

Still holding out? The advantages of integrating technology into your dental practice

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By Kevin Brady

The current health-care landscape is producing a stressful environment for dentists and their staff. Dental professionals find themselves dealing more with regulatory requirements and people-related issues instead of patient treatment plans. What's the solution? To become more productive and efficient in running the practice. By taking advantage of the various [technology support](#) services that help practices run more smoothly, dentists will have more time to practice their craft and spend time with patients.



Incorporating technology into best business practices

There's no doubt that technology can add efficiency to dental practices. Technology enhancements enable dentists to computerize such areas as the front desk and clinical treatment room operations. There are many advantages to integrating technology, including streamlining practice workflow, providing electronic billing and posting of insurance claims, EOBs and patient payments, providing electronic attachments for expediting insurance adjudication, and giving patients online access to review their accounts, view appointments, and make payments. You can communicate with patients via text and emails instead of or in addition to calling them, and having a computerized dashboard of practice vitals helps monitor practice goals.

Do you think that integrating technology will be too much of a hassle? Then work with professional service providers that deliver system integration seamlessly. This is better than trying to do it yourself.

Benefits of outsourcing innovative business services

There are many benefits of outsourcing technology-based services. “Our vendor’s custom software allows us to do everything in the front desk as well as the charting. It frees up staff so they can work on other things,” said Eric Emery, DDS, owner of Smile Station Dental in Kirkwood, Missouri.

His staff can make better use of their time building the schedule and marketing the practice. They can determine which patients have not returned for their recall and get them to reappoint. Instead of dealing with filing insurance and posting claims, they have more time to explain treatment plans and determine what’s keeping patients from moving forward with treatment.

While payment is typically collected at the time of treatment, the reality is that many patients cannot afford needed treatment. But there is risk associated with practices becoming banks for their patients. Outsourcing financing enables practices to offer financing options to patients without risk while experiencing higher percentages of treatment acceptance. In fact, if a practice is able to move just one more treatment forward each week by providing patient financing, the result, based on average treatment cost of \$500 to \$1,000, is an increase in production of \$26,000 to \$52,000 per year.

Another important outsourcing benefit is accurate and timely patient and insurance billing, which will increase the collection percentage each month. For example, if a dental office that produces \$500,000 per year can increase the collection percentage from 93% to 94%, the difference is an additional \$5,000 to the bottom line. Some vendors will post insurance and patient payments and scan in EOBs. However, it is important to make sure that the vendor is not charging a per claim processing fee, but includes it as part of the service. “Outsourcing billing is a savings,” said John O’Brien, DDS, of Rockford, Illinois. “Most people are surprised at how much of an expense there is in doing billing yourself. This is all taken care of by our vendor, and I don’t even have to think about it.”

One of the services offered by some vendors is providing funding on new accounts receivables as it is produced daily. This means no waiting for insurance reimbursements or patient collections. “Our service provider helps even out our cash flow,” said Bruce Haglund, DDS, of Dental Health in Maplewood, Minnesota. “Based on the amount of dentistry we do in a given week, that money is available to us. Meanwhile, they bill our patients and that clears the gap between patients and insurance companies paying us.” A predictable cash flow eliminates the stress of waiting for an insurance company or patient to pay.

The competitive advantage

Dentists have many options to help meet today’s business needs, whether they choose one or multiple vendors to provide these services. Multiple vendors can lead to flexibility in choosing the desired services, however, one supplier provides offices with greater control coordinating and integrating all aspects of the services.

While it may be a balancing act for dentists to manage their practices and provide the best possible patient care, those who take advantage of innovative business partners will reap the rewards.



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