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WHY CONE BEAM CT SCANS MATTER A SURGEON'S PERSPECTIVE

When many people in dentistry think of cone beam computed tomography (CBCT), the benefits of this relatively new technology are fairly well understood. In general, imaging technology in the field of medicine and dentistry have allowed for the advancement of patient care, specifically in the way that care is delivered.

FOR THE CLINICIAN USING CBCT, THE ADVANTAGES ARE NUMEROUS

- There is improvement in the way cases can be planned, from determining the size of dental implant, to predicting length of orthodontic treatments.
- There is more confidence in diagnosing, especially when it comes to assessing oral and maxillofacial pathology and correctly assessing anatomic structures during surgery.
- There is ease in communicating with patients who may find it difficult to appreciate a diagnosis and/or treatment plan.
- There is greater accuracy in endodontics when visualizing accessory canals.
- There is more accuracy than a medical CT and 2-dimensional imaging.
- There is evidence that there exist more treatment options with CBCT than without such imaging.

From an oral and maxillofacial surgery (OMS) perspective, CBCT imaging has become invaluable in determining anatomic boundaries and vital structures, so that the incisions, excisions, jaw alignments, and implant surgeries could be executed with accuracy.

Here, I introduce a case of a 14 year old boy, who presented to the OMS office for evaluation and management of his impacted maxillary canine. Note the position of this tooth in the panoramic radiograph (fig.1). Prior to taking a CBCT scan, it is unclear where in space the impacted canine tooth is. However, after the CBCT scan, it is very apparent that the impacted maxillary canine is a supernumerary tooth, located in an anteroposterior position, to the left of the mid-sagittal plane, fully impacted in the bone of the palate, just inferior to the nasal mucosa (figs. 2-4).

As a surgeon, CBCT made it easier for me to communicate with the patient's parents exactly where the tooth in question was located. Moreover, this imaging modality enabled me to carefully plan the procedure and avoid adjacent anatomical entities, such as the nasal mucosa, the neurovascular bundle of the incisive foramen, and the apex of the maxillary central incisor. Furthermore, visualizing the vital structures with close proximity allows for a more thorough understanding of postoperative concerns in the informed consent, such as epistaxis, palatal necrosis, hemorrhage, and paresthesia.

Given the multiple benefits of CBCT imaging, I think we owe it to our patients to offer one of the most advanced modalities in dentistry in an effort to deliver the most advanced care.



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Data-Driven Dentists Succeed

by Colin Rechever¹

To some extent, dentistry is a data-driven profession. Clinical practice is informed by the data from studies of the durability and functionality of various dental appliances; from cohort studies about specific interventions; and from prevention research results.

But there's another way in which your dental practice should be data-driven. Your marketing should be driven by data. Here's why.

Dentistry is a business. Hunches, guesses, and intuition are lousy ways to run your business. But that's exactly how too many dentists manage their efforts to attract more and better patients. Say you have a new ad campaign and you have more patients showing up at the door and they happen at about the same time - you might well believe that what you're doing with your marketing is working.

As the saying goes, "it ain't necessarily so." You're inferring a connection between your marketing and your new patient numbers that may not be there. Studies have found that new dental patients are wildly inaccurate when it comes to remembering how they found your practice. Let's say, giving your practice the benefit of the doubt, that fully half of your new patients are accurate reporters.

The question is, which half?

The right answer will inform your marketing efforts and tell you where to invest your hard-earned dollars. The wrong answer will have you throwing money away. If you're like the vast majority of dentists, you can't afford to throw money away. You need hard, accurate data about what's working and how well it's working.

DENTAL MARKETING TRICKS AND TRAPS

There are several ways you can accurately track how parts of your marketing are working. One of those ways is by putting unique identifiers on direct mail postcards and/or offering a coupon in newspaper ads. That identifier method works best when you're offering a discounted or free service; think dollars off a cleaning, or maybe a free initial exam. When the new patients show up at your office, postcard or ad coupon in hand, you'll know exactly how they found you.

It's a marketing trick that can also be a trap. Why? Because the basic premise is flawed. You're discounting your services and demeaning your dental prospects' perception of the value of what you offer. You're "just another discount dentist." Dental marketing based on specials and price is a race to the bottom.

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To grow your practice, you need patients who will stay, pay, and refer. Getting new dental patients on the basis of price or specials gets you price-shoppers and one-and-dones. You can probably convert some of those to regular patients, but when you figure the per-patient cost against your average case value, the numbers frequently don't add up.

That's particularly true if you're up against corporate dentistry or large group dental practices in your market. Both of those types of competitors have deeper pockets and greater economies of scale than the typical solo dental practice can muster. You can drive your practice into the ground trying to compete on price.

There's another aspect of advertising on price and discounts that can harm your practice. If you're doing what all the other dentists in your area are doing, you become a commodity. Dental prospects assume that dentists are competent, and if you don't give them good reasons to choose you to solve their dental problems, your prospects will be siphoned off by your competitors.

Another marketing trick to track your new patients is through your website. You can set up a "new patient" number with a dedicated line in your office. When that phone line rings, it's because they saw the number on your site. The trap side of this method is that it relies on your phone answerers to accurately record how many new patients were appointed through that line.

Of course, your website should also offer your prospects a way to book an appointment online, and those patients should be easy to tally. In today's internet world, all of your marketing should point your prospects to your website. It's the single largest part of your marketing that can do the most thorough job of answering new patients' questions. And, it's the best way to give prospects reasons to choose you instead of your competition.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Instead of a patchwork approach to gathering data on your marketing's effectiveness, you can institute a complete solution: phone tracking.

