

THE PATIENT JOURNEY MAP

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING
DENTAL MARKETING

The purpose of this tool is to create a marketing lens through which you and your client can examine the most important factors of marketing their dental practice and identify clear, low-hanging fruit and the must-haves for success.

The 6 Patient Pillars

- Reputation of the Dentist
- Quality of Work / The End Results
- Money / Insurance
- Personal Trust / Dental Anxiety
- Location & Convenience
- Office Environment and Amenities

These problems were identified by tracking thousands of calls via Callrail, receiving feedback from dentists and their teams, and collecting data online from patient surveys in the USA. You must understand the psychology behind these core problems and think about how to position a client to “solve” them holistically, for new patients, through marketing.

Reputation of the Dentist

Reputation, mainly online reviews, is the most influential factor for new patients. Patients almost universally check reviews before choosing a dentist and put significant trust in what other patients say. A survey conducted found “56% of patients refuse to consider providers with less than a 4-star average rating online.” The content and recency of reviews are also important. People read reviews, and what is said matters, not just the stars.

Q: Does the client have fewer than 100 reviews on their GBP?

Q: Do they have less than a 4-star rating?

Q: Do they get at least three reviews a week?

Q: Do we have automated review requests post appointment?

Q: Are they getting reviews on platforms like WebMD, Yelp, Nextdoor, that we can use? If not, redirect these reviews to Google instead.

Money/Insurance/Financials

The question we hear most on calls with every practice is “Do you accept my insurance?” Most people will ensure the dentist they select is either in-network for their insurance or affordable for their budget. For uninsured or underinsured patients, price transparency and payment options become critical. They might look for clinics with reasonable fees, new patient specials, or financing plans. Data found that patients would go to a dentist with a lower review count if it meant they were in-network or cost less. Money matters, we know this. So, look at the online presence with this in mind.

Q: Do they have a financials page?

Q: Does the office have special offers? Are they visible?

Q: Does the office have a membership plan we can promote?

Q: If Out-of-Network, do we communicate why and make a clear case that the quality of work will be worth the extra cost?

Q: If In-Network, do we communicate all the major plans the office accepts, and will the office help with filling out the paperwork?

Q: Are financing options communicated clearly, especially on services where treatment is expensive (cosmetic/implants/aligners)?

Q: If the office wants to see more cash patients, is messaging aligned to attract patients who are willing to pay more for better service?

Location & Convenience

The practical convenience of a dental office is very important to people's selection. Patients typically prefer a dentist who is close to home or work, easy to get to, with convenient office hours. #1 thing patients said they want is the availability of appointments when needed. Office hours also matter – patients appreciate dentists who have extended hours, weekends, or can accommodate emergencies, as this flexibility reduces the hassle of scheduling. Anything that lowers the “friction” of going to the dentist – proximity, easy scheduling, or minimal waiting – is a plus.

Q: Are the office hours visible?

Q: Do they have extended hours, weekend care, and emergency? Is this visible?

Q: Can a patient schedule online without calling?

Q: Does the website have an online form, a text service, or something other than calling? Does this form confirm to the patient that they will be contacted?

Q: Is the office conveniently located? Is this communicated?

Q: Is the address represented and correct across all major marketing channels?

Personal Trust & Dental Anxiety

Although online reputation often trumps formal credentials, patients do still consider a dentist's professional qualifications. People want a competent and reputable clinician. We need to think about how we are communicating to new patients that the dentist can be trusted, somebody who knows what they are doing, that they will work with patients to make sure they are not scared and feel heard. Dentistry is the business of relationships and then teeth.

Q: Does the dentist have an updated about page? (Website, GBP, Facebook, Yelp, Nextdoor, WebMD, Instagram, Insurance Provider Directories)

Q: Does the bio make the dentist the guide for the patient, the hero? Are we showcasing how the dentist, but bringing it back to why it matters for the patient?

Q: Do their pictures represent them accurately and in a presentable way?

Q: Does the dentist have awards or special qualifications? Can patients see it?

Q: Do we have videos on the website showcasing the dentist as being "human"?

Q: Do we have patient testimonials raving about the dentist? IMPORTANT.

Dental Anxiety is a major theme, and many patients will not go to a dentist unless sedation options are available or amenities are provided to help relieve stress. Some dentists position their entire brand around being the "no-anxiety dentist" or have many comfort items to show patients that going to the dentist does not need to be scary.

Q: Does the website address dental anxiety?

Q: Is there a clear CTA for patients with dental anxiety on the homepage?

Q: Are sedation options provided?

Q: Are amenities displayed to make the visit less stressful?

Q: Do we explain to a patient what they can expect when they visit the office?

Q: If no-anxiety is a focus for the dentist, does the overall marketing show this?

Office Environment and Amenities

Although not as important, the physical environment of the practice and the level of technology or amenities offered can also influence decisions. Patients notice things like a clean, modern office, up-to-date equipment, or additional comforts. Higher-income brackets or tech-savvy groups (like younger demographics) take notice of a practice that uses modern technology (digital X-rays, intraoral cameras, online portals, etc). This means features like online scheduling, digital forms, text reminders, and even virtual consultations need to be considered. Amenities, as mentioned above, have also become more important. Showcasing how the office makes the visit more comfortable is important, especially in high-income brackets.

Q: Does the website have updated images of the office?

Q: Is there a page or section on the homepage showcasing the office?

Q: Does marketing showcase new-age tech that will make treatment easier?

Q: If we showcase tech, does it clearly explain how it will improve the patient's experience or ensure better results versus talking about the tech?

Q: Does the office offer a comfort menu that sets it apart?

Q: Does the website have a tour of the office?

Q: Is the above represented on the Google Business Profile?

Quality of Work / The End Results

The Proof is in the pudding! Especially with high-cost treatment, cosmetic dentistry, and implants. As a patient, I want to know what I am buying. How would you know if you like that new car if you have never seen it? Most patients don't understand the incredible transformation good dental work can have. It is our job to make sure a new patient knows what to expect from a dentist before calling the office. They need to know what they are buying!

Q: Does the homepage showcase smile transformations?

Q: Does the website have video testimonials relating to treatments that are most important to the dentist and generate the most production?

Q: Does the website have a smile gallery?

Q: Does their social media showcase the quality of work?

Closing Thoughts:

The questions above serve as a starting point in your marketing journey with a client. It is a guide to help you understand what truly matters and if your client has all these different elements in place to be effective at capturing new patients. Patients don't simply read reviews and make decisions—the new patient journey is unpredictable. It's not your job to understand every step of that journey. The focus should be on ensuring that the client's overall marketing efforts consistently address the fundamental issues in the most straightforward way possible. This way, no matter how the journey unfolds, the patient will always have the information they need to recognize that your client is the best choice.