



How Patient Care  
Differentiates A Practice  
& *Boosts Production*



At the best of times, it's hard to know *exactly* what, where, when, and how frequently to communicate with patients and prospective patients. In a pandemic, superior patient communication efforts are critical for practice success.

Based on the results of Patient NEWS' clients compared to other dental practices across the industry, it's clear that dental practices that are marketing and patient-centric and who stayed in touch with patients and community consistently using a mix of communication channels have made up the most ground since the spring of 2020 when COVID-19 hit the industry like a sledgehammer.

Communication – especially in these times – is the cornerstone of exceptional patient care.

Due to stay-at-home orders, scary news headlines, and warnings of a “second wave” of COVID-19, consistent messaging is required to reassure patients that it's safe to visit the dental office. We all know, and you probably know, the CDC officially confirmed that there haven't been any COVID cases linked to a dental office. Do your patients know? Is this widespread news in your community? Probably not.

Dental offices experienced an influx of pent-up demand from risk-tolerant patients in recent months, while still many risk-averse patients remain on the sidelines.

## Patients Want Encouragement From The Dentist

According to recent data from the *Health Policy Institute*, of patients who were active in 2019, 86% are somewhere in the “ready” stage, 26% having been recently active, but more importantly, 60% *ready to go* **with encouragement from the dentist**. The final 14% are waiting for a medical breakthrough.

So, what percentage of your patient base has come back in? How many are currently scheduled? Is it time to work on risk-tolerant new patients to fill the COVID production loss gap?

If what’s needed is encouragement from the dentist that will not only boost patient care but also boost your production levels, consider what your office can do.

The data shows there are opportunities to further re-engage and connect with both active patients and new prospective patients in your target area. And the sooner you can get patients in, the more great dentistry you and your team can provide, leaving a more significant and recognizable impact on the community you serve. And on your bottom line.



Now more than ever, dental patients want to feel appreciated. Dentistry has moved away from a transactional business to a relationship-driven business. And what is the foundation of a good relationship? According to *Psychology Today*, it includes:

- Trust
- Communication
- Respect
- Honesty
- Transparency
- Humor.

In an age of misinformation, increased consumer skepticism, and personal disconnection, engaging with patients in and out of your practice – at all points of the patient journey – will drive production, allowing you to reinvest in various aspects of the business, which in turn makes it possible to provide even better care.

### **Great communication always leads to better patient care...**

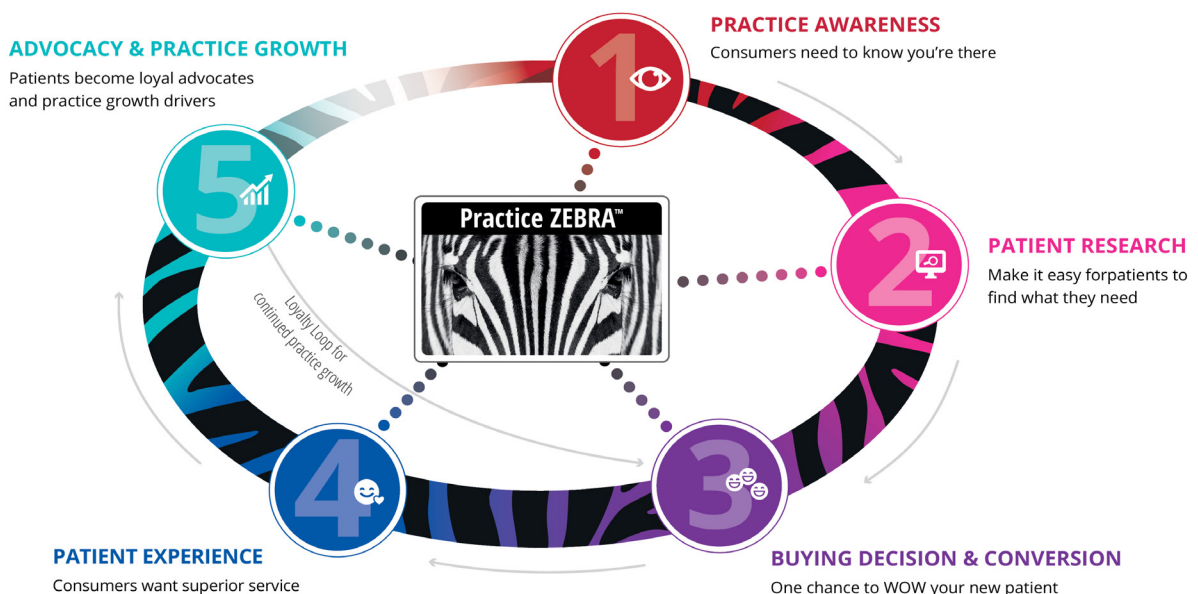
...Because when patients are educated about oral health, they prioritize oral health, they talk about it with friends and family, they recognize needs and wants. And because the more patient communication you provide, the better relationships you build with patients, based on trust, respect, and confidence, the more great dentistry you can provide.



