Implant Game Changers

A *White Paper Series* By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant Game Changers is monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

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4 Ways to Increase Implant Case Acceptance

Specialty practices often spend a great deal of time, money, and effort on referral marketing. There is good reason behind making these efforts, referral marketing is the single most critical factor in the success of a specialty practice and should be carefully designed, implemented, measured, and modified. The goal of referral marketing is singular: have a potential new patient from a referring practice contact your practice to make an appointment. At that moment, the referral marketing process ends, and the sales process begins. The success of any company or specialty practice is truly based on the two functions – marketing and sales. This whitepaper will focus on four strategies, which comprise the general definition of the sales process and can increase implant case acceptance.

Strategy #1: Create a sense of value

The new patient experience should be based and designed on creating a sense of value. In any case presentation, giving the patient an understanding of the value of following through with treatment will increase case acceptance. In many practices, the case presentation offers only a general explanation of implants or other services, but does not truly focus on their value.

But what is value? Value is what following through with recommended treatment would mean to the patient. The first value factor is physical and directly relates to how an implant can improve the quality of physical life. Eating better, eating desirable foods, chewing better, no slippage of a denture and no discomfort are all obvious value drivers for a patient. Not having to routinely remove and replace a denture for cleaning, reduce other teeth for a bridge, or simply having no space for food to get caught are also examples of how an implant can improve the quality of physical life. Fortunately, this is all easy to explain. Some of these value drivers are standard and can be used repeatedly and others need to be custom communicated to that specific patient. You should design specific scripting for patients depending on their circumstance. For example, if it is a cosmetic case, then you need scripting that talks about a beautiful smile, a more youthful appearance or an appearance that represents the career or social development of the individual.

The second value factor is emotional and relates to how implants make people feel. How does a person feel about themselves with or without the recommended procedure? Losing teeth will make them feel older, while implants can restore a certain level of youth. Implants can also instill a sense of pride, confidence and self-esteem. All of these are value drivers for implants. The emotional factor is very powerful and often even more important to some patients than the physical factor, although most patients think about both. Take time to try and truly connect with the patient on an emotional level. The best way to do this is by asking a series of questions about what they know about dental implants and why they are interested in dental implants. Training the Treatment Coordinator to handle this will save time for doctors. Once you establish an understanding of a patient's emotional rationale for having dental implants, then you can focus the discussion in that direction.

The third value factor is return on investment. At first it may sound funny to talk about dental treatment in terms of a return on investment, but it's a real consideration for many patients. They worry about how much the case will cost, how much will be out-of-pocket, how much is covered by insurance, how it can be paid for, and if it is all worth it. In this case, the return on investment is pitting the physical and emotional factors against the cost of the case. This is why value is so important. The value in this case may be protecting other teeth for a lifetime or avoiding more expensive and painful treatment later. If the patient perceives that the value of accepting treatment is greater than the investment, then the odds of case acceptance are very high.

Action: Impart value by scripting every case presentation. Attorneys don't walk into court without having a sense of what they're going to say and how they are going to say it. Politicians usually don't give critical and important speeches that haven't been written and practiced. Surgical specialists should have scripting for themselves, their Treatment Coordinators, and their staff to follow with a goal of simply imparting value.

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Strategy #2: Offer financial options

In many seminars, I have made the following statement: "In the end, it always comes down to money." This may not be true for wealthy patients, but most individuals filter a decision about treatment partly through the cost of the case. Fortunately, there is a strong psychology for most people that it's not how much something costs, but how they must pay that determines their decision-making. As an example, most people would not be driving the cars they are driving if they couldn't finance them. Approximately 95% of new car sales are either purchased by lease, payment plans or some other type of financing. If that all went away overnight, the car industry would literally crash.

