

How to Differentiate Your Dental Practice.

What sets you apart?

Differentiation has been an integral part of the business world for decades. The concept states that buyers choose a company that gives value they don't believe they can get at other competitors. When a buyer perceives value, their decision revolves around more than purely the cost. Further, when they believe something will add value to their life, they are willing to pay more than the competitors.

dif·fer·en·ti·a·tion

/ˌdɪfəˈren(t)ʃiˈeɪʃ(ə)n/

noun

1

1. a business tactic to provide customers with something distinct, unique, or different from that which is provided by competitors in the marketplace

The whole idea of differentiation comes down to honestly answering the question - **“Why would anybody choose you over the dentist down the road?”**

How do you know if you need a differentiation strategy?

- 1 Want less PPO and more FFS?
- 2 Want more loyalty from your patients?
- 3 Want to be seen as more than a commodity?
- 4 Want less negativity every time you recommend treatment?
- 5 Tired of having the “what does my insurance cover?” discussion?

Develop your Differentiation Strategy

How to use this Tool

This is a step by step process. Work through the steps and don't be afraid to go back through each step and refine after time. Steps 1, 2, 3 really lead to Step 4 and 5. This will result in a written Practice Promises and a thought out strategy. Once written, you and your team hold these up for the whole world to see. Live them, brag about them, use them to tell others why your practice is so awesome. The result? You will absolutely fill your practice with patients who believe what you believe and want exactly the type of dentistry you are so good at providing.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR CORE CUSTOMER.

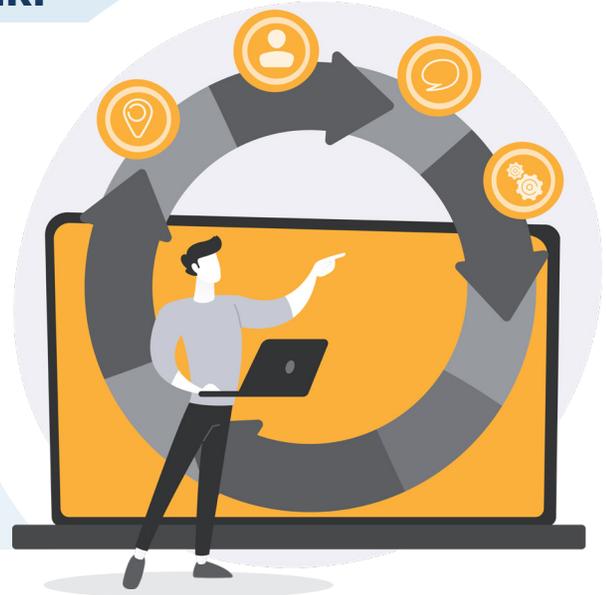
Dentists must get crystal clear on their core customer profile so they are able to attract more patients who fit this profile.

Your Core Customers are your favorite patients and the ones you wish you had more of.

CORE CUSTOMER

THESE PATIENTS LIKELY:

- › Are profitable - they choose dentistry and pay for it
- › Are enjoyable to be around
- › Value your services
- › Refer people just like themselves



INSTRUCTIONS:

1

As a team, pick 5 - 10 of your very best patients. Discuss what you like about them and what makes them a great patient. Write down each characteristic.

2

Looking at the list of characteristics, combine common themes to filter down the list.

3

Contemplate the shortened list and see which ones parallel your core values and core purpose. Consider crossing off those characteristics that are NOT in line with your core.

4

Keep working down to a list of 3-7 characteristics that describe your Core Patient.

5

Write a description that gives a clear picture of exactly who your Avatar Patient is.

Want More???

Please refer to the **Patient ID Tool in ACT University** for more help on identifying **A, B, C patients**. Scan the QR code here for instant access.



EXAMPLE:

“Our Avatar patient values quality dentistry and is happy to pay for it, whether they have insurance or not. They show up for appointments, always pay in full, and are sincerely appreciative of the services we provide. They accept our recommendations and work hard on oral hygiene at home. A healthy smile is important to them. They enthusiastically refer their family and friends to us.”

STEP 2 IDENTIFY YOUR CORE COMPETENCIES.

Core competencies are your strengths. They are the things YOU are really good at....better than most.....they are what set you apart from others.

Why is this important?

Understanding your inherent strengths is crucial. Your core competencies help set boundaries when determining your overall business strategy, including what services to offer, practice hours, insurance involvement, and technology to pursue. Your competencies are essential in helping you differentiate your practice within the dental marketplace.

