



# **STOP SELLING PRODUCTS:** **START FORMING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**

**The Amazon Effect on  
Dental Equipment Sales**

*Dental Hygienists' Role  
as Decision Influencers*

**Evaluating Your  
Trade Show  
Strategy**

THE **frank** AGENCY

Creative Marketing Solutions. Real Results.



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WINTER 2018

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Drop us a line, we'll be listening.  
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general inquiries, contact us at  
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# From the President

## ARE YOUR SALES STRATEGIES GROUNDED IN TRUST, OR TRANSACTION?

In many companies – including the professional dental marketplace – we're seeing a division at play: products and services in one category, prospects and customers in another. If you're like most B2B organizations, your goal is to connect these dots as quickly as possible, for the purpose of a *transaction*. That's all good and well, but from our point of view, this transactional mindset has some limitations.

Why do I say that? It's because this approach tends to be internally focused. It's based on your needs rather than your customers' and prospects' *wants*. And it completely ignores any notion of partnership and longevity.

You need a method based not on selling products, but on *building strategic relationships*.

So how do you pivot your sales approach to this line of thinking? It starts with your brand as the foundation. Your brand is who you are as a company, and it's through your brand essence and brand promise that you can clearly communicate your desire to develop business partnerships – not just a vendor/buyer arrangement. Keeping the momentum going, your marketing strategies and messaging must then pick up your brand pillars and communicate them effectively, with the end goal of creating trust in a way that resonates with your audience.

This trust, coupled with a customer-centric approach focused on solution-based selling, is what will help your brand find its mark with the hard-to-reach dental practitioner audience.

Go ahead and ask yourself: Are my strategies externally vs. internally facing? Do they focus on my customers' success? Does my marketing support my sales team and pave the way for them to develop stronger customer relationships?

If you answered yes, you're way ahead of your competitors. But if not, we're The frank Agency, and we'll provide the answers you need, and much more, in this issue of re:view. We're on the front lines of helping companies just like yours build strategic customer partnerships focused on solutions vs. products. Partnerships that create brand preference, loyalty and long-term value. Partnerships that will endure long past the next transaction.

**Tony Ali**  
CEO/President

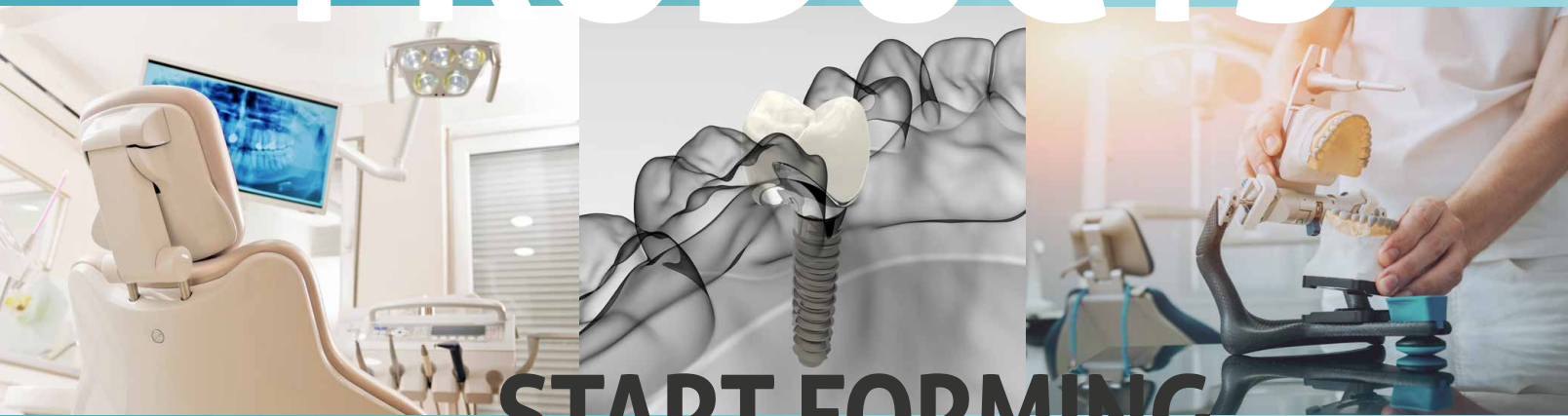
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INSIGHTS,  
INNOVATIONS AND  
STRATEGIES FOR  
THE PROFESSIONAL  
DENTAL MARKET

# STOP SELLING PRODUCTS



## START FORMING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



It's a commonly accepted proverb in sales that people don't like being sold to. That may be true, but it's equally true they continue to have needs.

Recognizing this paradigm of "intrusion vs. need" is key to pivoting your sales approach. For as long as your customers have needs, they will require help and guidance in choosing the product that is right for them.

Yet here is where so many companies and sales teams get it wrong: they assume that because someone has a need, they'll immediately be interested in your message and your product. But, this is often not the case.

## Always-On Selling

Dental practitioners are approached daily with various selling tactics from a multitude of manufacturers and distributors. Even if these are for products they need, the sheer number of marketing messages and sales pitches dental professionals hear on a regular basis cause these sales techniques to become white noise.

