

EXCLUSIVE

WHAT DENTAL PATIENTS WANT



What Dental Patients Want

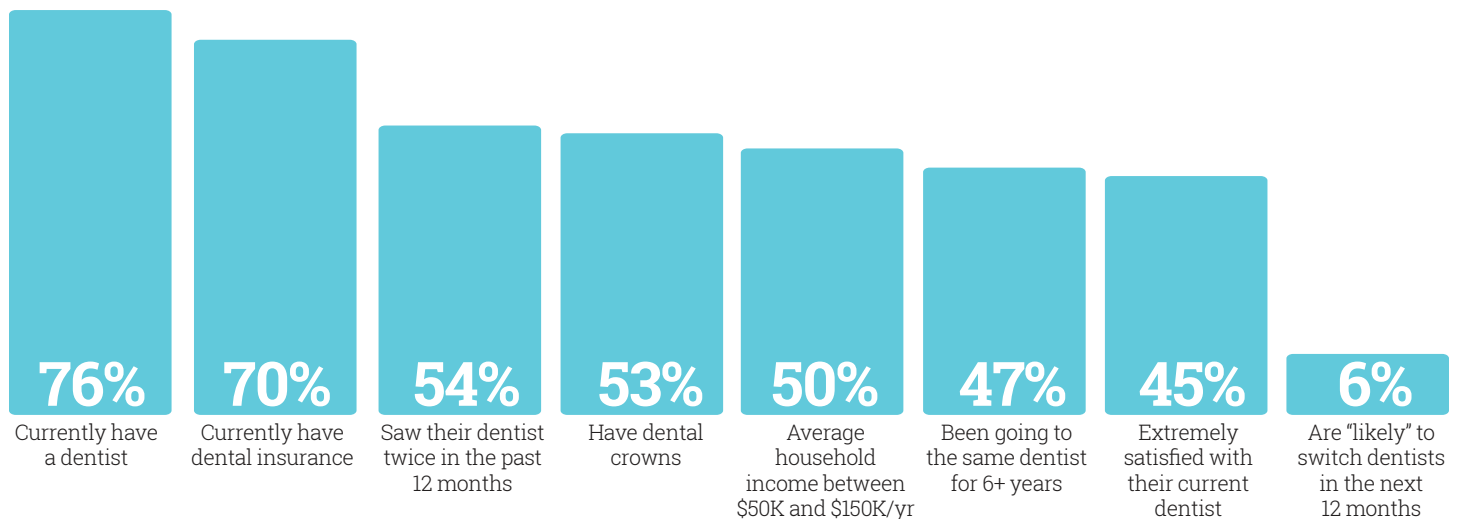
Dentists are obsessed with trying to understand what motivates consumers to select and become long-term patients of a dental practice. The goal is to “crack the code” that enables them to take their patient acquisition and retention rates to the next level. We wanted to learn what factors actually have the greatest influence on a dental patient’s decision-making process. To find the answers, Futuredontics® conducted a major national survey of consumer attitudes towards dentists and dentistry. This report is designed to answer many of the most important questions facing dentists today, including:

- What are the most popular sources patients use to find dentists?
- Which factors have the greatest influence on patients when selecting a dentist?
- How satisfied are patients with their current dentist?
- What factors cause patients to switch dentists?

Survey Methodology

Our report is based on the results of an online survey sponsored by Futuredontics and administered through an independent research firm. This report analyzes the answers provided by a nationwide research panel of consumers, designed to mimic the national population - reflecting current U.S. census demographic distribution (e.g. geography, age, gender, income and ethnicity). More than 3,000 individuals participated in the survey. Here are the major findings of this survey, along with recommendations on how you can best use this information to increase production and profitability at your practice.

