



# DENTAL IMAGE Branding

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**HOW TO**  
Create Optimal  
Patient Impact

Janice Hurley

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# 1

## Why You Are Losing Patients (Hint: It's Not Your Clinical Skills)



**E**ver been handed a worn, torn twenty? You know, that twenty-dollar bill that has seen better days? It's limp, wrinkled, and a bit dirty. Set that same twenty next to a brand-new, crisp twenty, and you'll be drawn to the new twenty every time.

Offer both twenty-dollar bills to a friend and see which one is the winner. New and crisp always prevails.

The same thing happens at work every day with our patients. They are drawn toward individuals who exude personal self-confidence and pride, those who are pressed and polished and look like they are happy to be at work. When they enter an office, people want to be able to tell at first glance that the team members value themselves and the patients they are ready to serve.

Understanding how others experience you is important because it affects how others treat you, which ends up affecting how you feel about yourself. Seriously, your self-esteem changes based on the feedback you get from others and the mental messages you give yourself. It can and will fluctuate daily, if not hourly, depending on circumstances.

Joseph De Loux, a neurologist and author of *Your Synopsis Self*, documented the daily fluctuations in our self-esteem based on the information our brain assembles. We notice how others treat us, and confidence and perception of our worthiness vacillates.

Do you know people in the dental industry who have this problem? They face eroding profitability because they focus too much on attracting new patients and not enough on patient retention by building trust.

From my experience as a dental practice management consultant with a successful twenty-five-year track record,

I give dental practices clarity by showing them how to remove common practice financial frustrations that they have total control to fix. To spread this message, I wrote this book.

## You Are Being Judged

This book is for everyone at the dental practice, whether you work in the administration of the practice or in the clinical aspect. The advice I offer is for the dentist, hygienist, office manager, and dental assistants. It takes a village to create an image and a consistent practice brand.



*Sometimes a group photo with three or four team members communicates that personalized dental experience.*

Consciously or subconsciously, people make judgments regarding whether your dental office is to be trusted and whether you *look the part* of competent professionals. Two important adjectives to add to your list of image goals would be *well-groomed* and *successful*. These are not goals for vanity's sake, but instead for the visual reassurance of patients' encounters with us; they affect the quality of their overall experience.

Think about it: we know packaging matters when we hand out toothbrushes and floss in a nice gift bag with the office logo versus a plain white bag or no bag at all. No one can argue that the toothbrush and floss did not *really* increase in quality or value with the addition of a nice bag, but the pride you felt handing those same items to your patient in the personalized bag is clear. Packaging effects your patient's perception of what they are receiving.

Another important reason to pay attention to your professional image and grooming is the power of the first impression. Understand that every day in your practice you may encounter new patients or their family members for the first time, and that these first impressions are, indeed, lasting ones. Clinical team members, be they the doctor, the hygienist, or dental assistants who take the time to make sure their shoes are spotless—that their lab jacket or scrubs are washed and ironed as well as tailored for fit—communicate to their patient that they value and respect the patient and the practice. Hair should always be worn

up and off the shoulders, and minimal jewelry and natural-looking makeup are the best recommendations for anyone working with patients.

## **The Flowered Wallpaper Syndrome**

Sad, but often true, is the fact that the longer we have been in practice and the greater our clinical skills and set of services offered, the more likely we are to no longer look at things from our patient's point of view.

Why is that? I think this occurs for two reasons.

The first reason is that familiarity leads to not seeing things at all. The longer you have been exposed to your reception area, your outdoor signage, or your parking lot, the less you see it. I call it the flowered wallpaper syndrome.

After the kids had graduated from high school and were off to college, my parents moved and purchased a new home. New for them, but thirty years old. When the grown kids visited the new home for Christmas, they all said the same thing: "This is nice, but the flowered wallpaper up on the kitchen ceiling has to go."

My mother's response was quick and clear: "Oh, yes, we're going to replace that right away."