The product-centric sales approach only contributes to this noise, blending in and not breaking through. When the message is just about the product, after a while things bleed together and it's even more difficult for practitioners to truly compare their needs vs. product features. This defeats the whole purpose of your sales strategy.

An approach that is centered around products and their benefits is simply a commodity race, and it will end up with the same results every time.

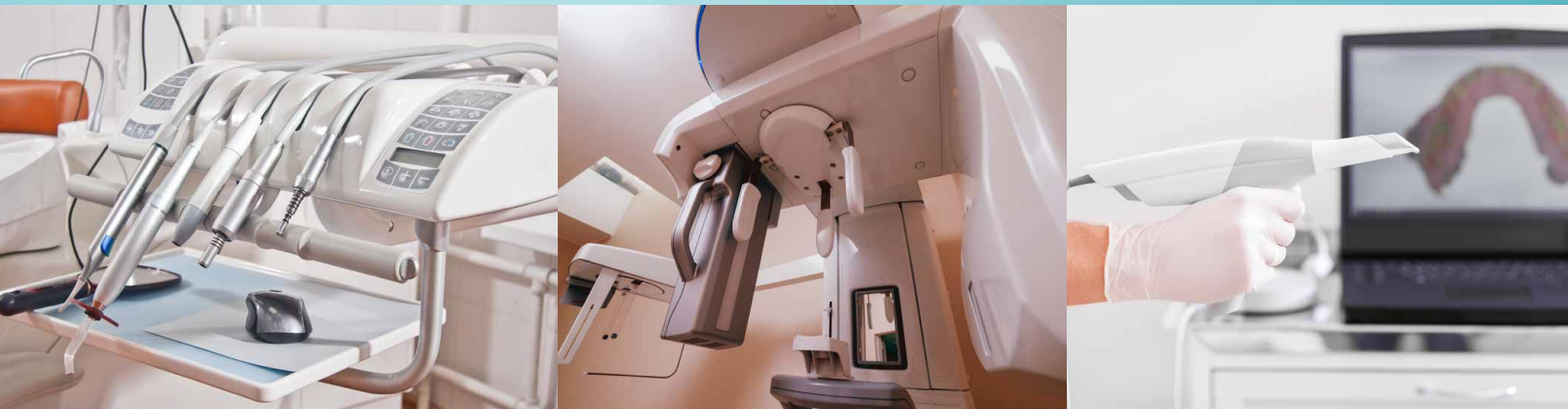
## Reframing the Concept

Let's take a step back and look at a difficult truth: *product-centric selling* is essentially a seller-centric approach. This type of pitch is about YOU: what YOU provide, what YOU do, and so on. This is precisely the approach that companies need to diverge from.

Instead, the shift needs to be toward *forming strategic partnerships* with customers. This is the customer-centric approach. It involves addressing and solving challenges, rather than showcasing features.

By taking a customer-centric approach focused on solution-selling, you'll form strategic partnerships based on your customers' concerns and needs.

This method deals with customers' deepest issues and concerns and seeks to find the best solutions: *How can we create more efficiency for your practice? How can we help boost your revenue? How can we support your hygienists and other staff? How can we help improve the patient experience in the operatory?*







Distinguish yourself from the rest of the market by offering more than just products.



PARTNERSHIP



SOLUTIONS



VALUE

These are questions that resonate with practitioners as they show your main concern is their business – not your sale. The result should still be a product sale, but at the end of the day, you're focusing on the customer's interests and needs by presenting yourself as a partner in advancing their practice.

## Rethinking the Methodology

To represent yourself as a partner rather than a seller requires a tight cooperation between sales and marketing teams.

Through marketing, you'll pave a smoother path for the sales team – gaining initial interest and nurturing that interest through strong, practitioner-centric messaging. This will allow the sales team to come in and continue that relationship in person, with

the foundation already laid for partnership and solution-selling.

The relationships furthered by sales will cause prospects and customers to be more receptive to future marketing efforts. Think about it: when you personally know from whom the communication is coming, and that the sender has your best interests in mind, you're more likely to review their marketing materials and maybe even respond.

Your marketing supports and sets the stage for your sales team, who then fosters customer relationships. The two in tandem bolster each other to create an overall positive, customer-centric experience that continues well past the initial sale.

## Standing Out in a Crowded Market

There are hundreds of dental equipment manufacturers and

distributors out there – all with overlap in their offerings and similarities in their products. How do you stand out from the rest?

The answer sounds counterintuitive, but is true nevertheless: You have to stop selling products.

Instead, sell partnerships. Sell long-term solutions that will deliver to your customers' bottom line. Sell value in the form of service, consultations and superior support.

With a focus on partnership and longevity, you'll gain customer loyalty, a distinguished sales team, and a reputation for quality that will be unmatched in your market and enable you to truly stand out. ●



# LOST IN THE COMMOTION?

**DON'T LET YOUR SALESPEOPLE GO UNNOTICED.**



Tap into our years of experience within the dental industry and discover tried-and-true strategies for driving market share. With our help, you can advance your brand and ensure your products are seen.

