

Turning enquiries into appointments

Ashley Latter shares some simple tips to help you get the best result possible when patients make contact to enquire about your services

In my previous articles I have written about the importance of the receptionist and how they can influence the performance of the practice, especially when they deal with new patient enquiries.

In the past I have mentioned that each new patient enquiry maybe worth at least €7,000 to the practice if they have some treatment done and join a dental plan, and that does not include any referrals that they may introduce to the practice.

This article will give you some simple tips on what your receptionist can do and ask the patient when they enquire about your services, either on the telephone or face-to-face if they visit the practice.

Tip one

My view is that the receptionist needs to answer the telephone within four rings, because I believe people are starting to get impatient by the fifth ring.

The telephone needs to be answered with enthusiasm,



stating the name of the practice, their own name and end with a statement as to how can they can help the patient. Don't forget, you never get a second chance to make a first impression and to make the most of this chance, you need more than: 'Good morning, dental practice'. I also think that if the person answering the phone introduces himself

of herself by name it gives an opportunity to build rapport with the patient.

Tip two

If a patient enquires about the services of the practice, the receptionist should immediately thank the patient for ringing them and ask the patient for their own name, in order to use it in the

conversation. Referring to the patient by name during the conversation is a great step in building a relationship and will help you to stand out from the dental crowd.

Tip three

Ask the patient how they heard about the practice. There are many advantages to this, including that you can

establish what aspect of your marketing is working; the principal needs to know if he is getting a return on his investment.

If it is a referral, you will have a chance to thank the referring patient and you will also know that you have someone on the hook who is genuinely interested in making an appointment with the practice.

If the patient tells you that they saw your website, then again thank the patient and ask them what it was about the site that they liked. This is important information because it will help you to establish what part of the website is working and, in some cases, not working.

Tip four

Ask the patient how you can help them and what treatments interest them.

This is the part of the conversation where you are now genuinely interested in the patient and finding out why they have got in contact. Asking open questions will get the patient talking about what they are interested in; listen attentively to their answers. Do not make the mistake of asking one question and then launching into a presentation on how you can help them. The role at this point is simply to find out more about the patient's thoughts.

Tip five

Once you feel you truly understand what the patient requires, if you can help tell them so and then invite them to attend for an appointment. Getting a patient to agree to this is the most important part of the conversation.

Clients often ask me what they should do if the patient is asking about prices. My suggestion is that you inform the patients that until you do a full examination it is difficult to quote a price. I would try to sell the benefits of the appointment, where a proper treatment plan and prices can be discussed, although I do not see any harm

in telling a patient what your prices start from and go up to.

I would also encourage you to consider taking the telephone out of the reception area, instead creating a back office where the calls can be answered. If you have a busy reception area, then the receptionist will probably always give their priority and time to the patients who are in the practice and therefore the telephone will go down the pecking order. If a receptionist is dealing with a patient then it is going to be challenging to implement all the customer care strategies mentioned above. Indeed, if the receptionist is sitting in a busy area, the telephone can be treated like a hot potato, which is a natural reaction given the circumstances.

Tip six

The final topic I want to cover is the answer machine. If you have an answer machine turned on at lunch time, you need to be aware that you are sending the message that you are closed. This is the time when many people want to do business, because they have a break from work. If they contact you and your answer machine is on, will they leave a message? There is a good chance that they won't and you will miss out on an opportunity.

This is a subject that could continue for many pages, but I hope this article serves to provide you with a few quick pointers on how to make your reception area more productive and profitable. 🦷

Over the last 10 years Ashley Latter has personally coached over 4,000 dentists and their team members on his two-day 'Ethical sales & communication programme'. He is also the author of 'Helping patients to say YES'. To find out more about his courses and to register for his free email newsletter, which is full of useful tips, please visit www.ashleylatter.com and click on the dental section.