

Beyond the Braces: Creating a Fun Ortho Practice Environment

A Practice Production Whitepaper — Exclusively for G&H Orthodontics

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Today we live in a world where traditional types of businesses are changing their image and brand to attract customers by creating an experience that goes far beyond the product or service. A leading example of this has always been Disney. This iconic company creates incredible experiences with high levels of customer service to attract people to their theme parks where they're influenced to purchase vacations, products, food, and more. A new example of this is the most recent mall that opened in New Jersey, American Dream. Recorded as the second largest mall in the U.S., it boasts an amusement park, waterpark, and 16-story ski slope. They don't even call it a mall and there's little wonder why. American Dream offers a total entertainment experience that attracts people who will purchase products rather than offering products that attract people and require them to determine their own experience.

It all starts with attitude

Almost every orthodontist would say that an orthodontic practice should be fun. But how do you make it fun? It starts by having a great attitude.

The internal attitude of the practice is a collective result of the attitudes of the team members. What's interesting is that most people would describe their attitude as positive and at a high-level even when it isn't. The truth is that most people score approximately a five or six out of ten on a scale of positive attitudes. This isn't bad, but it is not good enough for the orthodontic experience today. Before you attempt to reinvent the internal patient or parent experience it's essential to start with attitudes.

A great attitude requires energy, excitement, and enthusiasm every day. Just imagine going to a Disney park, only to find that the employees and characters score a five or six on energy, excitement and enthusiasm. The letdown would be tremendous. And while we recognize that orthodontic practices aren't Disney and patients aren't looking for an amusement park experience, we would argue that people gravitate to fun places. Practices that create fun, positive, almost "Disney-like" experiences will attract and start more new patients.

Construct the environment

When we say "construct" the environment we are not necessarily referring to the physical environment although that may need attention as well. But let's assume that we're going to leave the physical environment alone at this point in order to make progress quickly. "Construct the environment" means to construct the fun aspect of the practice. Fun can be communicated through decor, game rooms, holiday themes, computer workstations, beverage bars, snacks, or Wi-Fi.

But fun can and must also be created, when bringing new patients into the office. Always use energy, excitement, and enthusiasm to engage patients and offer them a great experience. This will cause parents and patients to start buying the *experience* not just the orthodontics. Consider creating the following experiences within your orthodontic office:

1. **The Phone Call.** Every new patient phone call is based on clear scripting that infuses a high sense of value in the call. A brand of caring and compassion is communicated and the front desk person taking the call works to establish a mini relationship. The script includes information about the doctor, team, and history of the practice. Treatment coordinators call to introduce themselves approximately 48 hours prior to the appointment. This allows the beginning of a relationship, makes the visit more personal, and still acts as the appointment confirmation.
2. **The First Meeting.** The new patient and/or parent receives a robust welcome with a smile and handshake from the front desk person who lets them know that the Treatment Coordinator (TC) will be out momentarily. The TC greets all new patients within three minutes of arrival. The goal is to control the entire new patient and parent experience without having them sitting, filling out forms or hanging out in the reception area for too long. They should also be offered beverages and/or snacks.
3. **The Office Tour.** The TC begins the patient's visit by showing them the office. Is it attractive? Does it have a theme? Are there flat screens and movies? What about the office creates an experience "beyond the braces"?
4. **A New Relationship.** The treatment coordinator experience should be focused on cultivating a genuine friendship. Everything that needs to be communicated can be communicated but a friendship must be developed so that the parent or patient can begin to feel as if they are already part of the practice.

This list could go on, but these four items highlight crucial steps that, when paired with great scripting, can increase the TC close rate up to 20%.

The Weakest Link in the Chain

There are now hair salons for men that offer experiences more like sports bars, offering flat screens, snacks, and beverages that cause people to stop by just to say hello, have a drink, or watch a game. There are beauty stores where you get an entire makeover and then all you have to do is buy those products. There are people who even go to Costco just to get their hotdog because it is inexpensive (and really good.)

These businesses are reinventing the customer experience by creating a wow effect for customers. But remember, a weak link can ruin any experience. Disney World is quite literally the happiest place on

earth. Everybody that goes there says so. But just imagine if you spent that hard-earned money saved for a Disney vacation and had nothing but trouble with your hotel room. Everything else was fantastic but the hotel room problems never got taken care of. When you contacted the front desk, they weren't helpful, and the manager never bothered to call you back. What is the impression that you leave with? You don't ignore the bad part, value the good part, and promise to go back and tell others. You simply remember the entire experience at a lower level. You may even swear you'll never go back.

One way to avoid having a weak link is to examine your patient experience step-by-step. How is the current patient scheduled for their next appointment? How are they confirmed? What communications do they receive from the orthodontic practice in between visits? How robust is the internal marketing program? Is it fun? To ensure that you have the right answers to these questions you should include these components in your patient experience:

1. **Always have a contest or raffle taking place within the practice.** Patients can sign up while they're in the office or on social media. One orthodontic practice has gone so far as to raffle off an annual family vacation for four. The winning family must take photographs every day while they're there and post them on Facebook which then creates even more fun as people see the winners at the resort.
2. **Make sure social media is continuous and valuable.** It should provide practice updates, educational information, contests, testimonials, and pictures. And remember, always use the right platforms. Today's relevant platform may not be so relevant tomorrow.
3. **Provide parents with relevant updates on orthodontics and other related dental and medical information.** Always keep in mind that it is the parents who actually do the referring. But they are impressed with the practice that educates and believe that practices that educate have better clinical skills.
4. **Keep people abreast of their financial information.** All too often patients don't know what they owe at the next visit, what their remaining balance is, or when it will be paid off. Patients will have a much better experience when they're kept up to date on a regular basis and not be caught off guard by unexpected payments.
5. **Participate in the community and let your patients and parents know.** People appreciate businesses that contribute to creating a stronger community. You can involve yourself in charities, school activities, or sporting events. All involvement should be heavily promoted to parents and patients to let them know that you are committed, involved, and contributing.

Other fun experiences can include an annual event sponsored by the practice, which could include water parks, carnivals, movie theaters, or parties. These all contribute to a sense of creating a community