Time went by, and Mom was busy with things other than the wallpaper.

Thirty years later, that wallpaper is still up there on the kitchen ceiling. Her justification? “I don’t notice it anymore, so it doesn’t bother me.”

A second reason we often stop noticing our environment falls on the dentist: the more a dentist gets involved in advanced clinical courses and the use of the latest technology, the more a dentist often stops seeing things from the patient’s perspective. Naturally, the dentist now spends a great deal of time focusing on what goes on in the treatment room. Typically, the other aspects of being a practice owner receive less attention.

Of course, the quality of care, efficiency, and team training are crucial. But a practice often loses patients before they ever get back to receive the dentist’s care. If the dentist’s focus is back there on equipment success rates, new procedures, and services, then the dentist may have *no idea* how much treatment was never done because the practice lost patients on the front end.

See your practice through the eyes of prospective patients. Here are six areas the dentist and the team need to look at *now* if they want to keep valuable patients and attract new ones.

- 1. Take a good look at the view of your building and its signage from the street exposure.** Signage needs to be big and clear

on what services you provide. The fact that your patient can receive dental care at that location is more important than your name or the name of your corporation. Signage on your building or in front of your building has to be large enough to be legible from the street, or it is actually worthless. It is important to understand signage limitations and possibilities before signing your initial lease. Negotiations to optimize your exposure should take place before the lease is signed or the decision is made to locate your practice on this property. This marketing aspect is far too important to ignore.

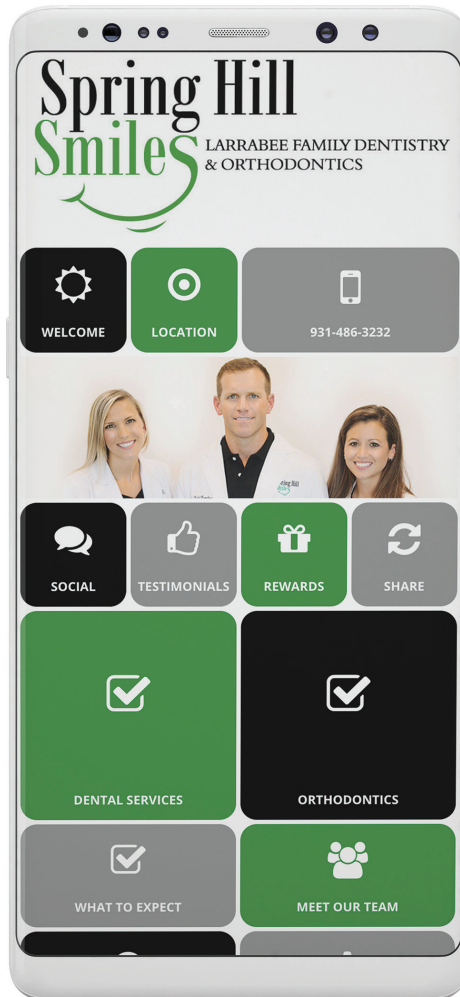


*Before choosing a location for your practice be sure you are allowed optimal exposure in your signage. The other business signs next to yours affect your image.*

**2. Examine your parking lot, front door, and the walkway up to your door with fresh eyes.** The door needs to have clear signage on it that tells the patient, yes, you have arrived at your intended destination. This signage should not state that you are out for lunch or show your business hours, because that type of communication is out-of-date. Instead, make sure the name of your practice is large and in a current format. Etching on glass is very attractive and current.

**3. Pull out a smartphone and find yourself.** Do what your patients do after they hear about you from friends or coworkers; see what they see and do what you can to look at it with a fresh eye. Gone are the days when your website was a one-and-done project. Instead, it needs to be updated every two to three years. You also always want to look at the mobile version of your website, since over 80 percent of the time that is how your patients are looking to locate you or another dentist in your area. Above all else, it must be quick and easy for your patients to access what matters most to them: your location and your services. Ideally, your patients will see your mobile website displayed the same way they see their phone apps. Dentalfone is on

the cutting edge, providing that initial look for dental offices, and it's so popular because that's what patients want: ease of use and clarity. You truly have to keep up your image from the very first encounter so they will choose you.