# Patient Care And The Role It Plays In The Patient Journey

The dental patient journey is comprised of five unique stages.

Essentially, it's a journey that each person takes, starting from awareness and decision-making and going all the way through to advocacy and growth. And it can be different from one person to the next. And the patient experience at your practice, your "PX," will determine how often a positive repeat buying-decision will happen, driving the loyalty loop.



**Every phase of the patient journey must be powered by data.** Knowing your key performance metrics will help you ensure that your patients and prospective patients in your community get the focus they need in each of the phases. It will show you just what types of communication strategies to put in place throughout the PX for your office.

Read on to see how the visibility of your metrics, combined with superior communication, can play a critical role at different points of the patient journey leading to enhanced practice success. Do communication well and you will acquire and keep more patients.

## Communication Throughout The Patient Journey

- 1. Boost brand awareness by sharing quality information.** The dental industry is forecasted to recover faster than most business sectors. That means that dental patients will be looking for a trusted provider. They want to know that the dentist they choose will not only provide excellent care but make their health and safety a top priority. And like pre-COVID patient activity, some patients aren't thinking about dental care right now, even though they might be an ideal new patient. This is because they don't prioritize their oral care and they believe everything is fine because they aren't in pain or showing visible signs of problems.

This is where your practice comes in. Enhanced communications, to patients and prospects, will not only reassure your target audience about the safety of dental care at your practice, it can bring awareness and educate your audience about the mouth-body connection and elective services that can make them look and feel great. Consumers WANT to look and feel great.

Proactive communications like paid media and good content on your website and direct mail will elevate your practice, boost brand awareness, and support the dental-buying decision. With 100% reach, direct mail is guaranteed to get in homes in your neighborhood to make a personal introduction, driving patients to your website and your phone.