A CORE COMPETENCY HAS TO PASS THESE THREE QUESTIONS:

1

Is it easy for others to imitate? It cannot be a commodity and cannot be provided by every other dentist.

2

Is it sought after by most of your patients and future patients? Is this actually something people are looking for? You might be really skilled and efficient at waxing up denture teeth but no patient is ever going to perceive that as a benefit.

3

Does it contribute to the customer experience? You might be really good at trimming dies but the patient doesn't experience that skill. Are you really good at giving truly painless injections? Now that is something the patient experiences.

Think of your practice as a group of competencies instead of a list of procedures.

EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES:



EFFICIENT AND TIMELY TREATMENT

▶ We are better than others in providing quick turnaround in the time it takes to receive care. Our systems are set up to allow same day dentistry, our in house surgeon is able to provide O.S. under this roof, and our Cerec allows same day final restorations.



EDUCATION

▶ We have fully invested in spending the time to educate our patients on dentistry and their options. We utilize our consultation room with a large screen tv. We purposefully schedule patients in a manner that allows the time for us to take pictures and have conversations with patients. We utilize intra oral photography, extraoral photography, operator screens with patient education software. Our entire staff is trained to have high level conversations with patients about their dentistry.



RELIABLE

▶ Our patients know what to expect - We never do dentistry without FAs or TX consultations. We always are on time. Our patients are never surprised with treatment they weren't expecting for financial costs they didn't know were coming.



EMPATHY FOR THE FEARFUL

▶ We provide definitive solutions for Anxiety - OCS, IV Sedation, music, etc. Our protocols are set up to serve this underserved population and we position ourselves as a referral source for other general dentists who need help treating their fearful patients.

COMPETENCIES ARE NOT:

- > We have a CEREC
- > We have a CBCT
- > We are “cosmetic dentists.”
- > Likewise, competencies are not quality crowns or resins.

- > Even “great customer service” isn’t a competency unless you are able to explain what you do differently than others.



INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1 Brainstorm a list of things you are good at.

- 2 **Answer the question**
“What do we do that makes us better at this than others?”

- 3 **ASK THE 3 QUESTIONS.**
 - Is it easy to imitate?
 - Is it sought after by most of your patients and future patients?
 - Does it contribute to the benefits the customer experiences?_____
- 3 Describe it in a way that explains why it is a competency. See examples above.

HUMILITY WARNING!

If you are having trouble coming up with anything that you feel you are sincerely really good at, take a deep breath. It’s okay. It’s time to set up a plan to get some skills that will help you differentiate yourself in the future. That “skilling up” may be step one in your strategy to differentiate. If this is you, keep going but instead write down some competencies you’d like to develop and some steps that you will take to start that process.

STEP 3

IDENTIFY YOUR WEAKNESSES.

If you are being completely honest, what are your weaknesses, both as a leader and dentist? We all have them. Likewise, what are the weaknesses of your practice as a whole? It is important to be fully vulnerable and honest with yourself here.

The goal isn't to feel bad about yourself. Rather, you are compiling a list of areas to improve. This exercise will also help you determine if you are spending your energy in the right way and in the correct area. If you are spending lots of time doing things you are not good at, that is problematic. Likewise, if your practice priorities and goals are aimed in areas that are determined to be weaknesses, they should be re-evaluated.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1

Identify your weaknesses. Categorize them as Practice Weaknesses or Leadership Weaknesses. Get your team's help here.

2

Filter down the list by combining common themes.

EXAMPLE WEAKNESSES:

1

Dr. sometimes lacks empathy. This can result in the patients not feeling heard at times.

2

Dr. is an introvert and is expected to be extroverted all day. The end of day is very hard for him/her to do complex procedures.

3

Our assisting team lacks clinical experience. This is causing slow downs in our schedule and we run late all the time.

4

We are afraid to ask for money. We are not collecting all the money that is owed to us and it is affecting our profitability.

5

We watch periodontal disease persist and don't have the confidence to recommend periodontal therapy.

6

We don't have the systems in place or the skills to provide comprehensive care. We talk about being able to do this but rarely present these cases and never have patients accept anything but a few teeth at a time.

7

Our treatment presentation skills and processes are not good. Patients often don't know what they are appointed for and this causes frustration.

HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE YOUR DENTAL PRACTICE.

Need Help?