**Let's talk today.**

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EVALUATING  
YOUR

# TRADE SHOW STRATEGY

**According to *Incisal Edge*, around 170 dental trade shows are hosted every year in the United States alone. That's 170 opportunities to showcase new products... to gain more brand exposure... and to boost your sales.**

Yet, without a strategic approach to which shows you attend and how you promote yourself, these opportunities may dissolve into nothing more than a time and money sinkhole.

How do you know that trade show attendance is truly an effective strategy for your business? It may be time to step back and assess exactly what you are doing to optimize the value of your trade show plan.

## The Underlying Question

Before you can develop a trade show strategy, you need to ask yourself the question: Why are trade shows part of my marketing mix?

Many in the industry tell us they attend and exhibit at several shows due to intangible factors like historical precedent and the old adage

of "being where my competition is." However, given the costs and resources required to attend and exhibit, tangible return on investment should and likely will become a larger part of these decisions in years to come.

And there are several great reasons why trade shows should remain a vital part of your marketing plan – the opportunity for in-person meetings with hundreds of potential customers in a focused environment and being an ideal venue for new product launches being atop the list.

But if you're unsure of exactly how profitable these events are for your business, developing a strategic approach defined by goal-specific outcomes will help your organization understand how to make the most of these key opportunities.





## Building a Better Strategy

You know you need a more tactical method – but the difficulty is often in knowing where to begin. We've broken the process down into three steps to show you how to organize and develop your plan of attack.

### Step 1: Define Your Goal

Every strategy begins at the end. Ask yourself what the goal is that you're trying to reach through trade show participation. For many smaller or developing companies, the overall goal is exposure and building brand awareness. For others, the goal may be lead generation or reaching a certain sales quota. For most, it will be a combination of all of these.

Write up hard, detailed targets that you hope to hit, and then craft a marketing strategy surrounding these goals. Your objectives will not only determine your tactics and approach, but also help you define success so you know if your trade show attendance is paying off.



Instead of just going to trade shows because you've always gone, develop a strategic, goal-centered approach so you can evaluate your return on investment.



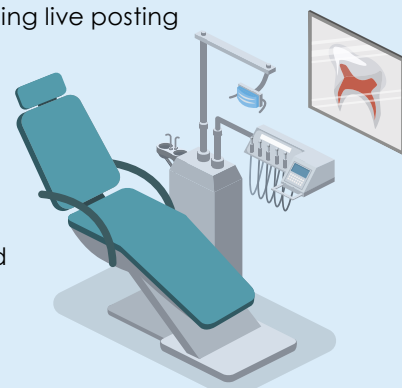
### Step 2: Develop Your Engagement Plan

With your target firmly in mind, it's time to create a marketing plan to generate interest and drive traffic to your booth.

Why should dental professionals come by your booth? What incentives or information are important to them? Are different things important to different groups (i.e., does an endodontist come by your booth for the same reason the president of a DSO does?). Customize messaging for each audience you want to attract, segment your list and pave the way to your booth with emails to prospective and current clients, giving them the option to set up a meeting with you.

Social media will also be instrumental in creating this initial awareness – organic posts that will be seen by your current followers should always be accompanied by digital advertising to help increase your reach and reinforce your message.

Once at the show, leverage social media to capture visitors during their unplanned time, as they walk the floor. Using live posting and tweeting, you can drive “in the moment” traffic to your booth for product demonstrations, live-session speakers and hands-on interactions with your products.





Make sure your trade show marketing is trackable. This allows you to easily measure against your KPIs and know whether you're meeting your goals.

It's particularly important to note that your trade show marketing should, from beginning to end, be:



➤ **Trackable.** Create trackable methods for potential customers to set up meeting times at your booth or simply sign up for information with their email addresses. One way to do this is quick and simple landing pages linked off emails and retargeting ads.

This allows you to generate leads in a digital setting, where you can track several KPIs more easily.



➤ **Valuable.** In exchange for appointments or information, you can offer a freebie or some other incentive at your booth – something that is valuable to your audience and gives a sense of urgency, as it will only be available during the show. Key in this is remembering that different things are important and valuable to different audiences.

➤ **Multi-Channel.** Trade shows are in-person events, but that doesn't mean they won't have digital aspects. Your trade show collateral should consist of physical take-home fliers/brochures and interactive segments, but also be an opportunity to show video presentations and promote your social media platforms. Live-streaming video on your social outlets (product demos, launch events, etc.) is a great way to create buzz and drive more traffic to your booth.

➤ **Relevant.** Again, when distributing your marketing, segment your audience so they receive material that is immediately relevant to their situation. Potential customers who have never bought from you may need more in-depth information than someone who is already familiar with your brand, or has purchased from you in the past.



### Step 3: Assess and Optimize

The only way to improve your future performance is by evaluating your outcomes. Once it's all over, spend time comparing your initial goals to the results you received. This is where using digital methods comes in handy – they provide you with valuable metrics so you can see accurate figures on leads generated, sales converted, and so on. You'll also see which channels were effective in providing the desired results, and which were a “bust” and could be scaled back.