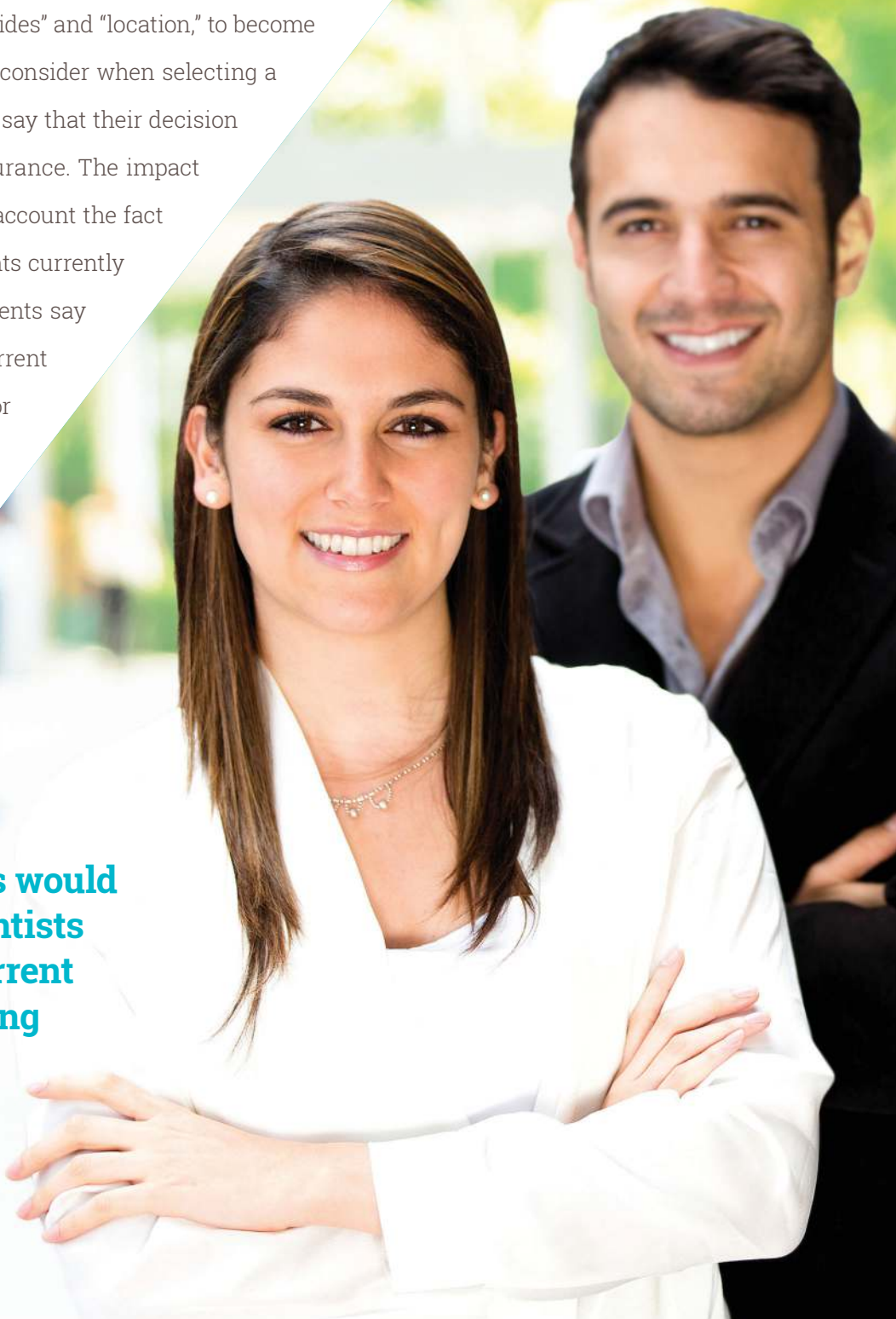
A Snapshot of Today’s Dental Patient



1 Patients Want You to Accept Their Insurance

They say that the three most important things in real estate are “location, location, location.” For dentists, it’s “insurance, insurance, insurance.” Since our last survey in 2013, “accepting my insurance” has jumped far ahead of previous leaders, “services dentist provides” and “location,” to become the number one factor dental patients consider when selecting a dentist. 59% of our survey respondents say that their decision to patronize a practice hinges on insurance. The impact of this is massive when you take into account the fact that seven out of ten survey respondents currently have dental insurance and 42% of patients say they would switch dentists if their current practice stopped accepting their plan. For perspective, only 34% said they would leave over what they perceive to be “too high of prices.”

42% of patients would switch dentists if their current practice stopped accepting their insurance plan.