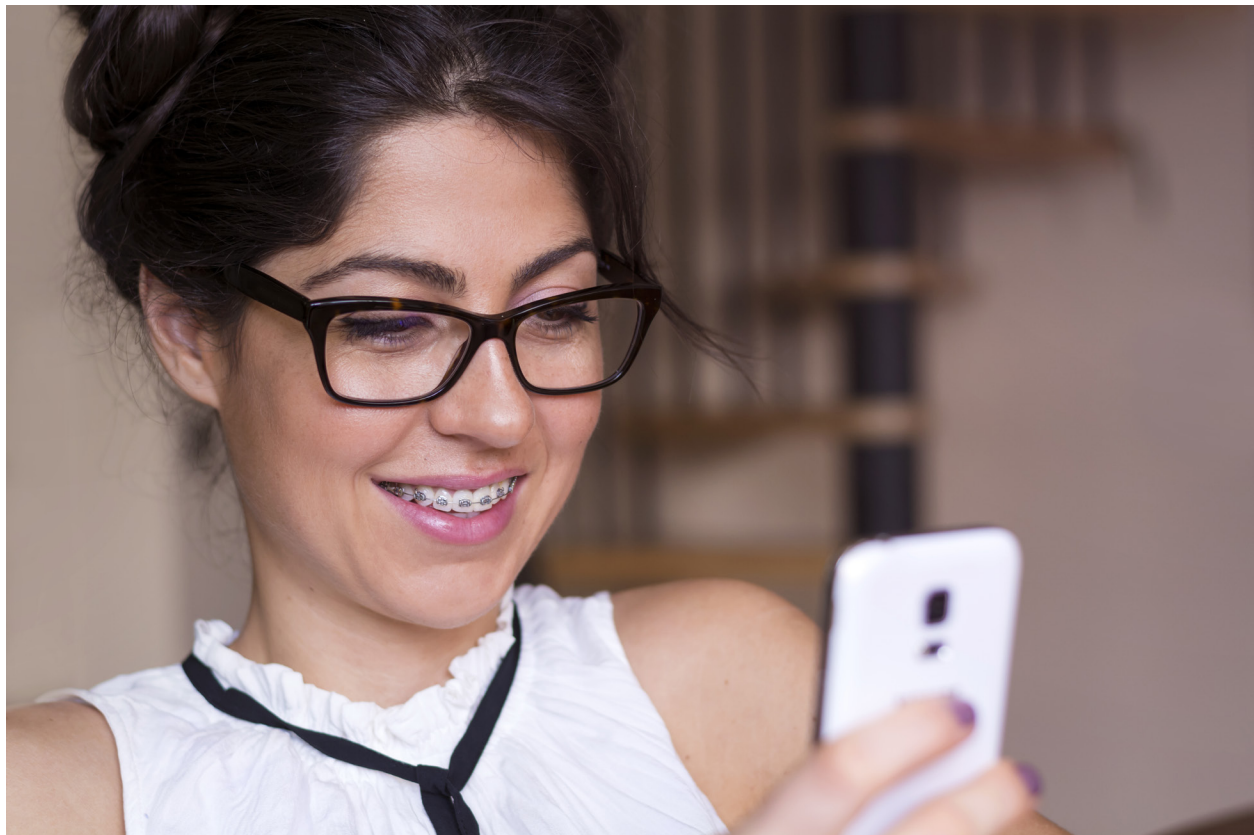
During COVID-19, the emphasis on cross-channel promotion and patient engagement and reviews has become paramount. The patient journey has become more complex. It requires increased touch points to build trust and manage the relationship.

And, we aren't getting bills in the mail, but we are getting information. Consumers of all ages appreciate and enjoy receiving mail – and most look forward to opening their mail daily. Don't discount the power.

While looking after existing patients has been a priority, don't forget about acquiring new patients. Consistently, across the industry, new patients contribute 2-3 times more annual production than an active patient, which will help speed up your recovery and make up for the COVID production gap caused by closure and months without new patients being added to your roster.

### *Quick tips for direct mail success:*

- Know who your best patients are and where they are. This will allow you to target your offer to more quality patients like the ones you like.
- Include the right offer strategy based on specific demographic information and develop creative messaging that fits their likes and buying preferences.
- Use a stand-out format (11 x 17") with design that gets a response.



- 2. Improve your chances to convert a new patient and keep them coming back.** Use social channels to educate your community on the importance of oral care. When new patients become aware of your practice, they'll go online to look you up. This includes reading online reviews and browsing Facebook and Instagram. Are you active on these channels? Do you have lots of positive – and recent – patient reviews?

Social channels also provide a great platform to positively reflect your brand. Provide updates on health and safety protocols. Share the personality of your practice. Success stories from patients who have experienced the “new normal,” and don't forget to have fun. People use social channels for entertainment – so hum-drum, dreary, all-patient education will miss the mark. Be yourself on social. And engage your team for support. Assign a social team lead and let them run.

