

Marketing Your Practice through Local Partnerships

Sarah Bradbury, Marketing Communications and Brand Manager at Denplan, discusses how to build local business partnerships to benefit both your practice and your local community.

For many practices, the idea of running marketing and PR activities conjures up images of expensive advertising and complicated campaigns. In reality, there are many areas of marketing that are not only highly effective and simple to execute, they can often cost very little - good news in the current financial climate! One such area is the highly effective but frequently underused marketing tactic of local business partnerships (or 'strategic alliances' for those who are interested in the technical term!).

Building mutually beneficial business partnerships with other local companies in your area can not only be cost-effective and easy to do; it can also help to grow your practice by attracting new patients and reinforcing relationships with existing patients. The following tips illustrate a few examples of how you can start forging effective local business relationships and how they, in turn, can benefit your practice.

Cohesive communities

As a small business, if you're looking to increase your marketing and PR profile in your local area then it's likely that other similar sized companies will be looking to do the same. Why not approach companies within your community that have a similar customer base and business focus, such as a local optician, and form a mutually beneficial offer?

An optician could offer your patients a free eye test and your practice could offer free new patient consultations or a hygienist visit. This type of alliance would provide both businesses with access to another customer base and would give prospective patients a recommendation from a professional they already trust.

In addition, joining forces in a community really helps local commerce to thrive - which is great news for your local economy and your practice. And, if as part of your partnership you arrange for your mutual staff to take advantage of the free consultations, you may find an increase in staff morale, motivation and retention, which in turn makes for a healthier and happier business in the longer term.

Corporate benefits

In a similar vein of thought, you could also consider approaching large corporations within your region and offering your dental services to their staff as an employee benefit. Many large corporations recognise the advantages of offering their staff additional benefits as part of their employment package. And, with research showing that 75% of employers believe that providing a dental payment plan contributes to their employees' overall wellbeing¹, you are certainly offering a highly desirable service.

Your corporate proposition should include value-added benefits for employees such as free initial consultations, reductions in routine oral care and other incentives to help get buy-in from the company you are approaching.

In terms of establishing contact, your first point of call should be the Human Resources department or whoever looks after the company benefits scheme. They are likely to ask for some literature and information for staff noticeboards or intranet so it's best to have these prepared in advance so that your services look as professional on paper as they are in real life. Some payment plan providers help practices to design brochures and other similar materials, so do ask for help if you need any advice or assistance in producing these.

¹ Denplan/YouGov survey among Corporate Decision Makers, March 2010

Ultimately, not only do corporate benefit schemes open your door to hundreds of potential new patients, they can also be great for your profile too. Imagine being able to approach your local press to say that you provide a dental benefit scheme to over 500 local employees - a real milestone for the practice's profile and good news for your local community with more people benefitting from improved oral health. Again, some payment plan providers have dedicated press teams that can assist you with public relations activities, so help is always at hand if you're unsure of how publicise your achievements.

More than a dental practice

If you're the proud owner of a stylish and contemporary dental practice that has a spare unused room, have you ever considered that it could be utilised for non-dental purposes? Some practices are now joining forces with local independent beauty therapists to provide high-end spa and holistic treatments within the practice premises. You may already be offering Botox and other facial aesthetic treatments, so why not branch out and offer sought-after therapies such as massages, aromatherapy, reiki, chakra, rejuvenation facials and other popular therapies which, if experienced in the right environment, can really lift a practice's profile?

Bearing in mind HTM01-05 regulations, this type of partnership is only suitable if you have a spare non-clinical room that can be converted for beauty therapy purposes. If this is a viable option, it makes perfect sense from a business point of view for your empty rooms to be earning you money while providing local independent beauty therapists with an ideal environment to work in. You will also be attracting a footfall of potential patients into the practice who already have a keen interest in wellbeing, health and appearance, and who may well decide to try your dental services too.

Aim for your target

A golden rule of marketing is to always know your customer base and how to reach out to them. With this in mind, you could approach local hair salons, beauticians and health clubs with leaflets promoting your cosmetic services, enabling you to put your practice in front of a receptive audience.

If appropriate, you could also look into striking up a mutual promotion with the various salons such as teeth whitening discounts for every bride visiting her local hairdresser for a wedding hair trial, or other similar offers. And, if you ran this promotion over late Spring and early Summer, you would be targeting a receptive audience during the height of the wedding season. By knowing your target audience, building a mutually beneficial promotion and timing it correctly, you can maximise your marketing partnerships to their full potential.

Next steps

As we have seen, local partnerships can take many forms and each has their own set of benefits for both parties involved. There is little doubt, however, that this type of strategic marketing opens up new channels of opportunity to practices of all sizes as well as boosting local economies and community interaction.

For practices that still feel unsure of how to implement partnerships, help is at hand. Some payment plan providers can offer support for this type of campaign as well as providing bespoke PR plans, training courses and advice to help establish your practice in your local community. With this in mind, why not get the practice team together and create some unique ideas for your own local partnerships and see where they take you!

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About the author

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Sarah has worked in service marketing for more than 16 years and in the dental industry for more than ten. She started at the BDA, recruiting students and young dentists becoming Marketing Manager at Dental Protection Ltd. Sarah has been with Denplan for over four years.