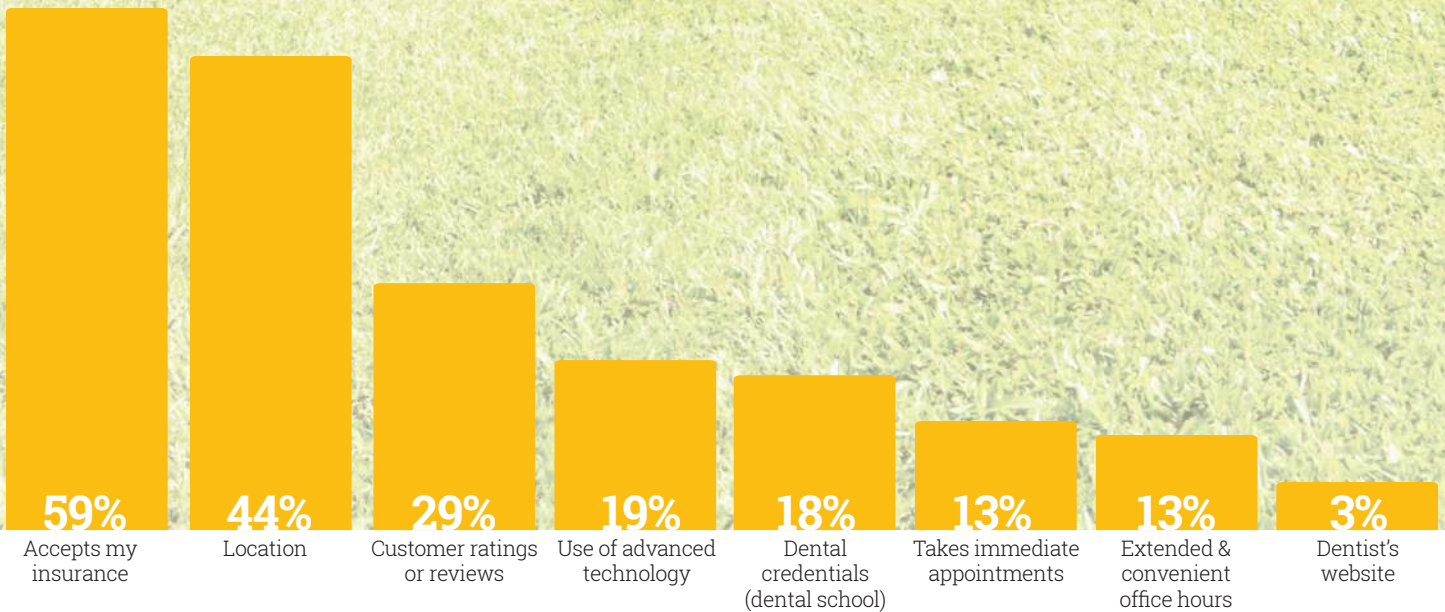


Do they accept my insurance?

Where are they located?



When Selecting a Dentist What Influences Your Decision the Most?



Insurance plays a major role in cementing the patient/dentist relationship. 84% of PPO patients and 78% of HMO patients report being “very-to-extremely” satisfied with their dentist.

It’s worth noting that 53% of survey respondents are using insurance lists provided by either their employer or their dental insurance provider to select dentists. The largest group of insured respondents (33%) belongs to a PPO plan. 18% are members of HMOs. The rest fall into a scattering for dental indemnity, union and state assistance plans.

Recommendations

Insurance can be seen as both an opportunity and a headache for dentists. It’s important to understand your patient base and, if you want to expand, consider adding insurance plans. Simply put, the greater the number of dental insurance plans your practice accepts the greater the likelihood you will be able to acquire and retain new patients. Determining which plans are best for you to participate in requires research. Selecting the right plans is dependent on a variety of factors, including where in the U.S. you practice, demographics of your neighborhood, major local industries and preferred providers of large area employers.

Other recommendations include:

- 1 Provide patients with a clear explanation about the difference between dental insurance and health insurance.
- 2 Offer treatment plans based on what patients need – not on the coverage they have.
- 3 If you offer financing, let patients know you’re willing to work with them to in order to provide optimal care.
- 4 Whatever options you do offer, make them obvious and available.

1-800-DENTIST® members enjoy a significant advantage when it comes to connecting with patients seeking dentists on their plan. We have the industry’s largest database of dental insurance plans – over 630 – so we can quickly match consumers to local dentists who accept their plan.

2 Patients Want You To Be Convenient

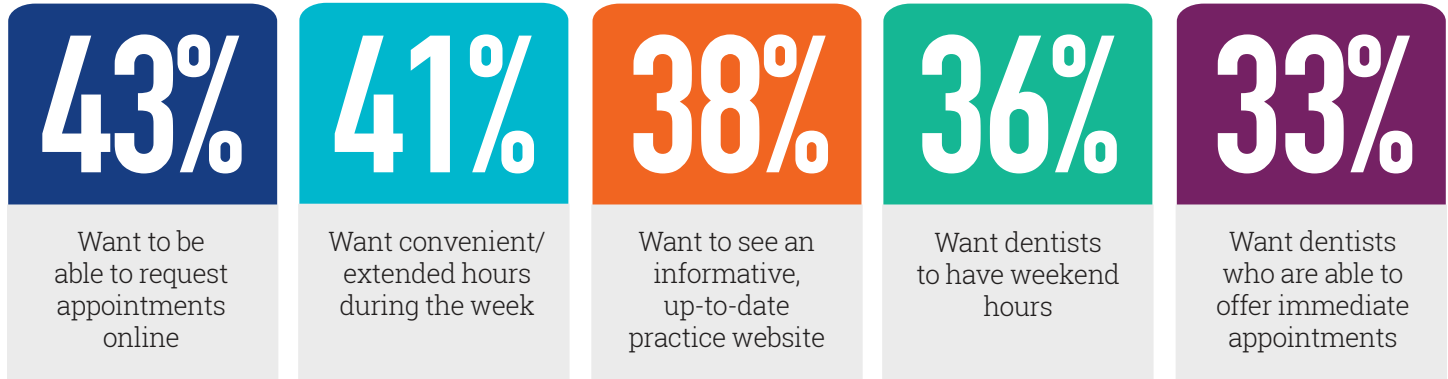
The second most important factor patients consider when selecting a dentist is location. 44% of survey respondents said that a convenient office is a must. While younger patients (ages 25-34) are more willing to put up with an office that is out-of-the-way than older patients (ages 35-54), nearly half of all patients won't patronize practices that fall outside the radius of their daily travels between home, work, school, etc.

