



The 'no excuses' call tracking system to maximize your advertising ROI

For more on this topic, go to www.dentaleconomics.com and search using the following key words: *advertising, ROI, marketing, marketing survey, new patients.*

In dental marketing, we're passionate about knowing THE SOURCE OF NEW PATIENTS. It's the clarity needed to drive a successful program and keep a bundle of marketing dollars from being wasted.

What troubled us recently in the results we reported from the "State of Dental Marketing Survey" (September 2008 *Dental Economics*) is that, for a lot of practices, vital tracking is lacking:

Over 50% of practices don't reliably monitor and evaluate the results of their marketing, advertising, or promotional efforts. Only a few (3%) use an online call tracking system, while some say they try, but are inconsistent or irregular (36.5%). Still others (21.3%) are totally in the dark, saying they don't have time or simply don't know what's working or not.

Having and using a system to identify the source of new patients is the only way to know the effectiveness of what you're spending on marketing. Repeat after me: *You've got to track!*

For practices that are serious about advertising, there's an easy-to-use technology that represents one of the biggest developments in dental marketing, but unfortunately, it's all-too-often overlooked.

The 'fully automated' alternative → For dentists who reported in the survey that they "don't know" or "don't have time," this is a nearly effortless option — maybe the best method we've seen to track inbound calls accurately, automatically, and consistently. Here's how it works:

For a low monthly fee, a service provider will create a seamless tracking and reporting system for your marketing program. They'll provide a different local or toll-free tracking number for each promotional channel — one number for the Yellow Pages ad, a different number for your Web site, and so on.

These calls are transparently connected to your office, and all call details are documented and reported to you in real time online. The system reports caller ID, the number, date and time, call duration, and other details, so you know exactly when and how many people called in response to your ads. You can also detect front desk problems such as unanswered calls, calls put "on hold" for long periods, and more.

There's a further bonus — the system has a recording feature. With the proper permissions and respect for privacy issues, the word-for-word manner that calls are properly or

poorly handled is a highly effective training aid for the entire staff.

If you would like a free copy of our white paper, with details about the features and benefits of a call tracking system, just send me an e-mail at stewart@healthcaresuccess.com.

Ask and ye shall receive → If you have no other system, the "old days" routine works if you faithfully ask each new patient. The approach depends on asking at the first incoming phone call — don't delay until the new patient comes into the office, or he/she fills in a blank on your patient intake form days later. The easiest way is to ask every caller on the first call, *"Whom may we thank for referring you?"*

If the patient was referred by a patient, he or she will tell you. If the patient says something like "Yellow Pages" or "an ad," ask for ad specifics to credit the marketing tool that caused your phone to ring. (Hint: Ask for a page number or insert "tracking codes" or the name and date of the publication.)

It sounds simple, but even well-intended dental practices neglect manual tracking. In a busy office, tracking falls off the priority list. Reality intrudes ... people forget to ask ... more than one person answers the phone ... data is not recorded or is lost ... a new person handles the phones. (All reasons to automate the process.)

There are other ways to help the staff and trap the needed information. Yellow Pages publishers often have unique numbers available to help advertisers with YP ad tracking. You can borrow the idea by signing up for local or toll-free phone numbers and utilize each for specific ads, but you'll need to review your monthly phone bills to match calls to ads. It's not perfect, but it's better than no tracking.

It's no contest → Dedicated phone numbers tied to automatic tracking moves the responsibility off your front desk, eliminates having the staff report "there were no calls," or keeps you from discovering too late that you were getting inbound calls but not setting appointments. With an ad-tracking phone number, you can know the actual performance results and ROI of your marketing effort. **DE**

Stewart Gandolf, MBA, and Lonnie Hirsch are cofounders of Healthcare Success Strategies, and two of America's most experienced practice marketers. They have worked with dentists for a combined 30 years, have written numerous articles on practice marketing, and have consulted with more than 3,000 private health care practices. You may reach them by calling (888) 679-0050, through their Web site at www.healthcaresuccess.com, or via e-mail at info@healthcaresuccess.com.