



# Selecting the Right Marketing Media

By Carl Burroughs

**Setting aside enough money for an advertising budget can be quite a challenge for a dental practice. One way to make sure you're spending your advertising dollars wisely is to make sure you select the most effective advertising media in which to run your ads.**

The term 'media' refers to the type of outlet that will run your ad. These include elements such as newspapers, television, radio, magazines, online, and many other potential advertising opportunities. While the array of choices may be intimidating, carefully thinking through your media buy and keeping your patient in mind every step of the way will help you make the most effective advertising decisions.

Before spending even one dollar on advertising, first answer some key questions. Specific answers to these questions will drive a more focused and targeted advertising strategy.

#### Ask yourself:

- **What is the main goal of my advertising?**
  - To drive more patients to my practice?
  - To attract more of a particular type of procedure?
  - To keep a hygienist or associate busy?
  - To fill a gap in the demographics of my database?
- **Who is my target patient?**
- **How much can I budget?**
- **How is my competition advertising their services?**

#### Choose the right media vehicles

While there is rarely a single right or wrong way to select media, thorough basic analysis, research and common sense, you will be able to choose the best forums for your advertising message.

The first task at hand when deciding on media vehicles is to make a comprehensive list of available media in your market. Be creative – aside from just listing local newspaper, flyers, radio and possibly TV, think about what kind of media your potential patient reads or listens to as well as when and where they are most likely to see your ad. This will include Yellow Pages, specialty publications, billboards, websites, shopping centres and area of influence such as the local pharmacy or gym.

Once you have a list of all the available media, start researching how much it costs to run an ad in each vehicle. Again, be specific and keep your ideal patient in mind.

Since the cost of media is usually the largest expenditure in an advertising program, your budget will be a major factor in deciding which media to choose. No matter how ideal an advertising vehicle may seem, it can only be so for your practice if you can realistically afford to buy the ad space or time and that it will result in a return on investment. Prioritise which media you want to use and which ones you can afford.

The next step is to consider where your patients will be when they see or perhaps hear the ad and how you want them to respond. Are you just trying to build awareness of your practice, or do you want customers to 'act' on the ad in some way?

In some cases, you may choose your ad based on what your competitors are doing. If a local practice has used the same newspaper for years and run a large ad, this may not be the best medium for your ad and it may be better to find a medium that you can, in effect, monopolise.

#### Small and Frequent

Why will someone respond to a dental ad? And more importantly, why will people respond to your ad. Firstly, the most important aspect of why someone will respond to your advert is timing, not your timing of placing the ad, but theirs for the need of your services. If a potential patient is suddenly in pain and sees your ad, then they have a massive reason to respond today. This may not be your ideal patient, but they have motivation. If a person has just got engaged and is starting to think about their appearance then an ad promoting teeth whitening may grab their attention. This is of course shifting sands, the person in pain today will be a different person tomorrow, so this is why with dental



advertising it is important to advertise regularly. Far better to take a small advert on a regular basis than a large 'ego' based ad once a year.

### Measure Your Progress

To keep your advertising costs within a reasonable budget, you should calculate the cost of reaching potential patient and monitor each ad's effectiveness.

To calculate and compare the costs of reaching potential prospects, most advertisers use the cost per thousand, or CPM figure. The figure is simple to calculate if the outlet's ad representative doesn't have it available for you.  $CPM = (\text{cost of the ad} \times 1,000) / \text{size of audience}$ . In other words, the CPM for an ad costing \$500 in a publication that reaches 10,000 people is  $(\$500 \times 1,000) / 10,000 = \$50$ .

Once you compare CPM's across different media and place your ad accordingly, be sure to track your results as specifically as you can to make sure your message is reaching your potential patients. When you get a new or returning patient ask how they heard about your practice. It's a good idea not just to have a space on the health questionnaire for them to fill in, but tick boxes outlining every marketing initiative you are undertaking, this way it will remind them where they 'really' heard about you and

not just write the first thing that comes to mind. From this information you can work out your patient acquisition cost and from there, the effectiveness of the media used.

By keeping a thorough tracking of which ads are reaching your customers, you can adjust your advertising dollars accordingly and come back better prepared when your advertising cycle begins again.

Finally, advertising for dental practices should be used as a tool to achieve defined goals, whether to launch a new product or service, attract a specific demographic to just getting you busy in times that are slow, but please never forget that referrals should remain the life blood of every practice. If your cost of acquisition is \$60 per patient through advertising and then you get the same patient to refer two friends or family members then your actual cost of acquisition per patient is now just \$20. Cost of acquisition will be covered in depth in a future article.

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