This is totally understandable. Today's dental patients – people in general – are busier than ever. Anything that makes life easier is welcomed by today's over-scheduled, time-strapped consumers. This is why **practices that focus on making visiting the dentist as convenient as possible enjoy a decided advantage over their competitors.**



Convenience and the Perfect New Patient

Our survey found that convenience factors are especially important to a special group of patients (individuals between the ages of 35 and 44 with household incomes of \$50K to \$100K a year). This key new patient demographic has some very specific requirements when looking for a dentist:



Convenience plays a key role in overall patient retention, too. One in four patients say they would leave their current dentist if they find a practice's location, hours or ability to schedule an appointment inconvenient.

Recommendations

Selecting the right location for your practice is essential. The more convenient you are to your target patient base the better (e.g. pediatric or orthodontic practices near schools, etc.). Some convenience factors to keep in mind when selecting a site include patient parking, proximity to mass transit and ease of access to major thoroughfares, etc. Operating out of a location with high street visibility is important too because 24% of dental patients find their dentist either driving or walking by the office.

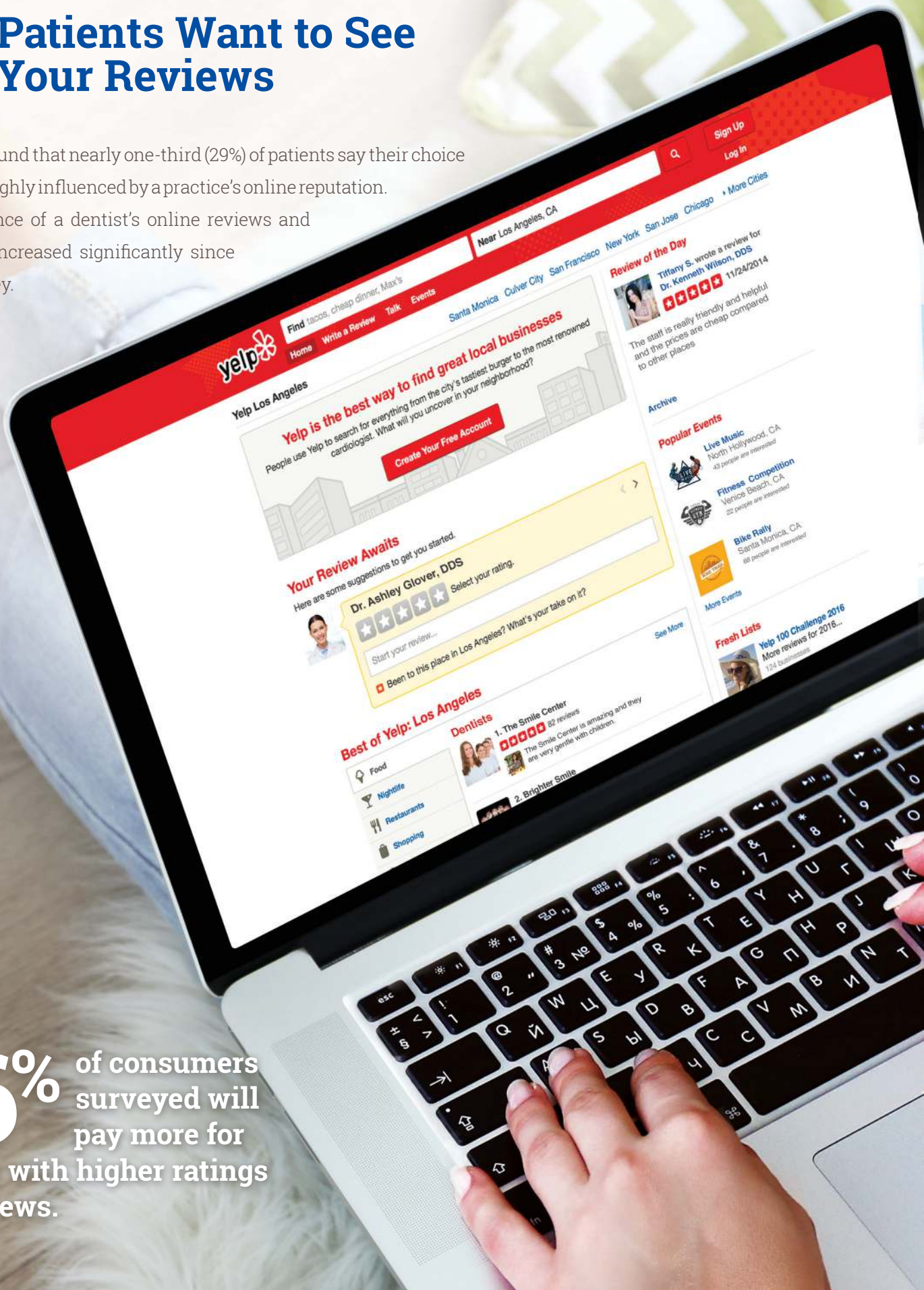
There are a variety of things dentists can do on the convenience front to make their practice more attractive to new and returning patients. These include:

- 1 Offering same-day or next-day scheduling options to all your new patients. Getting patient leads in the chair within 24 hours significantly increases show-up rates.
- 2 Staying open late or opening early one or two days a week – and adding weekend hours.
- 3 Providing online appointment requests on your website and Facebook page. Futuredontics has software solutions than can streamline this process.

3 Patients Want to See Your Reviews

Our survey found that nearly one-third (29%) of patients say their choice of dentist is highly influenced by a practice's online reputation.

The importance of a dentist's online reviews and ratings has increased significantly since our last survey.



86% of consumers surveyed will pay more for services with higher ratings and reviews.

In 2013, reviews ranked after a dentist's credentials as the seventh most influential factor in the dentist selection process. It's now number three. Today's patients consider reviews far more relevant than where dentists went to school, how many years they have been practicing and even the range of services they offer.

It makes sense that so many people report being influenced by what other patients say about practices online. Reviews from other patients lend credibility in the online marketplace. In fact, 88% of consumers say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.² What's more, 86% of consumers surveyed will pay more for services with higher ratings and reviews.³

Recommendations

Dealing with online reviews must be a top priority of every practice. It should be the job of someone in the practice to regularly visit Google, Yelp and the other sites at least daily, and see if anything new has been posted about your practice. Another good idea is to set up a Google Alert, which can be programmed to send you an email every time your name is mentioned online in a public document. It's also important to regularly monitor social media sites like Facebook and Twitter for mentions of your practice, as patients may "review" your practice in these forums as well.

Although the work of monitoring and updating your online presence across the web can be done manually, it can also be compressed into just minutes a day using a service like PatientActivator®. This communications app enables you to monitor and interact with your practice's entire online presence – literally hundreds of review, directory and social sites – from a single screen.

Additional recommendations include:

- 1** Claim your dental practice profile/page on Facebook, Yelp, Google Places, etc. and max-out the information provided there (i.e. hours, photos, videos, special services, new patient offers, etc.). This is both free advertising and essential for managing your online reputation.
- 2** Post signs in your waiting room and operatories requesting reviews on Yelp, Facebook, Google Places, etc.
- 3** Solicit positive reviews from your patients with automatic surveys, or with custom emails.
- 4** Have a strategy for dealing with negative reviews; step one of which is to always respond quickly and thoughtfully.
- 5** Make sure that positive reviews appear on all of your online locations (e.g. Facebook, your website, etc.).
- 6** Futuredontics has a free library of whitepapers and reports. Download our free whitepapers, "Dealing with Patient Reviews – The Dental Guide to Online Reputation" and "YELP 101 – A Guide to Dentistry's Most Influential Online Review Site" by visiting www.futuredontics.com/resources

4 Patients Want You to Use Advanced Dental Technology

One of the pivotal findings of our survey is the increasing importance of dental technology to patients. 19% of respondents said the “use of advanced technology to provide better and faster service” was one of the three most important factors they consider when selecting a dentist. This is a big change. In our last survey, technology just barely made it into the top ten factors patients consider when selecting a dentist. Today, it ranks as the fourth most important.

While this is crucial information on face value alone, the full import of it becomes clear when we look at a subset of patients (individuals between the ages of 45-54 with household incomes of \$50K to \$100K annually). Nearly half of this group (45%) said their



decision to patronize a practice is based on its use of advanced technology. This may be due to the fact that these busy, middle-aged individuals are more likely to have experience with treatments like CEREC® single-visit restorations (e.g. 22% of this demographic have had at least one dental crown).

The importance of technology to your practice can't be overemphasized. Our survey found that **many patients between the ages of 25 and 54 said that they would switch from their current dentist if they did not offer advanced technology treatment options.**

Recommendations

Advanced technologies like CEREC®, The Wand®, BIOLASE®, VELscope®, GALILEOS and ORTHOPHOS SL 3D have created a new standard of care that caters to consumers seeking better, faster treatment. The challenge for dentists is how to best promote the advantages of these technologies to new and existing patients.