In performing this type of analysis, you not only stand to deliver better results on your next event, but you also ensure your marketing budget is spent in the most efficient way possible and delivers better ROI.



➤ **Reinforced.** The most important marketing you do for trade shows, outside of set up, is follow up. Send email offers that continue conversations and offer further information, free demos or consultations. This allows you to stay top-of-mind while still offering something of value.

But once the activity has died down, there's still one last step in the process.

### Taking a Step Back

From here, you can now further optimize your trade show strategy by looking at the bigger picture. Based on how much revenue you generated versus how much you spent, how profitable was the event?

With hard numbers on your performance, these questions become easier to answer and you can develop a strategy that is based on real results – not hypothetical expectations or assumptions. Armed with these results and a mind to continuously test and optimize, your trade show attendance becomes an efficient tool, rather than a costly gamble. ●







# The Current State of Off-Label Marketing

**Selling dental pharmaceuticals becomes even more challenging when some of the drugs' uses are off-label.**

A provision of the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act prohibits pharmaceutical companies from selling a drug if it is "misbranded." From this, the FDA takes the position that a drug manufacturer's statements about its product are limited to promoting its "intended use" – in other words, the specific treatment for which it was approved – even if the promotional statements from the manufacturer of the drug are true.

Some manufacturers have engaged in legal battles spanning from the late 1990s to now, citing the First Amendment as grounds to promote their products' off-label uses without repercussion from the FDA. While many of these battles have been successful, some are still underway, leaving a number of regulatory hurdles to overcome. However, there are several positive ways you can stay in line with FDA regulations while getting the word out about your products.

## Develop a High-Level Approach

If your product's uses are mainly off-label, your safest bet is a generic angle. Messages that do not make any claims, but rather encourage consumers to ask questions and pique curiosity and interest can motivate consumers to explore more on their own. Whether they turn to the internet or their dentist with questions, your marketing should be the factor that motivates them to start digging.

Though messages will need to be vague, they don't have to be boring. Use engaging visuals, video content, or even share relevant (if not directly related) information that doesn't make claims, but rather provokes thought and self-directed research.

## Bring in Social

Many pharma marketers stay away from social media entirely

for fear of legal entanglements. But, with careful monitoring, social media can be a useful tool for engaging and informing your audience.

For branded channels in particular, keep your product's safety information readily available. Some manufacturers even "pin" this information at the top of their Facebook page, so that it's always within plain sight regardless of when it was posted. While a branded page can mention the name of your drug, it can't mention any claim information or off-label uses.

Additionally, you may need to heavily monitor engagement; if commenters begin to stray into discussion of off-label usage or adverse events, you may consider deleting or disabling comments to avoid any confusion.

Many manufacturers also employ unbranded channels as, even though off-label uses

and even drug names are off-limits, there is more opportunity for community discussion and conversation. Again, there will need to be strict monitoring of comments, but this is a good forum to promote thoughtful discussion and share articles and resources (with the proper credit attached).

## Target the Influencers

In 2017, Arizona became the first state to allow drug manufacturers to directly communicate off-label uses to insurers and medical or dental professionals. For those manufacturers outside of this state, you can still influence this sphere by circulating peer-reviewed journals and other in-depth studies on off-label drug uses. These will provide additional necessary research to benefit industry professionals without directly promoting products.



