

**GUEST
ARTICLE**

Don't Tell Me About Your Grass Seed... *Tell Me About My Lawn*

BY PATRICK WAHL, D.M.D., M.B.A. AND LORRAINE HOLLETT

We speak with dentists all over the country every day. And if you're feeling the effects of the economy, we can tell you that you're not alone. We can also tell you that the most important factor in your success is... you.

It's your practice. You're the ambassador, and YOU have to be the rainmaker. Even if you don't do any promotional work yourself -- you have to know what good marketing is. Otherwise, you'll throw dollar after dollar at incompetent yellow page designers -- and end up missing out on hundreds of patients you should be getting.

You're marketing every day, whether you know it or not. Even not advertising is a form of advertising. And we're not just talking about advertising. We're talking about EVERYTHING you do. Every way you communicate... Every conversation you have... Every brochure you print.

It seems natural whenever you're selling a product to describe the product. For example, the focus of some dentists' ads these days is "invisible fillings." After all, resin restorations represent the latest technology available, and they can be virtually indistinguishable from natural tooth structure.

The problem is, as Dr. Mike Barr eloquently puts it, "Patients don't want fillings." In fact, the idea of getting a filling can make some patients squeamish. What

prospective patients do want is a solution -- a nicer smile, no more pain. They don't care how you do it. In fact, most of them would probably rather not know!

Distill Your Marketing Message to a Single Idea

Your marketing message must tell your prospective patients about the experience they're going to get in your practice, the life-changing results they're going to get, what they'll be able to do, the enhancements, the improvements. Think of one sentence that encapsulates your marketing message. That's the headline

for your next ad.

Most ads for dental practices don't have a headline. A great many dental ads are nothing more than an enlarged business card or a laundry list of services.

Greeting card writers know the benefit of an attention-getting one-liner. They know that only about one-fourth of their card sticks out above the rack in view of the buyer. Therefore, that top one-fourth must compel you to pick up that card and read on. The headline is the ad for the ad. It's what gets you to read on.

Benefits vs. Features

Now that you've captured the prospect's attention with a compelling headline (remember every good headline has a subject and verb), what next? In your body copy, emphasize benefits over features.



(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

Anything about you, your treatment, your service, your practice, even "We've been in business 17 years," is what's called a "feature." Anything specific about the patient, what the patient gets, is a "benefit." Benefits should far outweigh features in an ad.

Try this exercise. Read each line of your ad out loud. Then ask, "So what?" You will quickly pinpoint the benefit to the patient.

Suppose one of the lines in your ad says, "State-of-the-art dentistry." So what? Well, if you provide state-of-the-art dentistry, talk about the confidence your patients can expect with their healthy smiles. "Periodontal treatment – Endodontic treatment." So what? The patient can have most of their dental needs taken care of under one roof. "Porcelain veneers." So what? The patient won't be afraid to smile. "Been in business 17 years." So what? The patient gets an experienced dentist who's seen just about everything.

Now, rewrite your ad emphasizing benefits to the patient. This simple

exercise will double the response to your ad without adding anything to your cost.

Offer A Reason To Respond

A good ad is about more than just image-building. It is about response. Give prospective patients a reason to respond. At the very least, ask the reader to call now for a convenient appointment. You may even want to include an email address, which the reader may be more likely to use, as it requires less of a "commitment" on his part.

There may be some of you who are hesitant about advertising in general and who are, therefore, overly concerned about making sure your ad is "professional." Remember, your ad is for prospective patients, not other dentists. Other dentists still won't like your ad, even if you remove all the language that a patient would have any interest in. Use language that patients understand, and talk about things they care about. If you follow only this simple advice, your ad will be improved tenfold with measurable response.



Dr. Patrick Wahl and Lorraine Hollett of Office Magic turn talent into performance. They are the co-authors of the new manual, "Double the Response of Your Marketing at No Additional Cost." The manual includes a free bonus, "The 80 Greatest Dental Headlines of All Time," worth countless thousands of dollars in new patients. The total cost is just \$44. Identify yourself as a Richards Report subscriber and pay no shipping. Call Office Magic at (800) 750-8779 or order securely online at www.officemagic.com.

Top Ten Outrageous Patient Cancellation Excuses

- 10) "I had a 'quickie' with my wife and couldn't make it to the office on time."
- 9) "I thought my appointment was yesterday."
- 8) "I didn't want to miss my chiropractic appointment."
- 7) "I had a toothache and couldn't come in."
- 6) "Did I make that appointment... really?"
- 5) "I was so nervous I had 'the diarrhea' and couldn't get off the toilet."
- 4) "My dog ate the reminder card that was on my refrigerator."
- 3) "I hit a turkey and it broke out my windshield."
- 2) "I had to go stand in line for Rolling Stones tickets." (in our opinion, a valid excuse!)
- 1) "Too many bears. I'm not leaving the house."

Our thanks to Bill Rossi of Advanced Practice Management (952-921-3360) for submitting the above.

**Visit the Brand New
Madow Group "Warehouse."
Save Big \$\$ on Cool Dental Products!
www.madow.com/warehouse**

