

# TOP 10 SECRETS

## Dental Marketers Don't Want You To Know

By Michael Carabash,  
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**H**e is young and sharply dressed. A so-called 'marketing guru' for dentists and a real smooth talker. His elevator pitch puts dollar signs in your eyes. He promises you a steady stream of new patients through flashy direct mail campaigns, a beautiful website and robust social media, and very high Google rankings.

You tell yourself that his huge fees are worth it: you just need a few new patients to make your money back, right? And everyone else seems to be doing the same thing anyways, right?

But it's not all right. And you're about to learn an expensive life lesson.

Because when you don't see real results, but do feel your wallet getting lighter every month, you'll eventually want out. Perhaps you'll try to cancel the contract (and pay a hefty financial penalty in the process). You may even hire a lawyer to try to get your money back – with no guarantee of success.

In the end, you will be worse off. Filled with anger and regret. Having wasted your time and money. Having only learned what you SHOULD NOT be doing.

So don't take that phone call or meeting. And don't sign any contract.

Instead, do your homework. And that starts right here, right now.

What follows are the TOP 10 SECRETS dental marketers don't want you to know. Because armed with this knowledge, you'll realize that you won't need them as much OR at all to bring in new patients.

Now buckle up, because reality is about to hit.



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### SECRET #1: Focus on Existing Patients

As Dr. Arsalan Poorsina (multiple practices across Ontario) puts it: "Our best new patients come from our existing patients. Hands down, internal referrals are the least expensive and most effective way of getting new patients. Happy patients are our best sales force."

Why, then, do so many dentists focus on acquiring any patient from the internet? Perhaps they feel they need to. They see what others are doing and copy. Maybe they get swindled by dental marketers. Or perhaps they feel legally restricted when it comes to the kinds of marketing campaigns they can run to incentivize their existing patients to refer.

But that's pure HOGWASH.

There's nothing illegal, for example, about calling a patient on their birthday to wish them well, see what's new in their lives, and ask for feedback and referrals. That patient will probably be SHOCKED that their very own dentist called to wish them well and tell the whole world about that experience – because it shows their dentist actually CARES about them. And what did that quick phone call actually cost? Not much.

### SECRET #2: Find Your Niche

By targeting everyone, you attract no one.

Ronald Fung, business strategy consultant with Valeo & Co., states that: "In today's competitive landscape, if you want to survive and thrive, you must differentiate your practice and be meaningful to your ideal patient".

Dr. Fadi Swaida (multiple practices across Ontario) understands this principle quite well. When he set up Bond Street Dental in the heart of Ryerson University less than a year ago, he focused on providing dental care primarily to university students. Why? Because they have dental benefits, care about their oral hygiene, will walk by the clinic, and hang out with...you guessed it: other students.

How successful has this niche strategy been? Well, in the limited time it has existed, Bond Street Dental has amassed over 700 ideal and active patients. Outstanding for a new downtown Toronto dental practice!

### SECRET #3: Build Your Brand

Dr. Arsalan Poorsina, who came up with the DentalHouse brand for his various practices, explains why people buy brands: “Brands are familiar, trustworthy, timeless, and consistent in what they deliver.”

So what is a brand? Well, it IS NOT a practice’s logo, ads, website, mission statement, colour scheme or slogan. It may not even include the principal dentist’s name or the practice address.

A brand IS the personification of values and feelings that are INBETWEEN a dental practice and the patient. It is what a patient experiences (sight, smell, hearing, touch, gut feeling) when they are exposed to a practice – both online and offline. Successful brands are engineered to attract a specific group of loyal patients by addressing their needs and desires; and it keeps them coming back throughout their lives. It gives dental practices a huge advantage in a fiercely competitive industry.

To create a successful brand, you need it to spread socially. Patients, however, aren’t going to automatically sing your high praises every chance they interact with others. But they will talk about cool brands; brands that evoke emotions and which are triggered by associations to other things; brands that are in the public realm; brands that are loaded with tons of practical benefits; and brands that have human stories associated with them.

Don’t put your brand on the merry-go-round of mediocrity. To stand out and be memorable, your brand needs to be BOLD and be communicated LOUDLY to your target audience.