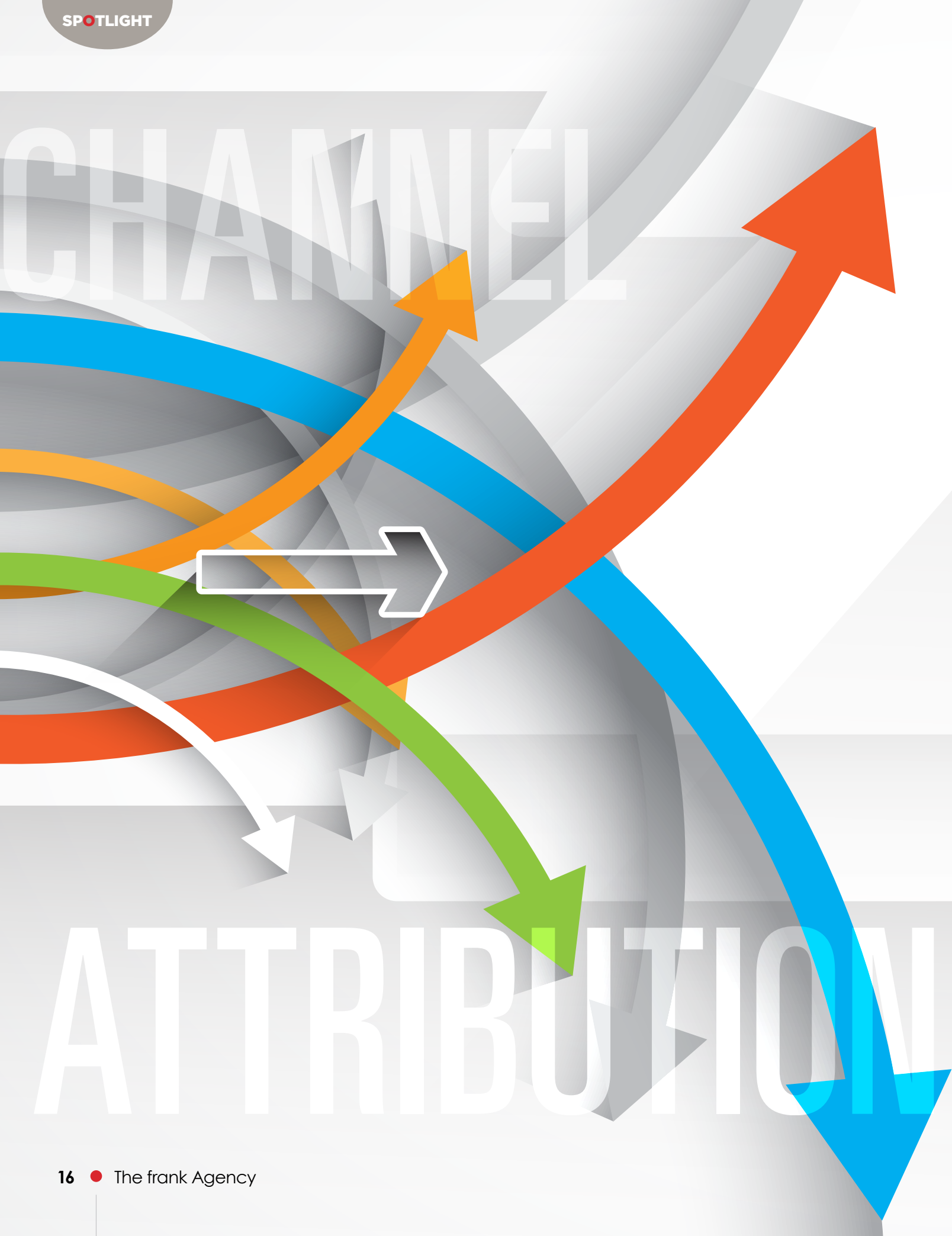
## Working within the Parameters

The complexity and nuances of off-label marketing restrictions can make it feel like you're navigating a minefield. The best methods of ensuring compliance are by staying up-to-date on the most recent developments, and allowing your legal team to help you interpret the best way to stay within the guidelines for your particular product.

Although many off-label restrictions are still in discussions, and some believe they may even be relaxed in the future, most manufacturers choose the wise route of playing it safe until concrete decisions are reached. And, with careful attention to your messages and a commitment to developing strong brand awareness without making claims, you can keep in step without pulling out of the game. ●




# CHANNEL



# ATTRIBUTION

# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MARKETING SPEND THROUGH CHANNEL ATTRIBUTION



**It's the perennial struggle – the nagging question that keeps professional dental marketers awake at night: Am I really making the best use of my marketing dollars?**

An accurate attribution model is more critical than ever, as marketing channels grow in number and complexity and make it difficult to discern where your marketing spend ends up. Yet the complexity of modern marketing isn't the only challenge to proper attribution.

For many industries, including dental, traditional channels are still heavily influential in the conversion process. But

these channels are not usually trackable in attribution models, which begs the question – exactly how influential are traditional channels?

Without having an exact picture of how your traditional channels contribute to conversion, you're operating largely on trial and error when allocating your marketing spend. In fact, you may be wasting incalculable amounts by pouring money into

a channel that's not performing as you believe it to be – or you may be overlooking your most influential channels in favor of non-performers.

However, these risks can all be mitigated through proper channel attribution. Let's dig deeper into the question of attribution models and how they can help you form a clearer picture of your marketing performance.

## A Little Background

You're likely already familiar with the most common types of attribution models: first-touch, last-touch, and linear (or equal). These can give you a general idea of which channels are involved in conversion, but unfortunately, *they can't really describe accurately the extent to which each channel contributes to conversion.*

The problem with these models is that they assume each interaction is a conversion-based engagement, but this is not always the case. Each touchpoint is an opportunity for influencing a decision – but where attribution models often break down is they cannot assign a dollar value to each point of interaction. They simply aren't able to examine the influencers on such a granular level.

And, more broadly speaking, these standard models are

effective for tracking digital channels, but less so for traditional channels. For companies that use a large mix of direct mail, TV ads, and other traditional outlets along with digital, this creates a serious predicament. As the famous John Wanamaker quote goes, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half." This is the situation for many manufacturers and distributors that aren't able to track the ROI of their traditional channels.

Boiling the issue down to this level you discover that a completely new attribution model is needed – one that both takes traditional marketing into account, and gives a more accurate picture of which channels are contributing to conversions (and how much they contribute). There's only one solution that fills all these needs: a custom model that is tailored to your business.



100% CREDIT

### FIRST TOUCH:

A model in which the first touchpoint in the conversion process is given all the credit for the conversion



100% CREDIT

### LAST TOUCH:

A model in which the last touchpoint in the conversion process is given all the credit for the conversion



33% CREDIT

33% CREDIT

33% CREDIT

### LINEAR:

A model in which each touchpoint of a conversion is credited equally



# Building the Perfect Model

Now, lest this seem like an easier-said-than-done solution, we'll demystify the process a little bit by describing the ideal custom model.