An automated phone tracking system assigns unique phone numbers to every piece of your marketing – newspaper ads, local magazine ads, radio and TV spots, direct mail pieces, blog posts, outdoor boards, your website, online videos, your patients and prospect emails, and your e-newsletter.

Those unique phone numbers automatically forward to your practice phones. The instant the phone begins ringing, the source and the call are recorded in a database. This gives you ironclad proof of which parts of your marketing are attracting the most new patients.

But the benefits don't stop there. From the database, you can determine which calls during office hours went unanswered or rolled to voicemail. And in case you think that your practice answers every call while the office is open, our data shows that a large number of calls never get answered.

Every unanswered call is a potential new patient you're unlikely to get. The final benefit of phone tracking is that the call recordings allow you to determine the percentage of new patient callers that are appointed and to discover gaps in your staff's phone etiquette and appointing skills. Phone tracking gives you data that you can rely on and use. It's the exact opposite of hunches, guesses, and intuition. That data will allow you to precisely target your marketing dollars for maximum new patients.

Now, the downside of phone tracking: Hopefully, you're already busy and so are your staff. Reviewing every phone call, every month, requires a tremendous time commitment. Phone call reviewing isn't the best use of your time, it may not be the best use of a staff person's time, and it could cost a considerable amount to contract out, but there are other tracking systems available. If you'd like more information, please contact us. What's important is that you know what's working, what's not, and when there's a problem converting callers to appointed patients.

Analyze the data and succeed!

Colin Receveur is the creator of the revolutionary Patient Attraction System™ and the CEO and founder of SmartBox Web Marketing. SmartBox, a dental marketing firm, works with over 550 dentists on three continents to help them get more patients, more profits, and more freedom. You may contact him at 888-741-1413 or at www.smartboxwebmarketing.com.



GOOD PROFITS

by Dr. Kevin Coughlin¹²

Is there really such a thing as bad profits? With business getting larger and more powerful and investors feeling and expecting ever greater ROI (returns on investment) wouldn't all profits be good...

It is an important question to ask yourself. Those of you in leadership positions running companies and managing people, the culture you present to your team may lay the foundation for success not just in the short term but hopefully in the long term. The Leaders who have exceptional core values and focus on good profits and eliminate bad profits will not only create companies with long term success but will provide products and services that your customers will crave, want and need.

Bad profits are those profits that are earned at the expense of customer or patient relationships. Whenever a customer or patient feels misled, mistreated, ignored or coerced then the profits from that customer are bad... Bad profits arise when a company saves money by delivering a lousy customer experience. What is really happening is leadership or companies extract value from their customers or patients instead of adding value.

When companies don't understand the difference between good and bad profits the bad profits allow growth to suffer in the long term, reputations are hurt, customers or patients become alienated and employees become demoralized. You and your business become vulnerable to competition. Your business may achieve short term success but will always fail in the long term.

Bad profits create detractors - these are people or products that hurt your company and team members. They hurt your company's reputation; they strangle growth and demoralize an organization. These detractors can be leaders, managers, employees, customers and or patients. The first step in avoiding bad profits is to recognize they exist and the second step is to recognize who are what the detractors are. The third step is to decide, can you convert the detractors that are people or products to promoters. That is done with not just good communication within your organization, but with outstanding communication and over the top service and customer and patient relations. The goal is to create in every transaction the BLT. You want people patients customers employees and or products that people Believe in, Like and Trust.

The goal is to focus on good profits from good products and/or services. Good profits are earned with customer's enthusiastic cooperation. They occur when their customers or patients come back time and time again for your products and or services. They want to tell their friends family and acquaintances about their exceptional experience. When this occurs they become your companies and or products promoters.



BAD PROFITS

Promoters are individuals or products that provide positive marketing for your company; they are loyal and provide the most cost effective growth for you and your company.

It has been estimated that most companies have about 42-82% of promoters receiving products and/or services. Your focus should be to improve that percentage as much as possible to promote the most good profits. This is done by training and more training that is backed up by outstanding leadership that has outstanding communication. This is not only smart business but good business, so let's all get going.

Before you start re-evaluating your company, consider evaluating yourself or the leadership of your company. That may be the board, partnership or an individual. Look at those who are influencers and find out about their core values. This may be easier than you think. Spending time with people can tell you quit a bit about that person. If it is a dinner meeting, observe how they treat the wait staff, if it's a golf match, see how they handle a bad shot, if it's at a dinner party see if they include other people in their conversation or does the conversation always revolve around them. Are they good listeners? In the end, would you believe, like and trust this individual and if so, then you most likely have defined a good set of core values. You should be honest and straight forward. You shouldn't put people before profits. You should do what's right and not just easy. You should put your customer and employees first and if that seems impossible then make sure your team members know your always trying to do what is right.

Once you have the correct core values, the next step is simply putting the correct processes and procedures in place to make your products and or service succeed. A team that does not look up to leadership is a failure not only to your team but to your customers and products.

When making decisions and you feel bad in your gut, in most cases, you know you made the wrong decision. Everyone makes bad decisions but companies that want to excel long term, sense this immediately and move to make corrections.

Making good profits simply means you constantly re-evaluate your products and services and constantly try to make improvement. These improvements do not necessarily have to be major changes they can be minor tweaks that provide major improvements.

In order for business to succeed longer, a companies leadership must have a laser focus on good profits and create the correct processes and procedures that eliminate bad profits.

Dr. Kevin Coughlin practices full time and owns 14 dental practices in MA, Baystate Dental PC. He is also Clinical Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Comprehensive Care at Tufts School of Dental Medicine.

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