

ADA New Dentist News

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Inside this Issue

- Tough times call for creativity
- The economic downturn
- Patient satisfaction
- Insurance plays a key role in buying a practice
- ADA Resources

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Tough Times Call for Creativity

How can New Dentists market themselves in a down economy?

Today's economic conditions have generated more questions than answers. No one can predict where the market is going or what challenges lie ahead. And although Albert Einstein wasn't talking about a recession when he said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity," that thought is applicable for today's new dentist. In this era of uncertainty, new dentists can tap their creative energies to discover new markets (and fresh ways to market their practice).

In Montgomery, Ala., pediatric dentist Dr. Keri Miller is making herself visible through the public schools. She adopted the alligator as her office mascot, made goody bags with dental supplies bearing her office logo, then contacted the schools, offering to lecture about oral health.

"Schools are always asking for someone to come and talk to the students," she says. "With preschoolers, I talk about basic brushing and flossing. With third graders, I explore the science because they're starting to learn about bacteria and its relation to tooth decay. With teenagers, I address piercings and sports trauma."



Dr. Keri Miller

In Honolulu, new dentist Dr. Jaclyn Lum is seeing her patient base grow with union workers. "I found out, if you can win over just one union guy, most likely they'll bring more union guys," she says.

"They usually have good dental coverage – and they're very good about spreading word-of-mouth about me. It really comes down to making friends."

In Boston, Dr. Helaine Smith, who offers cosmetic dental services, has unleashed a low-cost marketing blitz on the Internet. She wrote an e-book on oral disease. She maintains a Web site, a blog, a Facebook page, and "everything is driving traffic to my book; that's why it gets downloaded," she says. "People are curious."

In less than a year, the e-book has been downloaded 6,700 times. The volume of work in her dental practice is up \$10,000 per month. Her reputation for harnessing the Internet to drive business is growing. Her speaking engagements have added creativity and excitement to her dental career.

To handle the technical side of cyberspace, Dr. Smith hired a professional.

"Though I dabble in social media, I need an expert who does it full-time," she says. "My I.T. person maintains the site, handles the analytics, monitors trends, reads blogs, etc."



Dr. Jaclyn Lum

Tap Your Tools

With her e-book (a quick read, easy to download and print, and available for free), Dr. Smith says she found the "perfect forum for a 28-page piece of information." Still, after 3+ years of using "social media" like Facebook and Twitter, there's no magic formula for increasing your bottom line.

Being creative and resourceful helps. New dentists grew up with computers, are smart and energetic, and open to new ideas and trends – just the right tools to try out their own ideas in viral marketing.

Start with a Web site. "People do look at it, and it will generate business," Dr. Smith says. "In Boston, where a T.V. commercial is cost-prohibitive, my Web site has been my most effective (and cost-effective) investment."

Keep it fresh with new content. "During the presidential campaign, I analyzed the candidates' teeth on my blog," she says. "Of course, I always want to be professional and raise the public's view of us. I try to educate people using topics that interest them."

Don't quit before the payoff. "You don't need one million hits from around the world to have a successful Web site," she says. "For a small business like mine, the return-on-investment has been simply great."

Hire a pro – now! With the downturn in the economy, and I.T. clients putting projects on hold, right now is a good time to hire a web developer or negotiate a lower retainer fee.