Being active on social will show that you're ... well, social! It demonstrates that your practice is filled with people who are caring, generous, imaginative, friendly, and who make a concerted effort to stay connected to patients. That's a very positive brand image.



*Quick tips for social media success:*

- Post content 3-7 times per week
- Use the 80/20 rule. 80% of content offers value and connects with your audience on a personal level. 20% contains sales-related messages.
- Reply to all reviews, comments, and private messages.

**Demonstrate you're an authority.** There are several ways to show that you're an expert in your field – the one whom your community trusts with their family's dental care. When you build patient trust and confidence, when you build brand awareness and interest in dentistry, you'll boost patients ... and people care because they'll make dental care a priority.

*Quick tips...*

- Ask patients for reviews and keep your review site active
- Write blogs for your website and share these on all channels
- Create videos with dental tips and short messages for your social channels
- Send email communications to patients with value-added oral health articles.



**3. Improve your PX – the “patient experience.”** When you make quality care readily available and you provide a superior experience, you will strengthen patient relationships and build that loyalty loop. Lack of dental insurance or cost concern is one of the primary reasons 50% of adults skip their necessary dental appointments. And because many people lost their coverage during COVID-19, it’s become more important to offer an attractive, easy alternative to bring new patients into your practice and keep existing patients coming back.

In the US, pre-pandemic, in-house membership plans were a thing. Now they’re becoming more of a thing. And the data is proving that these are extremely effective in boosting practice production – particularly by converting non-insured patients.

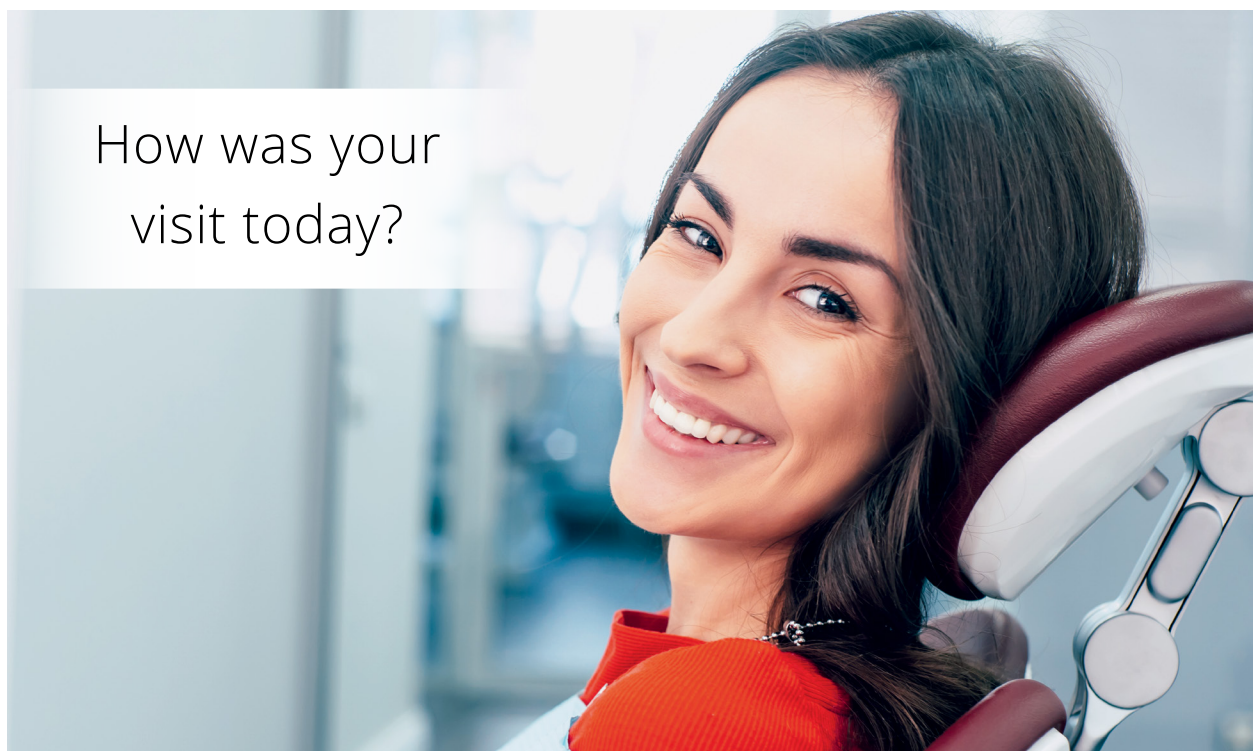
On average, dental plan patients are proven to spend twice as much on dentistry over non-insured patients. Offering an in-office dental membership plan makes it easier for uninsured patients to choose your practice. And you get to take back control from insurers and discount plans. It also differentiates your practice and bolsters your reputation by showing patients you care and want to help them get quality care at an affordable price. This can be a true practice “value-prop” differentiator.