Here are a few suggestions:

- 1** Keep clinical jargon to a minimum both in person and in your marketing materials. Focus on translating the benefits of advanced technology into language the average patient can appreciate.
- 2** Make advanced technology the star of your practice marketing efforts. Feature it prominently on your practice website, Facebook page, social media postings, patient newsletters and email campaigns.
- 3** It's important to distinguish your practice as the high-tech, comfort-conscious office when speaking with patients. Be sure to mention the advantages of your practice's technological capabilities during new patient phone calls, office tours and during treatment.
- 4** Get our free reports, "Marketing Your Technology – Selling Patients on CEREC, Zoom, Invisalign, etc." and "Using CEREC to Build Your Practice – Marketing Strategies for CAD/CAM Dentists" by visiting www.futuredontics.com/resources



5 Patients Want Referrals From Friends and Family

While much has changed in the dental profession over the past 20 years, one thing has remained constant: The importance of word-of-mouth referrals. **84% of the patients we surveyed solicit personal recommendations from family, friends and co-workers when they search for a new dentist.** This is up from 74% in 2013.



Which of the following sources would you use to find a dentist?



Word-of-mouth referrals offer dentistry's most cost-effective source of new patients. In a widely publicized case study, a member of the 1-800-DENTIST new patient leads program ran production numbers from a single patient. She found that this individual was responsible for 14 secondary and tertiary referrals. Together they had generated a total of \$46,000 in production in under two years.

Here are a few additional reasons why it's essential to provide a remarkable patient experience:

- Word of mouth is the primary factor behind up to 50% of all purchase decisions.⁴
- Customers referred by other customers have a 37% higher retention rate.⁵
- People are 4 times more likely to remain a customer when referred by a friend.⁶
- Referred customers are 25% more profitable.⁷

Recommendations

The most effective way to generate referrals is to be a dental practice worth recommending. Pay attention to the details that the survey shows matter most to patients. These include accepting a broad array of insurance plans, leveraging your positive reviews, providing advanced technology treatment options, etc.

Other recommendations include:

- 1** Ask for referrals! Do it in person at the office and reach out to patients at home with email reminders from a patient communications service like PatientActivator®.
- 2** Consider a reward plan. It's preferable to offer a "Thank You" as opposed to an "incentive" due to regulatory concerns. If you do opt to offer incentives, (e.g. gift cards, etc.) be sure to check with your local board about your state regulations before implementing.
- 3** Personally thank everyone who makes a referral. If a patient recommends someone to your practice, send them a handwritten note thanking them. And be specific: "Thanks so much for sending your sister-in-law Brenda to us. She's wonderful, and we're going to take good care of her. See you soon!"

6 Patients Want to See You Online in The Spaces They Use Most



A strong online presence is essential for patient acquisition. **Six of the top ten sources patients use to find dentists are web based.** The most influential online source being search engines, (e.g. like Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.), which are currently used by 55% of patients. While search engines rank second only to word-of-mouth referrals in terms of overall usage by patients as a means to find dentists, the percentage of people depending on them has dropped slightly (4%) since 2013.

The change can be easily explained by the rise of alternate online sources, including:

- Insurance lists
(e.g. employer/insurance company)
- Online directories (e.g. Yahoo Local, Citysearch)
- Review sites (e.g. Yelp, Angie's List, etc.)
- Dental referral company websites
(e.g. 1800dentist.com, Dentistry.com, etc.)
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

Recommendations

The takeaway for dentists is accepting that a majority of new patients will come to their practice thanks to the internet. It is essential that you establish a positive, patient-friendly presence in the online spaces patients use most.

Key steps to take:

- 1** Optimizing your website for SEO, and mobile search.
- 2** Standardize your directory listings for maximum SEO
- 3** Having branded profiles on Facebook and Yelp
- 4** Updating Facebook postings daily
- 5** Integrating social media into your website
- 6** Posting Yelp reviews onto your website

PatientActivator® offers a variety of tools to help you reach new and existing patients online. This versatile communications, social and online reputation application not only integrates with Facebook, it also helps collect patient reviews and pushes them to the sites that have the greatest influence on patients (e.g. your website, Yelp, Google, etc.).