Scan the QR code below to access ACT Dental's Tiers of Service Exercise in the ACT U. This exercise will help get you going on Step 2 and 3!



Web Form Link
12 - Download
Tiers of Services
Exercise



STEP 4

WRITE OUT YOUR DIFFERENTIATORS IN THE FORM OF "PRACTICE PROMISES."

So by now, you've identified your core customer, identified your core competencies, and admitted your weaknesses. Taking all that into consideration, it is time to write your Practice Promises. These are your differentiators, the reasons your patients come to you instead of your competition. These are the tangible differentiators setting you apart, the specific actions that represent HOW you deliver dentistry differently than the competition. Your promises are the concrete actions or the things your patients experience that keeps them loyal and coming back. Don't overthink this and don't let perfection get in the way of good. Write it down and perfect the verbiage over time.

"Words are only words."

Michael Porter from Harvard Business School says, "It's at the activity level of a business where true differentiation occurs and the true business model is revealed." These are the things that your patients experience that keep them loyal to you and your practice.

Many dentists can say the same words, or market their services to the same people and offer similar promises. However, it is HOW you deliver on your promises where differentiation occurs.

EXAMPLE PRACTICE PROMISE

"Our practice is proud of our unique ability to serve the fearful population. There are few practices around that have our experience in providing oral conscious sedation and we attract patients from miles around. It is our pleasure to serve as a referral source for other general dentists, helping them treat their most fearful patients. Due to our experience treating the phobic dental patient, our entire team is trained to support this challenging patient and our entire operation is designed with these patients in mind. Our fearful patients often comment that they feel heard and understood for the first time. Further, by providing good dental experiences, we help them break the cycle of fear and inspire them to seek continued preventive care."

STEP 5 **DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGY.**

How?
Use the checklist below to identify your new differentiation strategy.

**REGARDING YOUR
CORE CUSTOMER:**

- Evaluate your current marketing. Is it aimed at your core customer? Document
- the marketing changes you will implement to attract more of your Core Customer.
- Revisit your Asking For Referral system to make sure you are asking your best patients to refer more just like them.

**REGARDING YOUR
CORE COMPETENCIES:**

- Do you have the skills to differentiate yourself?
- What skills do you need to seek in order to further differentiate yourself?
- What systems or processes need to be changed to allow you and your practice to spend more time doing what you are good at?

**REGARDING YOUR
WEAKNESSES?**

- Which weaknesses can be easily mitigated via procedural changes? Set a strategy to do so.
- Which weaknesses are more cultural or foundational to who you are as a practice. These will either be impossible to change or will take considerable time. Go to next question.



- Of these, which are you spending significant time and energy in or on? Set a strategy to spend less time on these weaknesses or a strategy to strengthen this skill so it no longer is a weakness.
- What weaknesses of yours as the doctor can be fulfilled by people on your team? Hire people to fill your blindspots.
- What adjustments to your overall practice strategy are necessary to minimize your weaknesses?

**REGARDING YOUR
PRACTICE PROMISES:**

- Read them as a team often and make sure your patients are experiencing them as they are written.
- Evaluate your practice promises to ensure they are more than just words.
- Use them in your marketing to tell patients exactly why you are different.

DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY

1

CORE CUSTOMER

2

CORE COMPETENCIES

3

WEAKNESSES

4

PRACTICE PROMISES

5

STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

9 KEY'S TO DELIVERING YOUR PRACTICE PROMISES AND TRULY BUILDING YOUR BRAND:

1

Be skeptical of keeping up with Dr. Jones. Don't be drawn to the new bright objects that aren't right for you, even if they are common or popular with other dentists.

2

Think of your long term goals and work backward, identifying the steps you need to take to get the capabilities that you don't currently have.

3

Minimize your time doing things you aren't good at.

4

Constantly improve and adjust your operational processes, but always make sure they align with your core values, core purpose, and strategy.

5

Innovate your capabilities - never stop improving.

6

Your challenge is to set apart your practice as a WHOLE. This requires you to build distinctive capabilities - both clinical and interpersonal - both you and every person on your team - capabilities that truly are a step above other dentists around you.

7

Hire people who bring you advanced capabilities that you don't have on your own.

8

Be consistent. Even if you are starting with only one practice differentiator. Execute that skill relentlessly so your patients are able to "see" the difference in coming to you.

9

Use the same words. Everyone on your team needs to believe in your Practice Promises and easily be able to talk about them with patients.