*Tips for dental membership plan success:*

- Keep it simple. The more complex the plan, the more difficult it is to explain and get adoption.
  - Keep your plan front and center for new patients. Use it as a new-patient offer on proactive marketing like direct mail and paid media, and have a page outlining your plan on your website.
  - Promote your plan with an automated cadence to save your team time, avoid “cherry-picking,” and only educating some patients or missing patients altogether during transactions. Automated communications increase awareness and conversion.
  - In Canada, where membership plans aren't currently available, get creative with payment plans and other offers you can provide to encourage non-insured patients.
- 4. By showing you care in and out of the office, build advocates who return and refer.**
- Dental patients want to know they're more than just a patient. They want to feel appreciated. Perceived indifference is the number-one reason patients don't return. A simple question like, “How was your visit today?” can make a significant impact. Pay attention to their answer. Ensure they are happy and make it known you care about them.



## Your Business & Patient Care... & Its Impact On Customer Service

There are several things a dental practice can do to provide a superior experience for patients so that they post positive reviews, trust the office, accept treatment plans, remain loyal, and refer friends and family.

### 7 Tips To Ace The Patient Experience (PX)!

- 1. Scripting & Training – on the phone, in-office & online – to respond effectively.** Today dental offices are facing tough questions about safety in the dental office, why there are precautions and protocols, and how it affects patients – and the age-old questions and objections regarding fear, cost, and more. Right now, risk-averse patients who are “almost” ready to commit to an appointment will need reassurance, confidence-building, and encouragement. It’s critical to ensure everyone has all the answers to questions that might come their way.

Your practice may have already tackled this and put strategies in place. That’s great! But patient objections, trends, concerns, and questions don’t remain static. Great communication requires constant improvement and refinement.

- Gather your team regularly to brainstorm on how to answer questions and objections you’re each facing.
- Craft answers and share what’s worked and what hasn’t so that everyone is on the same page with a unified response. Rather than “scripts,” bulleted “talking points” are easier to recall and offer up naturally when talking to patients over the phone and in person.
- Create a “brand voice” for how to respond to online reviews. Reviews – and responding to them – are a tremendous way to reveal how awesome your practice is – good, bad or ugly – and always respond to your reviews right away.

The way all of these patient interactions are handled determines your practice PX (patient experience) and they provide a great opportunity for you to build and strengthen your patient relationships – now and into the future.

- 2. Offer convenient & comprehensive care.** As people continue to social distance and avoid taking unnecessary risks, it's critical to offer them convenient care.
  - Offer early, late, and weekend appointments to increase conversion help make up for COVID losses. Successful practices are extending operating hours in the short- to mid-term to support the need for additional production.
  - Make convenient payment plans and in-house memberships highly visible, include enticing offers for elective services. Patients are looking for more dentistry to be completed at a single visit.
  