Speaking of websites, the importance of having a modern responsive dental website which provides a good visitor experience on mobile devices cannot be overemphasized. 68% of U.S. adults have smartphones and 45% own a tablet.⁸ These mobile devices play a critical role in how patients will find you. 65% of all online searches now begin on a smartphone and 46% of consumers exclusively use mobile devices to research products and businesses, including dentists.⁹

Most importantly, search engine giant Google has expanded use of mobile-friendliness as a ranking signal. This change affects mobile searches in all languages worldwide and has a significant impact on your practice's search results.¹⁰

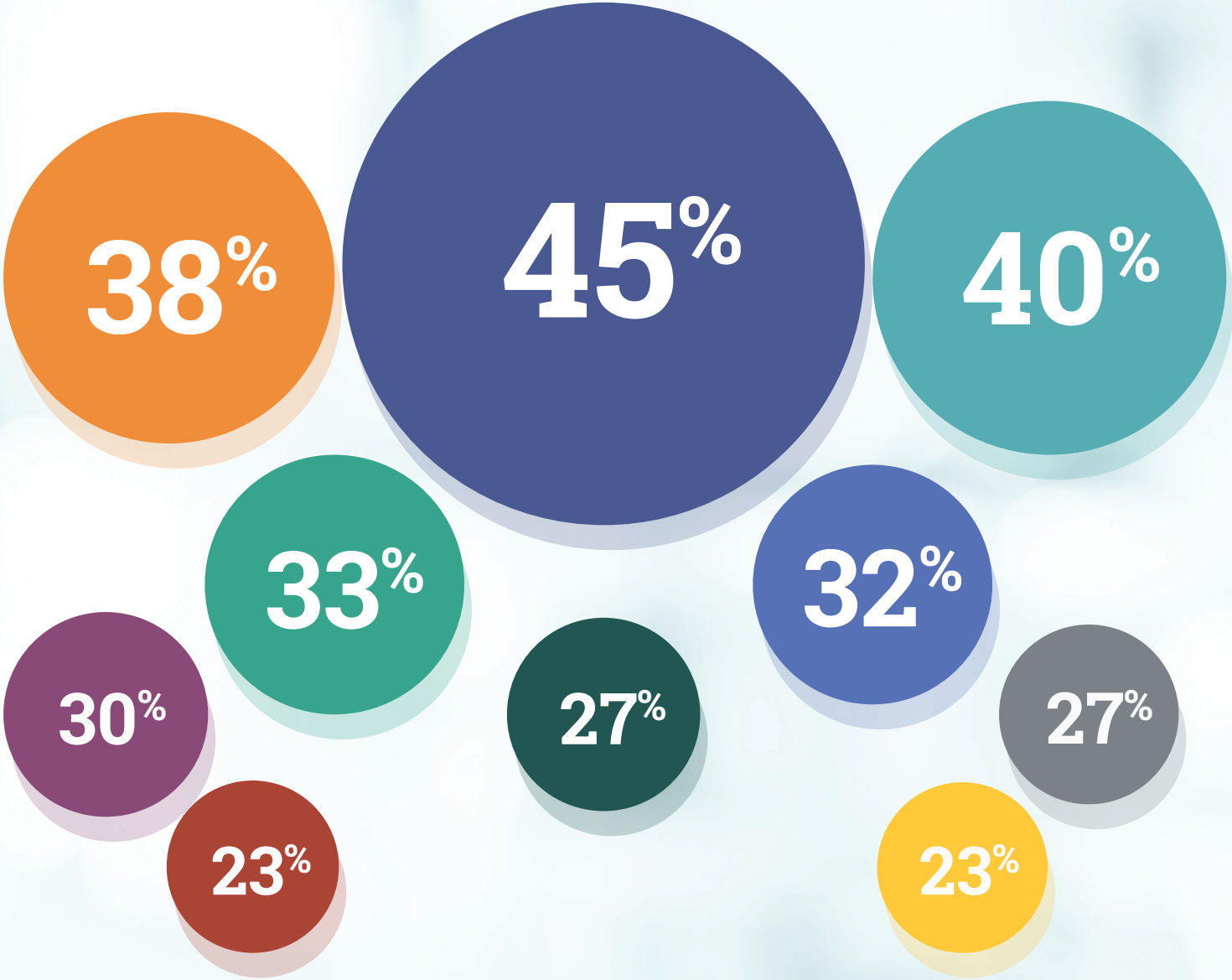
7 Patients Want You to Focus on Keeping Them Happy

Our survey found the majority of patients are happy with their dentist. Nationally, 82% of survey respondents report being “very to extremely satisfied” with their current dentist. Satisfaction levels are highest (85%) in the Central U.S. and the lowest (77%) in the Mountain states. With satisfaction levels that high it’s not too surprising that 47% of respondents have been going to the same dentist for 6 or more years.

More good news: When asked “how likely are you to switch from your current dentist in the next 12 months?” only 16% of respondents said they would consider it. While on the surface it is reassuring to see that most patients are not presently seeking a new dentist, your relationship with your patients is surprisingly tenuous. So, what causes patients to switch dentists? The answer: A lot of things.

Our survey found the majority of patients are happy with their dentists.

