

## **The Best of Times, The Worst of Times? Roger Matthews**

The Greek tragedy is being played out as I write this and once again – or is it continuously? – the fate of the economies of the Eurozone, and possibly of the world's financial system, hangs in the balance. Bang goes the pension fund again, then.

Plus, we're awaiting – and will have had by the time you read this – what is promised to be the most debilitating strike by teachers, healthcare staff and everyone else whose pension ultimately depends on the taxes of all.

The Health and Social Care bill, like a wounded elephant, lumbers through its Lords Committee stage and will probably need action to pull it, wailing like a newborn, into the world, for there is no longer a U-turn or a Plan X that will get the government off the hook.

So why, as figures show dental attendance in decline, patients lengthening their periods between examinations (good if you're an NHS Commissioner, bad if you're pay-as-you-go private) and the GDC warning dentists about advertising on Groupon.... Why would I say it was the Best of Times?

Trust me, I'm not an incurable optimist, (that was beaten out of me by the bank when the practice building works went two and a half times over budget – another story for another bedtime) but it's true that it needs a gloomy room to see a candle flame burn clearly.

Scenario One: as I go around the country, as I tend to at this time of the year, meeting dentists from across the UK, I see shining examples of successful practices, generating new patient enquiries and doing things just that little bit specially to entice patients across their thresholds.

What underpins most of these is a committed team, excellent clinical care, but above all, taking the time to find what their patients really want and need from their dental care.

Scenario Two: listening to James Goolnik at the BDTA Showcase. In looking to generate positive and enthusiastic stories and motivation in dentistry and utilising all the armamentarium of modern communications to spread the news that a healthy and confident smile is still something that justifiably excites people.

I have listened to those who believe that the internet is something of a passing fad, and that social networking is only for teenage geeks, but I do seriously believe that dentistry needs to take note – and advantage of – the media of today.

Scenario Three: spending a day analysing and supporting a new preventive treatment modality, still under wraps – that has the potential to offer improved lifetime oral care for older patients.

Looking ahead, as we did a bit at the Denplan conference last month, there are so many exciting possibilities and amazing things that we can do for patients. What was (as James Goolnik said) the thing that inspired us all to be part of dentistry? What was the spark?

It's still an virtually unique undertaking – the opportunity to work with (not just on or in) a patient in such a way as to improve their health, their self-esteem, their comfort, their quality of life – or even just to relieve their symptoms at the beginning of that journey.

What's more, our service cannot – for the foreseeable future – be provided on the internet, or by multinational business. There is even now the possibility of achieving a niche offering to suit your particular skills and approach, provided you do your planning and marketing carefully.

Money is tight – as never before – but dentistry is still more reliable an investment than most. Patients are more discerning than ever, but that should be an encouragement, not a dissuasion.

If it works now, it should positively fly when conditions improve. If you can prove your business model today, then when the economy lifts – as it will – then you will have a head start.

So don't listen to the nay-sayers. Take the bold decision to promote the benefits of your oral healthcare to those who appreciate it – and to those who have looked it all up on the internet beforehand.

Get good advisors, build a support structure from those who will still be there in the good times. Network, compare and above all learn – not just from others and experts, but by auditing your own progress.

As the late Steve Jobs once said: most people don't know what they want – until you show it to them.

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**Notes to Editors:**

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Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.