Don’t forget to periodically refresh your brand.

Finally, giving back can help elevate your brand. Coincidentally, ever dentist featured in this article has done some form of dental outreach in Jamaica. Their hard work and heart-warming stories have helped humanize them.

### TOP 5 BOOKS FOR BRAND BUILDING:

Jonah Berger, *Contagious*

Idris Mootee, *60 Minute Brand Strategist*

Jeremy Miller, *Sticky Branding*

Daymond John, *The Brand Within*

Steve Jones, *Brand Like a Rock Star*

Some mentioned that their patients have become their RAVING FANS as a result – proudly telling others how they took time off to journey to an impoverished country and give back to those who needed it the most. Don’t underestimate the power of charity!

### SECRET #4: Six Touches

When a dentist runs a marketing campaign, they typically want an instant and positive response. But that rarely happens.

The reality is that you need to touch a prospective patient SIX TIMES before they contact you to set up an appointment. Those six touches could include things like seeing your office on their way to work or home, hearing about your practice from an existing patient, finding your practice’s website while Googling, receiving one of your direct mail flyers, or even seeing your practice’s newspaper ads.

To get his speciality practice off the



ground, for example, Dr. Gary Glassman (Endodontist, Toronto) touched general practitioners by lecturing at dental trade shows, networking at dental society meetings, publishing quarterly newsletters, and running free CE courses and demonstrations at his dental office. Per Dr. Glassman: “To be top of mind and tip of tongue for endo referrals, we planned multiple interactions every year for both referring and non-referring dentists. This strategy helped us grow exponentially”.

Remember: some touches produce better results than others. Two-way communication (example: in person meetings) is way more effective than one-way (example: advertisements). Printed materials are harder to ignore and throw away than, say, e-mails. And touches with simple messages that elicit an emotional response work better than more complicated ones that focus on practical benefits.

### **SECRET #5: The Patients You Attract – Attract Similar Patients**

In 2009, Dr. Nohora Martinez and her husband Matt Bladowski (appraiser and strategic management consultant with Dental Strategy) opened their first dental practice in an overly-saturated part of London, Ontario. From the outset, they realized that the first group of patients they attracted would attract similar patients – in terms of education, occupation, income, age, family status, ethnicity, and other socio-economic factors.

They wanted to offer high-end dentistry using state of the art equipment in a relaxed environment. They focussed on what Matt Bladowski calls “the whole patient experience”: offering spa like amenities to make patients extremely comfortable, educating them throughout (and taking the time to do so), and being accessible to them when they

needed it. They targeted resourceful and sophisticated individuals who wanted a higher-end dental experience than they were used to.

Importantly, they didn’t offer free services or discounts. They didn’t accept assignment. They didn’t have any big neon signs or marketing posters cluttering up their windows. They were uncompromising in their vision and marketing.

Many thought they would starve. But they didn’t. Their first round of patients attracted similar socio-economic patients and the practice grew in the first four years to over 4,000 ideal and active patients (note: it’s more than double that size today, with 5 dentists and over 20 team members).

### **SECRET #6: Align Your Internal/ External Brands**

Sometimes, there’s a disconnect between how a practice markets itself externally (very good) and what the patient experiences when they call or step inside the office (very bad). If your team members aren’t sufficiently motivated or capable of delivering your brand’s value proposition, you’ll have disillusioned patients and a high turnover.

Per Ronald Fung: “A patient’s first human interaction with your clinic dictates whether they make an appointment and keep coming back. It’s actually easier to disappoint a new patient than to impress them. Every team member needs to be obsessed with giving them the best possible experience. When a patient calls, avoid putting them on hold. If they leave a message, call them back right away. Always be servicing patients with a smile. Greet them by name. Engage them personally. Take your time. Bottom line: patient won’t care about your business – or send referrals your way – until your office shows

#### **Pictured left to right:**

Dr. Arsalan Poorsina

Ronald Fung

Dr. Fadi Swaida

Dr. Gary Glassman

Matt Bladowski and  
Dr. Nohora Martinez

Dr. Samantha Amaro



them how much they care by delivering premium service.”

Remember: your team is your second-best sales force after your existing patients. Make sure each team member is ‘with the program’ or replace them quickly.