Which of the following would cause you to switch from your current dentist?



- Poor quality of dental work
- Dentist doesn't accept my insurance
- Loss of trust
- Prices are too high
- Staff is not friendly
- Poor dentist chairside manner
- I would not switch from my current dentist
- Dentist is not gentle
- Difficult to schedule a visit
- Location

Not surprisingly, the number one reason patients switch dentists is due to poor quality of work. Nearly half (46%) of respondents would leave a practice over this. Next most important is insurance. 41% of patients will be heading for the door if you stop accepting their plan.

Recommendations

Notice a pattern? The majority of factors that cause patients to switch dentists are within the direct control of the practice. In fact, eleven of the top thirteen issues are customer service or performance related.

The lesson here is two-fold:

The majority of patients are happy with their current dentist and are unlikely to switch in the next 12 months; It is up to the practice to proactively manage the patient relationship to ensure stability and continuity.

Here are a few recommendations to make sure your patient satisfaction levels remain high:

1

Make sure your practice remains financially viable to your patients by participating in a carefully curated selection of insurance plans.

2

Invest in your team. Make sure every member has the training, attitude and commitment to provide a remarkable patient experience.

3

Take a long hard look at patient/dentist clinical and interpersonal interactions. See where improvements can be made to increase trust, improve chairside manner and maximize patient comfort.

4

Focus on improving patient convenience factors like office hours and ease of scheduling. Consider offering early morning/ evening/weekend hours and adding 24/7 online scheduling options.

5

Invest in dental technology that improves the patient's comfort and convenience and then promote it so that your patients know you're committed to making their visits as pleasant as possible.



Summary



The findings of FutureDontics' dental patient survey offer dental offices a practical guide for improving patient acquisition and retention. As this report illustrates, dental insurance is playing a dominant role in patient acquisition and retention. Accommodating your patients' insurance requirements should be a primary concern of your practice.

Today's patients also expect a greater degree of convenience and comfort from dentists in everything from appointing to advanced treatment technology. Again, it is critical that you are proactive in addressing these issues.

Finally, patient reviews, word-of-mouth referrals and a strong online presence govern the growth of today's dental practices. It is essential to leverage these patient acquisition opportunities whenever and wherever possible. Dentists who are prepared to implement changes based on our findings and recommendations have an exceptional opportunity to grow their practices.



About Futuredontics®

Futuredontics® - the parent company of 1-800-DENTIST® and Patient Activator® – specializes in helping dental practices turn consumers into lifelong patients.

We are the industry's largest direct marketer that solely focuses on the challenge of maximizing dental practice production. Independent practitioners and DSOs nationwide rely on us for the advanced services, training and support they need to build profitable, long-term relationships with new patients in their area.

1-800-DENTIST – our flagship service - receives over 2 million consumer inquiries and makes over 400,000 patient referrals every year. Ours is the only national new dental patient leads program offering both an online directory with patient self-appointing and a live 24/7 US-based call center staffed by rigorously trained agents.

PatientActivator – the ultimate dental patient engagement system – increases production and boosts the practice's online presence with automated patient appointment reminders and tools for marketing, social media and online practice reputation management.

Only Futuredontics offers the unparalleled expertise that comes with over 30 years of industry leadership. With unlimited live customer support, dentistry's premier marketing products and our exclusive production guarantee, Futuredontics is the proven way for dental practices to grow their patient base and increase practice production year after year.

Our library of educational resources – the largest dedicated to dental practice marketing – features original reports, surveys, training webinars and videos.

Visit us at **Futuredontics.com** for more information.

Disclaimer: This whitepaper provides general marketing advice. Please consult your legal professional to ensure compliance with applicable laws in your jurisdiction.

Sources

¹SearchEngineLand.com "88% Of Consumers Trust Online Reviews As Much As Personal Recommendations," July 7, 2014

²ReviewInc.com, "STUDY: 86% of Consumers Willing to Pay More for a Service Provider With Higher Ratings and Reviews," January 21, 2015

³McKinsey Quarterly, "A new way to measure word-of-mouth marketing," April 2010

⁴Forbes, "8 Essentials Of Creating A Sustainable Advocacy Program," September 17, 2013

⁵Nielsen, "Under the Influence: Consumer Trust in Advertising," September, 17, 2013

⁶GfK Marketing Intelligence Review, "Do Referral Programs Increase Profits? Case Study / Vol. 5," November 1, 2013

⁷PC World, "Pew survey shows 68 percent of US adults now own a smartphone," November 1, 2015

⁸Search Engine Watch, 46% of Searchers Now Use Mobile Exclusively to Research [Study], May 1, 2013,

⁹Google Webmaster Central blog, Finding more mobile-friendly search results, February 26, 2015



www.futuredontics.com

© Futuredontics