The same psychology is applied to dentistry. Every practice should have a set of financial options that can be explained in a positive manner with motivation to help a patient select the best option. These options can include a discount for payment upfront, credit card payment, a payment plan, or patient financing. Levin Group projects that patient financing will continue to grow annually in size and scope for dental patients. The reason is simply that people have competing priorities for their money. Practices should begin every case presentation by letting patients know that financial options are available and will be reviewed at the end of the presentation. This often opens the mind of a patient to listen and pay attention rather than to simply think that there is no way they can afford treatment.

Action: Design clear financial options and have the Financial Coordinator or Treatment Coordinator become excellent at presenting them. More importantly, don't forget to end every case presentation with a discussion of money and payment. Many cases are lost at this point more because there was no clear communication of the financial options and how they can be applied to make it easy and comfortable for a patient to have treatment.

Strategy #3: Follow up on unaccepted treatment

We recently had a client who was struggling with case acceptance. He didn't understand why time was being spent with patients who weren't accepting treatment. His patient base was upper lower class and lower middle class in terms of economic capability. He tried several approaches, including expanding payment plans, only to find that his case acceptance was still not where he felt it should be. Our consultant spent time observing his treatment presentations and observed him on a day when several patients were clearly interested, but didn't make a commitment while they were in the practice. A simple conversation asking about how the practice followed up with the patients that didn't accept treatment revealed that there was no follow-up system at all.

Over the next 90 days a detailed follow-up system, which is a standard part of our recommendations for surgical practices, was put in place. Each patient was contacted once a week for three weeks as a customer service follow-up to answer questions and help with any potential issues. Patients were told before they left the practice that the practice would follow up with them in about a week, so it didn't come as a surprise to the patient. Over the next 12 months, case acceptance improved. This had a significant financial impact on the practice, and it became clear that follow-up was a critical component of case presentation for this practice.

Keep in mind that most patients aren't rejecting treatment by not immediately accepting it after a case presentation. They simply have competing priorities such as other expenses, work schedules or other home and personal situations that must be considered before they can commit to treatment. We've always found that most patients welcome the opportunity for follow-up as they are working through the decision-making process.

If the practice has a Treatment Coordinator, they should be trained to build a strong relationship with a patient during the case presentation process. The coordinator should let the patient know they are their liaison in this process and will contact them after about a week to see how they can help make a positive decision for the recommended treatment. Being a liaison and friend will be viewed in a positive light by most people.

Action: Make follow-up a standard part of your case presentation. An increasing number of patients will not make an immediate commitment to have treatment while they're in the office. Developing these types of protocols is in the best interest of every practice.

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Strategy #4: Build a marketing program around completed cases

Many specialty practices have completed literally thousands of implant cases. The patients in these cases are excellent ambassadors, and each has a sphere of contacts of approximately 100 other people. Keep in touch with them through a communications program offering important dental implant information and updates. When people are reminded about their dental implants and how they have improved the quality of their lives, they tend to think about it more and communicate it to others. We have seen practices that have 5% to 7% of their new implant referred cases coming directly from previous implant patients. While most practices probably have 1% to 2% of referred cases coming from former patients, this still represents a significant return—three times the return on investment—all from a simple, clear communications program.

Summary

Case acceptance for dental implants, or any other service, is a complex skill to master. Influencing factors include the location and timing of the presentation, the communication skills of the Treatment Coordinator and doctor, financial options, value building, and a whole host of other factors. However, the four factors outlined in this whitepaper will help any practice to improve overall performance. To have a growing, vibrant, and relevant specialty practice you must master the case presentation process.

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Roger P. Levin, DDS is the CEO and Founder of Levin Group, a leading practice management consulting firm that has worked with over 30,000 practices to increase production. A recognized expert on dental practice management and marketing, he has written 67 books and over 4,000 articles and regularly presents seminars in the U.S. and around the world.

To contact Dr. Levin or to join the 40,000 dental professionals who receive his *Practice Production Tip of the Day*, visit www.levingroup.com or email rlevin@levingroup.com.

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