



Contacting your patients has never been easier than with an informative and interesting newsletter.

By Carl Burroughs

It is proven that communicating with your patients 4 times a year improves recalls, creates demand for more elective dental work and boosts your bottom line.

So many patients today will seek out a 'cosmetic dentist', an 'implant dentist' or go to a specialist orthodontist even though their own dentist may be able to offer the services they are looking for. Informing your patients of everything you do will keep patients in your practice and save you constantly remembering to mention the full gamut of treatments you provide.

A newsletter is a great way of getting your image out into the world at a relatively low cost and with a maximum impact. Telling your patients about a new procedure, a new doctor, showing them the results of a great orthodontic or veneer case gives them an insight into your practice even when they are not there.

You might think that writing a newsletter is just a waste of valuable time as it will never get read. Well, think again. If your newsletter is written correctly, with interesting topics, it will keep your practice top of mind and you will get great results.

Regular activity and great content will get your patient to interact with you and your practice on a more regular basis, giving you the additional patients and procedures you desire.

A newsletter is a great promotional tool. Because it's not meant to be used as a selling tool patients are more likely to read a newsletter. Newsletters are also a great way to build credibility for your practice, getting your image and name out there regularly and professionally.

Everybody receives mail they do not want every day, it is a fact of life we are all coming to live with. A newsletter is something that has more chance of catching the eye of the reader. They will see your image, recognise your practice name (so straight away they know it isn't junk mail as they know you), they will scan the document and see if there is anything of interest to them. You will have caught their attention for a few minutes longer than a postcard, flyer or plain letter. Done regularly, the impact becomes greater as they come

to expect the newsletter, know that it isn't just a one off piece of mail and may even start keeping them to read later.

The best way to write for a newsletter is keep it informal. Imagine you are writing it to friends, people you know. Your patients will have some kind of relationship with you when they are in your practice. If your software allows, you will have notes on them, their history and you may even note points they have raised about their family, work or social life. The patient should feel that you remember them from the last visit. So, when you send them a newsletter, they still feel that you have sent it to them personally with information they will personally like to read.

Familiar images of your surroundings, you and the team will also register with them when they pick up the newsletter. They will know your faces, know the practice and immediately take interest in the content.

You now have their attention so what should you write!

There are Five Rules for newsletter content: -

1. Topical (contain news, e.g. coming events, new products, announcements, patient of the month)
2. Readable (contain short, properly written and proof-read, focused articles)
3. Useful (have an advice column, hints & tips, e.g. flossing techniques)
4. Balanced (e.g. a mixture of content, text/graphics)
5. Compelling (cover areas known to be of interest to the reader, e.g. Procedures, a patient story, a new staff member and how it will help them at their next appointment).



Topical Issues

The first item goes without saying; the news in newsletter is just as important as the news in newspaper – and it's not news unless it's topical. You may be doing a promotion for educational sessions to encourage children to understand oral hygiene- that is topical. Telling patients of an exceptional result with another patient gets that personal touch into the newsletter. Keep a list each month of events that you believe improves your practice and promotes the achievements you have made to the benefit of the patient.

Readable

In the case of the second principle, always remember your target audience. A conversational style is usually best as you bring the reader in as the acquaintance they believe they are. Do not use technical terms when discussing procedures, use the terms that are softer and can be digested better by a patient. It is not a newsletter about how qualified you are and how much you know but a newsletter that makes the reader feel in control and in need of your services. They can only feel this way if they understand what they are reading.

Useful Information

Regular features such as Hygiene Tips are good examples of interacting with your patient. Giving them information and advice for free adds weight to the content and will get the reader to keep on reading if they think they are learning something new. Also, a section like Your Questions Answered will keep the reader alert. You may even request that they contact you with a question to be included in the next newsletter. It helps you learn more about what your patient wants to know and makes the patient feel like you are listening to them.

Balance

The fourth item in the list is an elusive quality that is easy to get wrong but it's much more important than many people realise. The need differs from one newsletter to another but content balance is usually achieved by including carefully chosen 'filler' items. Having a children's colouring in section, perhaps a trivia quiz or just a fact of the month, breaks up the content and balances out serious articles with something a little more lighthearted.

Compelling

How do you make your newsletter compelling? By including content that is alluring to the reader; in other words, the things that they are most interested in. The more you know about the reader the more relevant you can make the content and

the more compelling the newsletter. Don't forget also how compelling it is for people to read about themselves! Even better is seeing a picture of themselves or one that includes a team member or another patient. What about a regular feature such as Patient of the Month or randomly selecting someone in your practice for a Focus on a Patient spot. In conversation during an appointment, you may find out that a patient is sponsoring an event, raising money for charity or the local football team is in the state final.

You must also remember when creating your newsletter to include your WEB ADDRESS EVERYWHERE! This is a perfect opportunity to let people know more about you and interact with your website in their own time. Your newsletter has only a small area in which to get a lot of information across. Your website has EVERYTHING your patient needs to know about you, your services, images of work you have completed and a comprehensive guide to dentistry in general. By providing this link, you are giving people the opportunity to find out more and another way for them to refer their family and friends to you. 'Yes Bob, I have a great dentist. I was just reading their newsletter the other day. Can't remember their phone number but their website is www.greatdentist.com.au, have a look to see if they offer the services you need'.

You should also remember, when creating your new website or refreshing your existing one, you can attach a copy of your newsletter to it. Having a link for someone to click on and open it as a PDF is a great way to show new patients how interactive you are with your database and how much you care about your patients. You can also archive your newsletters so people can have a look through your old newsletters to find an article of interest. Also, don't forget to keep your newsletters handy in the practice- When your patients are waiting, what better than to have a bit of light reading available about your practice!

Just a few more ways to get your newsletter out to people and expand your brand and image in the community.

If you stick to the five rules of content, your newsletter will have truly entice your patients and once it does that, plus REGULARITY, it is easy to get your newsletter to really work for you.

For more information on creating a newsletter for your practice, simply talk to Integrated Dental Marketing. IDM can create an individual newsletter for your practice, write the content and organize printing and distribution to your patient base. Call 02 9211 1477 today or email info@idm.com.au.

