patients haven't visited their dentist in 18 months or more.

REACH OUT TO PATIENTS

Professional marketers have an idea about how to solve this problem, and it's called **retention marketing**. Retention marketing is a consistent, multi-touch effort that keeps your practice at the forefront of all your patients' minds. Consider how companies market to you. Your inbox may have emails from Spirit Airlines highlighting its latest travel destinations. Or Netflix informing you of its new programming. Or maybe TOMS with its latest line of shoes.

Through these emails, the companies are keeping themselves top-of-mind. They're educating you on additional services and working to retain you as a customer.

When it comes to dentistry, you want to be the first and only choice for patients. Retention marketing gives you a way to close the back door and remind patients you are the provider for them.

Consider these **three** things as you strategize on how to keep patients:

- ONE** Multi-Channel Communication
- TWO** Consistent Communication
- THREE** Offer Incentives

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MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATION

It's important to vary your marketing channels. Patients need to see their doctor's presence in multiple places.

Your retention marketing campaign could take the form of an email; it could be a letter; it could be a social media message; or it could be all of the above. Remember: you want to communicate with patients in the ways they like to be reached.

One of the most popular approaches is a postcard. And the postcard isn't a bad tactic ... unless it is the only tactic you choose to employ. Unfortunately, for many practices, sending a single postcard makes up their entire process.

Professional marketers reach their audience through many different communication channels, all with the mentality that they need to close the deal.

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Telling your story

A "message map" is a popular marketing term that describes the story you want to tell patients. In your retention efforts, it's the language you'll use to motivate patients to schedule their next office appointment.

Messages might include:

- Why it's important to see the dentist every six months
- How friendly and caring your team is
- What forms of insurance you accept
- Any new technology you've purchased that makes appointments faster and more comfortable

Make sure your message map directly relates to your practice, then be sure to incorporate it into every touch of your recall campaign.





CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

The first aspect of retention marketing is to maintain contact. Recall messages alone simply won't cut it. Set a goal to communicate with patients every month, thus enabling you to stay top-of-mind throughout the year.

Consistent communication serves to remind patients you *actually* exist outside their visits – that you don't go underground only to reappear every six months.

Immediately After Visit

Getting in touch with a patient within 24–36 hours after their appointment is crucially important. For one, it shows patients you care about them even after they've settled their bill. It's also the premier time to double down on your communications.

Ideas:

- Email any post-op instructions to a patient
- Email follow-up treatment information
- Offer elective services

Between Visits

Communicating between visits enables you to stay top-of-mind. The last thing you want is for patients to only remember your existence every six months. Show patients that, even when they're not thinking of you, you're thinking of them.

Ideas:

- Holiday greetings via social media
- Send birthday cards in the mail
- Email newsletters with topical dental information
- Have an appointment time become available? Send an announcement

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Exploring Recall

Recall is important. And while you're likely thinking, "Thanks, Captain Obvious," take a moment to consider how efficient your practice's recall efforts truly are.

Between 70 and 80 percent of treatment is diagnosed at routine appointments, yet the average dental practice's patient retention hovers somewhere between only 50 and 65 percent.

These figures show us that while practices certainly understand the importance of recall, there is much room for improvement.

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OFFER INCENTIVES

Though it may feel a bit uncomfortable, you may need to incentivize patients to take action. In a perfect world, they'd come in and seek treatment unsolicited. Unfortunately, things don't always play out like that. Patients will fall off the grid, only to show up with emergencies that could've been avoided through preventative treatment.

Incentives can take the form of anything from a free service to a new Sonicare or a discount off a visit. Sometimes all it takes is this little bit of coaxing to get a patient into the chair.

Again, incentivizing can feel uncomfortable at first, but think back to your inbox. Did TOMS offer 20% off while touting their new line? Did Spirit mention any temporary fare reductions? It's a common practice within marketing. With that said, be sure that you are legally allowed to incentivize before adding this to your retention campaign; some areas are stricter on this than others. ●

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