- 3. Help patients feel comfortable and welcome.** Dental patients want your team to be attentive to their needs, treat them with compassion, and demonstrate a genuine interest in them as customers.
  - Smile ☺. Every person who works in any business has a tough day here or there, will have to deal with a tough customer, or has some difficult challenges outside of the workplace. Everyone has "stuff." But as representatives of our company, and to be generally more happy, it helps when we put on the positive for each new interaction – whether bosses, team, co-workers, or customers. SMILE. It releases endorphins for you and the recipient. A smile can be heard over the phone! And when patients see you smile in greeting and as they move through your practice, they automatically feel welcome and appreciated.
  - On the phone. Call handlers must be friendly and answer the phone with energy and enthusiasm. They must also be good listeners, provide information and answers to questions, and make the patient feel important. It's a fact that 50% of all new-patient opportunities are lost at this critical stage, and while one of the main reasons is fee concern or insurance (and you should know your metrics for your practice so you can implement a way for your team to overcome those objections), another main reason is that the call handler just never asked for the appointment. Always ask. And boost scheduling by offering to bring in additional family members when you get the first patient scheduled!
  - In the chair. This is true relationship-building time. Good chairside communication can alleviate anxiety, reassure, build confidence, and strengthen trust. This communication can brighten a patient's day just by the way you pay attention to them. Make eye contact, be a good listener (don't interrupt), and learn to "read" the patient. Some want more information, some want less.





**4. Be available. Don't rely on voicemail.**

- A whopping 87% of new patients won't leave a message or call back their call isn't answered live. During COVID, there's been about a 27% spike in missed calls. And that means a good majority of those missed new patients are lost to a competitor for good.
- Designate a trained team member to answer the phone live at all times. This will have a profound impact on your call-conversion rate.
- Top practices answer close to 100% of calls. For now, focus on just a 10% improvement ... and when you get there, focus on another 10%. It's amazing what just a small goal can add up to for practice production growth.

## 5. Be proactive.

At Patient NEWS, our clients are patient- and marketing-centric, so it's been great to see their production levels get back to around 100% after re-opening. That's not to say the COVID-closure isn't going to result in some difficult days ahead, but they are doing far better than the ADA/HPI reported 75% recovery for the average office. That's because dental practices didn't stay in touch with patients when appointments were canceled during the shutdown. And if patients are left in the lurch, that leaves them open to leaving the practice in search of a practice that can give them the care they need. This will open up opportunity for dental offices that are proactive with new-patient acquisition campaigns, snatching up disillusioned patients that have been abandoned by their previous dental office.

**6. Acknowledge positive feedback.** Patients who take the time to say good things about their dentist in online reviews and elsewhere want to be acknowledged. By doing so, patients will be inclined to leave your practice more reviews in the future. Respond to all reviews – both positive and negative. When it comes to the not-so-great ones, don't go on the attack. Remain objective, acknowledge the review, and welcome further discussion offline which shows others that you care by always being willing to try to improve a situation. Just monitor and respond to all your reviews. There are tools and dashboards to help you do this. Practice ZEBRA is one of them designed exclusively for dentists.

**7. Go cross-channel.** We're facing a more complex patient journey and that requires increased touchpoints to build trust and manage relationships. Today you have better channel attribution and ROI analysis, like address and phone matching to patient spend. It's never too late to improve your patient and new-patient communications. Direct mail builds awareness, educates, and keeps practices top of mind with patients. Email is just a "must-have," but be sure you don't only use it for transactions (i.e. reminders)... Add value by sharing news and information. Update and refresh your website, use social media for brand-reinforcement, and paid media to drive new-patient traffic.





## The Impact Of Patient Care On Practice Recovery

By going to above and beyond for patients during these extraordinary times, your practice will reap the benefits.

By keeping patients informed about the importance of their oral health, communicating through all channels, and showing you truly value them as a person and a patient, you can expect:

- ✓ more positive reviews
- ✓ a leading reputation in your community
- ✓ more new patients
- ✓ an increase in patients who stay, refer, and invest
- ✓ higher scheduling rates
- ✓ better case acceptance rates
- ✓ higher referral rates (when you consistently communicate that you want referrals of friends and family).