### **SECRET #7: Social Media Doesn’t Work (Like You Think)**

Dr. Samantha Amaro (Toronto) has a very robust social media presence for her White Willow Family & Cosmetic Dentistry office that includes Google, Facebook, and Instagram. But she’ll be the first to admit that investing in social media doesn’t translate into a rush of new patients.

“People don’t look at our social media and say ‘I need to be a patient there’. Our social media reinforces our brand – namely, that we offer a very friendly atmosphere and gentle dental treatments primarily for government employees and their families. It lets the public know we exist and what we stand for. But patients ONLY come when they NEED something specific from you; when they’re actively searching for you. That’s why running targeted online marketing campaigns is extremely important. You can’t just rely on social media to bring in lots of loyal lifelong patients.”

Bottom line: social media websites and apps are best used to disseminate content that reinforces your brand while creating backlinks to your website to enhance its Google juice (i.e. make it more search engine friendly so it ranks higher when patients search for specific keywords).

### **SECRET #8: Always Be Uncomfortable**

“When it comes to marketing, there’s no sitting on your laurels” says Dr. Gary Glassman, who runs monthly team meetings to evaluate

the practice’s marketing and plan ahead.

To get inspiration for marketing, Dr. Fadi Swaida checks out what American dental practices are up to. “We are 5-10 years behind our American counterparts”, he says. “When I was in Las Vegas and Miami, for example, I saw huge billboard ads for dental implants at seemingly affordable prices using third party financing. I might just try that out and see how it goes.”

The quickest way to getting the most new patients is to keep trying new things. Invest in those ideas and campaigns that produce results; tweak or drop everything else. Measure and re-evaluate each month. And always be uncomfortable with the status quo

### **SECRET # 9: Measure Success**

“What’s the return on my marketing investment?”

That’s what you should be asking before, during and after you run a marketing campaign.

If you’re not measuring success, how do you know what’s working?

Obviously, you should be tracking things like: number of prospective patients who were exposed to a particular campaign (POSSIBLE LEAD), number of prospective patients who reached out to the practice (online or offline) as a result (WARM LEAD), and number of prospective patients who actually booked (PATIENT).

But you can and should dig deeper. For every marketing campaign you run, you should ask:

- What was the cost per LEAD, WARM LEAD and PATIENT?
- What is the average treatment value of a new patient?
- How much did a new patient contribute to the practice’s bottom line that year?

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(Note: some patients need more treatment than others)

- What is the lifetime value of that new patient?

Tracking and analyzing the data helps you focus on the most effective marketing tactics so you can plan ahead and invest wisely!

## SECRET #10:

### You Are Competing With...Dentists

This isn't a secret at all. But it's still worth mentioning. When it comes to marketing, as a group, dentists aren't a very fierce force to compete against. Remember: I'm a lawyer who successfully competes against many MORE lawyers than there are dentists in Ontario!

Dental schools don't really prepare dental students for the real world of owning a practice and getting new patients. Instead, they tend to focus on practice management, having your team on contract and not getting sued. Old school mentalities – like dentistry is a profession, not a business OR doing good dentistry is your best marketing – still permeate. There hasn't been much in terms of teaching proper marketing for the new millennium.

So when someone finally graduates and start practicing, they're unprepared. And the last thing they're going to do is read a book, or take a course, on marketing. They may sit on their laurels and wait for patients to come in. They may copy others and achieve no real results. They may eventually hold up their hands and blame external factors – like a bad economy, too many dentists setting up nearby, a changing community, or patients moving away.

Eventually when they get desperate, they'll hire a dental marketer.

But this is all good news for the marketing savvy dentist. Because by understanding the secrets outlined in this article and executing them flawlessly, that dentist WILL succeed with relative ease in attracting and keeping new patients. And they'll do so faster and more cost-effectively than their peers.

## CONCLUSION

The next time a so-called dental marketer promises you an influx of new patients but doesn't use the right language – like focusing on existing patients, niching, branding, six touches, brand alignment, etc. – do yourself a favour and hang up or walk away. Now that you know their top 10 secrets, you can save yourself a lot of time, money and headache. Trust your gut. Be in control. Good luck!

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