*You want to be branded on mobile applications. That is how people find you. I recommend using Dentalfone ([www.dentalfone.com](http://www.dentalfone.com)).*

Video of all kinds on your website and on review websites allows your patients to connect with you more quickly and on a deeper level. Text is being read less and less; videos are seven times as likely to be opened than information to be read. Text continues to be important for search engine optimization, but photos and videos are what your patients react to the most strongly. According to Matt Bowman, owner of Thrive Internet Marketing, "One of the biggest strengths of video marketing is that it's highly visual and auditory, which means it's easier for many users to remember than text-based content. When customers remember your video marketing content, they also remember your brand, which translates to more sales and leads for you. What's more, customers typically like to share videos they enjoy, which can expand your online reach."\*

- 4. Check out and keep current with your social media footprint.** Anything that your potential patients can find on the internet affects your success, the number of new patients, and the quality of patients that you can count on each month. You might wisely be spending thousands

\*Bowman, Matt. "Video Marketing: The Future Of Content Marketing." *Forbes*. April 02, 2018. Accessed August 27, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/02/03/video-marketing-the-future-of-content-marketing/#13f5b0ff6b53>.



*Resist using stock photos on your website or social media posts; instead, professionally taken patient photos are more impactful.*

of dollars each year on marketing, but are unaware of what your patients see first. When your patients enter your name or location into an online search, they will see results including review sites such as Healthgrades, Facebook, and Yelp. These review sites allow you to add your photo, videos, and practice information when you claim those sites. There is no charge for this process, and you will want to make sure you take the time to populate each site. These review sites may well be one of the top two first impressions potential patients see when they look for you online. Patients are very impressionable and easily swayed by the quality and number of your reviews. There is no doubt you have to use



*Your social media posts can be fun, showing your playful side as a team.*

software that optimizes your patient's postings and check to see that you have responded to their postings, both good and bad. Someone in your office must have this assigned as a priority duty, because reviews will often be your potential patient's initial introduction to you. Make it an office goal to respond within twenty-four hours to a review, whether negative or complimentary.

- 5. Call yourself.** By far the most undervalued responsibility in the dental practice is the answering of phones. The person that I choose for this crucial responsibility has the best verbal skills in the office; he or she is clear that the person calling is actually more important than the person standing in front of the desk, who is already a patient. The first three seconds of what the person hears from the person answering the phone determines the caller's impression of the practice. Phone calls should be recorded through marketing and patient communication software so that there is no possible excuse not to know exactly what is being said on every call coming into or going out of the practice. The dental software Weave has this ability, as well as Patient Prism. In my opinion, this aspect of patient marketing needs ten times the attention that it gets. It is important that the team members

put in that position know the difference between talking and communicating. The best individuals are the ones who keep in mind the goal of successfully scheduling and screening. Outstanding front-desk team members have high self-esteem and confidence, so they are comfortable in the role of serving others. These people can make or break a practice, and this is where a practice can lose the most patients without even knowing it.

**6. Be sure you have the right message for those on hold and that the phones have different messages on the answering machine or voicemail, depending on the situation.**

There will always be times when the phones can't be answered as you would like due to team meetings, holidays, or the limitations of your business hours. Make sure the message your callers hear is current. When they do reach the practice, but you have to place them on hold, make sure they hear prerecorded information that places your practice in the best light. You do not want a local radio station with another dental office's ad playing as your patient waits, and you can't just have silence.

When I speak to dentists or business owners, they often want to hear about the biggest dental image mistakes.

While I like to be positive, these are the blunders that do indeed drive away patients. The next chapter will highlight the top mistakes and advice for improving your dental image branding.