To be effective, a custom model must be **data-driven, cross-channel, variable, and constantly optimizing**. Let's break down each of these tenets:

**1. Data-driven.** A custom model must begin and end with data. In-depth behavioral data and other research will give you a "baseline" for how prospects and customers interact with your business, and this will be the springboard from which you develop your model. Gathering and analyzing this data gives you the background you need first to create the model (point 3), and then to optimize it (point 4).

**2. Cross-channel.** The pain of trying to track and then attribute success to traditional channels is one that marketers feel daily. However, by linking traditional channels to digital, you create touchpoints that are actually trackable and can be incorporated into your attribution model. Then you can finally and decisively determine how your traditional channels fit into the mix.

**3. Variable.** The downside to many multi-touch models (i.e., the linear model we discussed earlier) is that the weight assigned to touchpoints is fixed. Different models may assign value differently, but that weight is generally a fixed percentage. For your custom model, you need a variable weight that is extrapolated from your data, and which can be updated and refined according to new data that you receive.

**4. Optimizing.** Finally, a custom model is only strong if it is able to adapt. The more you track how your customers interact, which channels they touch most, and which channels hold the most influence, the more accurate your model will become. In short, **testing, tracking, and analyzing data lead to a smart attribution model – one that changes as your prospects do.**



### Assessing the Outcome

The constant data gathering and tracking that go into developing a custom model may seem high-maintenance. And it's true that an effective attribution model cannot remain static, but needs to be consistently tweaked for maximum efficiency. However, the benefits of custom models are so great that any ongoing effort pales in comparison.

With a custom attribution model in place, one that is able to track

traditional and digital channels accurately, you curb the need for constant trial and error. You can know with certainty where your money is going, which channels are performing, and how to shift your focus to better target practitioners and other decision makers. Gone is the guesswork – instead, you gain a tool that has the ability to help you achieve a more effective marketing spend, a better return on investment, and more peace of mind. ●



**“HALF THE MONEY I SPEND  
ON ADVERTISING IS  
WASTED; THE TROUBLE IS,  
I DON'T KNOW WHICH HALF.”**

John Wanamaker couldn't figure it out, but today you can. Attribution U tracks all your channels, both traditional and digital, getting smarter with each use. So you can tell exactly where your marketing dollars are best spent, and know they're not being wasted.

**LET'S TALK.**

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# DENTAL HYGIENISTS AS DECISION INFLUENCERS

The role hygienists play is only becoming more integral to many companies' sales. From the trusted relationships they have with patients to assessing needs and beyond, dental hygienists are key players when it comes to building and maintaining practice efficiency. And, as the role of RDH has evolved and expanded, so has their role in purchasing decisions.

A recent survey in *RDH Magazine* showed dental hygienists often hold influence over the supplies and equipment purchased within the dental practice – whether directly or indirectly. In fact, in the case of handheld instruments, 46% of those surveyed said they made the final decision on the purchase, though they didn't purchase directly.

Some industry experts even recommend that hygienists who aren't currently involved in purchase decisions should jump in, especially if they see a need that can be met through specific equipment. After all,

who better to weigh in than the people who will be using the equipment most regularly? With this progression has come some unique implications for dental suppliers from both a sales and marketing perspective.