Great Patient Care = Strong Production



**Unsure of where or how to start?** At Patient NEWS, we know that dental practices have a lot to manage. This was the case well before a global pandemic happened. Things look different now – not just with how you treat patients, but how you run your business. At this time, you might be working with a smaller team and this puts more pressure on everyone.

With nearly 30 years of experience helping dental practices launch and monitor their marketing campaigns, Patient NEWS can help. We've been alongside thousands of dentists throughout the ups and downs – including the last recession. And in the weeks during recovery following the shutdown, many of our clients have either returned 100% to pre-COVID production levels or are hovering around 90%.

We've expertly crafted communication materials – from direct mail to dental websites to social posts – that help keep patients in the loop and reassure them that it's okay to make that much-needed appointment.

Our full suite of solutions include:

- Neighborhood Newsletters & Postcards (Direct Mail)
- Dental Websites – WebLift™
- Patient Newsletters – in envelopes!
- Dental Brochures & Referral Cards
- SEO Content Packages
- Paid Media (PPC) Advertising

Marketing Automation Including:

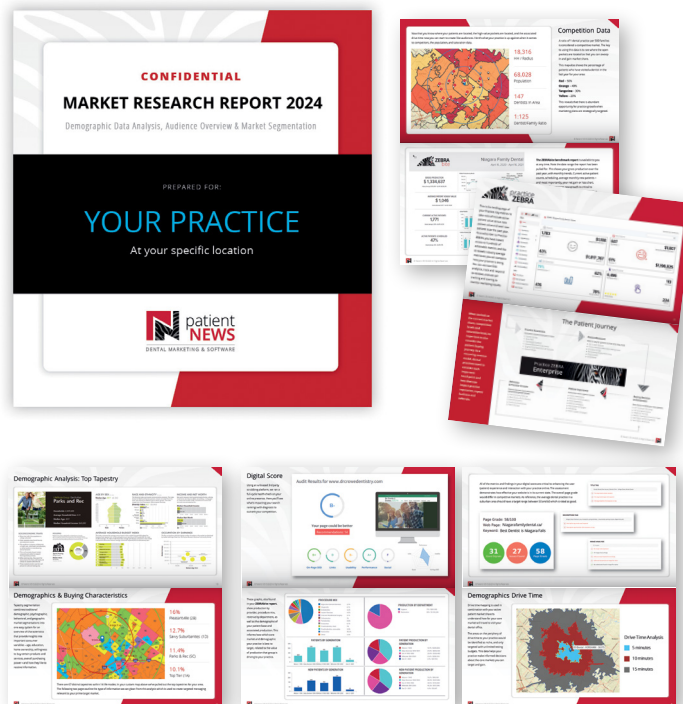
- Email Newsletters & Anytime Patient Email Communications
- Review BOOSTER & Reputation Management
- Appointment Reminders
- Dental Membership Plan BOOSTER
- Practice ZEBRA™ – industry-leading dental software for practice and marketing intelligence.
- Call Tracking, Recording & Scoring with supportive Phone Power Telephone Training.



# Dental Marketing That Works

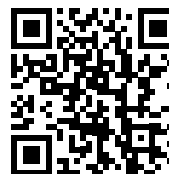
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## STAND OUT

Achieve Your Goals  
Distinguish Your Practice  
Be THE Dentist In Your Area

### DEVELOP

Practice Needs Assessment  
Demographic Analysis  
Strategic Planning

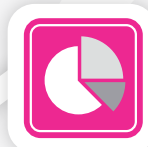


### IMPLEMENT

Creative Development  
Tactical Team Training  
Campaign Deployment

### MEASURE

Call Tracking & Scoring  
Success Benchmarks  
Performance Dashboard



### IMPROVE

Informed Coaching  
Fact-Based Feedback  
Continuous KPI Analysis