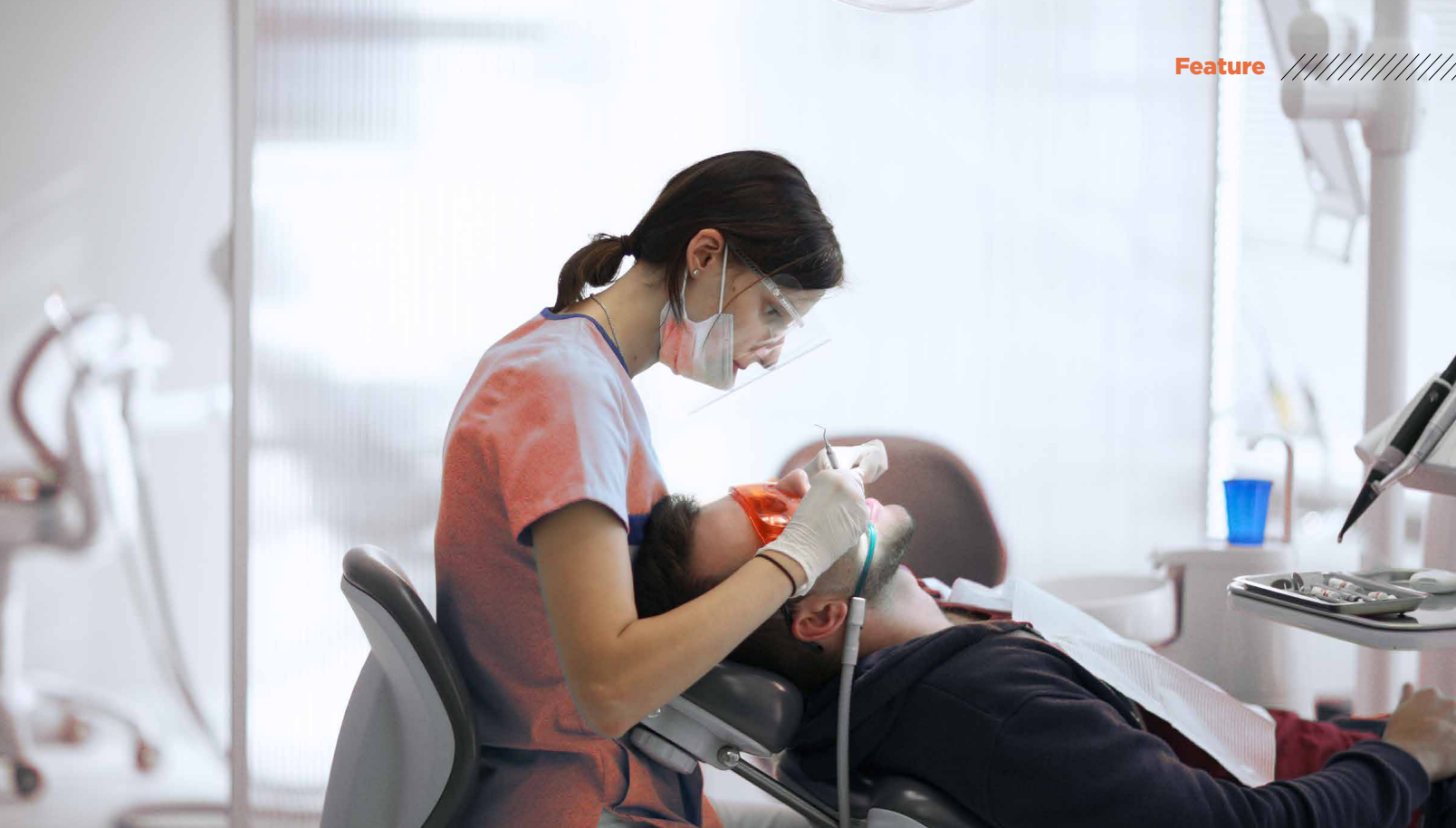
Yet, there is a second trend in motion that adds more complexity for the sales team trying to gain a foothold in practices: while in some practices hygienists hold heavy influence over purchase decisions, in other practices, they are a target unto themselves.

## An Independent Target

It's become increasingly common for hygienists to work part-time for multiple practices, rather than full-time for a single practice. A survey by *Dentistry IQ* estimates that about 47% of hygienists work part-time for more than one employer, creating a scenario where hygienists may choose to buy their own supplies and hand instruments.

This benefits hygienists, as they have control over what they buy, and especially where dental tools are concerned,





this ensures a good ergonomic fit and more comfortable use. There's also the added benefit that hygienists gain tax write-offs from their work purchases, upping the incentive for them to buy. Thus, whether hygienists are full-time influencers or part-time independent purchasers, marketing to them on a personal level – as a unique market segment – has become much more important.

## A Divided Track, A United Goal

We can see that there are two parallel tracks of hygienists occurring in the dental sphere. In some practices, they are

*The average registered dental hygienist reads upwards of 10 articles online about products during their decision making process.*

influencers, while in others, they are the buyers. But despite their divided roles, it's apparent that hygienists are significant players in dental equipment purchases, and that marketing and sales tactics must change to connect with this unique audience.

The first step should be creating more information that is specifically targeted to hygienists. Peer-reviewed journal articles coupled, obviously, with patient benefit is the most influential element in connecting with hygienists. Just under that, though, is product education. In-person training sessions and education on products and methods is critical for hygienists as they, like GPs and specialists themselves, struggle to keep up with technological changes in the industry. But you can't be everywhere all the time. For this reason, disseminating in-depth information regarding products and uses, especially in the form of digital content,

will be an important method for marketers and sales teams alike as the average RDH will read upwards of 10 articles online about a particular product during their decision-making process, depending on the complexity and expense of the product.

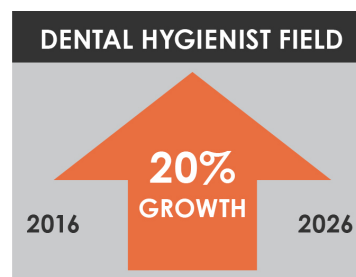
Additionally, this type of content needs to make use of messaging that is directly tailored to hygienists. Hygienists are looking for products that will streamline their jobs – but that isn't the only trait they're looking for.

Hygienists spend most of their days one-on-one with patients. They develop relationships with the patients, make recommendations for elective treatments, and encourage follow-ups. So when a hygienist is looking at products, they're searching for something that will enhance patient experiences overall. Emphasizing patient experiences and patient care in your messaging will go much further with this audience than other messaging strategies.

## Amping up Social Engagement

Coupled with this is something companies are discovering: the need for a strong social media presence. Dental hygienists' largest demographic group is women between the ages of 30 and 49, corresponding almost exactly to the highest and most engaged user demographic on Facebook, as well as one of the top two user demographic groups for Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest, according to a recent study by Sprout Social.

With a unique voice and a variety of content forms like video and other media, your social presence can become an insightful industry authority and build awareness of your brand. And, by responding to comments, questions and messages, you engage your audience on a personal level and create confidence that you will be an attentive and helpful resource during the purchasing process.



## An Expanding Target Means More Opportunities

Dental hygiene as a field has been projected to grow at a rate of 20% between 2016 and 2026 (*Bureau of Labor Statistics*).

Whether purchasing on their own behalf or helping influence practice decision purchases, there's no mistaking that hygienists are becoming an important target for dental manufacturers and suppliers to reach. And as the market only continues to expand, campaigns that methodically target hygienists will make inroads in practices now – but also secure a valuable audience and build long-term loyal customers for the future. ●





The  
Amazon  
Effect

# RIDE THE RIVER OR FIGHT IT?

Amazon has long been called a disruptor, but it wasn't until this past year that this disruption hit home in the dental sphere.

In December of 2017, analyst Steve Beuchaw announced that Amazon had begun acquiring certain dental equipment and supply products with the intention of selling them via the Amazon Business platform. The result was a rapid drop in a few distributors' market shares, along with a resounding question – what will the long-term effects be?

While Amazon's intrusion is a first in the dental arena, it has been making waves in the medical industry for the past few years already. And, because of the tendency of the dental industry to follow medical, we can examine some of the effects that Amazon Business has had on the medical supply chain to understand more of what the future could look like for dental manufacturers and distributors.





## The Distribution Changeover

When Amazon Business opened in 2015, medical supplies were among the first to be seen on the platform. As could be expected, Amazon's sales caused a downward pressure on prices industry-wide, which resulted in slimmer margins for some large distributors.

Cutting distributors out of the picture will have much the same effect in the dental industry –

causing strain as manufacturers and distributors alike are pressured to lower their prices to compete with online vendors. However, manufacturers and distributors aren't the only players who lose out in this model.

Dentists will have less access to distributor sales teams, who are often the ones to deliver ongoing support for products, as well as consultations to help dentists find the best solutions for their practices.

But therein lies the advantage that distributors and manufacturers have over Amazon Business – and the main point to capitalize on as we see this shift unfold.

## Playing Off Strengths and Adapting to Changes

While direct sales through an ecommerce avenue are appealing from a price

standpoint, this model leaves dentists with less access to consultations and professional advice from sales teams. If your team is providing indispensable service and value, this will be a significant deterrant for those clients that make use of your expertise.

Your first step to maintaining balance during this shift will be bolstering your sales force. If they're not industry experts who provide true value for

## **BUILD UP YOUR SALES FORCE INTO INDUSTRY EXPERTS WHO CAN PROVIDE LONG-TERM VALUE — NOT JUST PRODUCTS.**

your customers beyond merely touting your product offerings, you stand to lose out to Amazon and other up-and-coming ecommerce players. However, by offering partnership in addition to products, you become a key to practice advancement – and an essential member of each practice's team.

Your sales team can even bridge the gap by providing and distilling online resources for their customers. B2B buyers review massive amounts of internet resources before they make their purchases (according to

Demand Gen Report's B2B Buyer Behavior Survey), especially where complicated equipment is involved. By sharing important information, whether through blog posts or in a one-on-one setting, your sales team can offer those resources that are so critical for buyers to see before making their decision.

Another way to adapt to the direct sales shift will be to employ your own ecommerce options. With a strong sales team and an online sales method, you can appeal to a wider swath of your target audience: those who prefer the personal consultation of a sales rep, and those who tend to make their purchasing decisions independently.

Yet, beyond changing your sales approach, staying relevant and competitive will also require a change in your marketing strategy.

### **Amping Up Your Strategy**

Even if your sales team is an outstanding asset, or your ecommerce platform is expansive, neither of these will help you make headway if they're not supported by robust marketing tactics.

This begins by having a recognizable brand. If your images and tone both echo the same cohesive message, each piece of marketing you create will reinforce your brand at every level and throughout every channel.

Social media needs to be an integral part of your marketing

strategy as well, especially as nearly 40% of all practicing dentists are under the age of 44 (according to the ADA) – and therefore likely to be present on the main social media outlets. By using both organic and paid social strategies with focused targeting parameters, you boost engagement and brand awareness while reaching this audience more effectively.

For the manufacturers who choose to build up their ecommerce presence, marketing via retargeting ads will be an absolute must. These allow your brand and products to stay top-of-mind, nurturing leads further into the sales funnel. As your customers are constantly bombarded with marketing messages from a variety of sources, you need to ensure that your messages are seen and make an impact.

### **Crafting a Plan for Success**

Though Amazon very well may disrupt the dental supply industry, according to *Barron's*, it's projected by some that this can't occur unless a large distributor is first acquired. Until that point, as the adage goes, the best defense is a good offense.

Build up your commitment to providing the absolute best in service and value to practitioners, and center your marketing and sales tactics around this common goal. In this way, you'll more than meet the challenge that Amazon poses – you'll withstand it. ●





**AMAZON HAS STEPPED INTO THE DENTAL RING.  
MEET THE CHALLENGE THROUGH STRONG SALES AND  
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