

Dentistry Creating your perfect practice DDPC

Creating your perfect practice

By Gary Bettis (Architectural Director) Dental Design & Planning Consultants Ltd

Dentists are working within an increasingly competitive marketplace. Whether offering an NHS or a private service, the dentist of tomorrow needs to be a business person with an understanding of how to run a practice: the running costs, including overheads such as buying the practice itself, the purchase and maintenance of equipment and staff remuneration. The dentist must also know which treatments provide the higher margins, what hourly rate to charge, and how to attract the right patient is essential. He/she must be aware of all the financial risks involved.

The key to success is to prepare an overall business strategy, perhaps with the help of a dental business advisor. This will enable you to arrive at a realistic budget for your refurbishment. If you are looking for new premises this early preparation will help you choose a suitable location.

Dentists now have to exert more effort in order to find new patients and to maintain existing ones. They are recognising the fact that patients are also consumers and their practices must motivate them to want to register and recommend their services to others. Unlike the process of locating a GP, prospective patients will 'shop' around for a suitable dentist. Judgements regarding the quality of dentistry are often based upon their first impression as they walk into the practice.

Attention to detail is highly significant. For example, the reception desk should not only be immediately visible and accessible it must be well organised. This will have a direct impact on how the

reception staff present themselves. An interesting feature, artwork or flat screen entertainment within the waiting area will distract the mind. You may consider offering spa treatments alongside traditional dental services to alleviate the fear of visiting the dentist by some of your more nervous patients. Any decisions that are made should be carefully thought out and presented to the patient as a coherent whole.

To create your perfect practice:

1. Engage a good designer

Your practice should consider the patient from the moment they arrive. This can be achieved through forward planning at the design stage. A carefully chosen team of professionals will understand your objectives and will be able to translate your ideas into workable solutions. The success of your project relies heavily on the performance of this professional team and the relationship they have with you.

An integral part of this team is your architectural designer. You should contact him/her at the start of the project in order to assess the feasibility of the project and suitability of the premises. This will enable you to find an alternative site before making a huge financial commitment.

During your initial consultation you will be advised of your legal duties and responsibilities. For example your designer will advise you whether a Planning Application for 'Change of Use' is

necessary, and if so, will deal with the local authority on your behalf.

2. Explore your ideas and create a 'wish list'

For a designer one of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of designing is forming a good relationship with a client, to discuss ideas and to build a design strategy. As soon as this has been achieved decisions become easier and both client and designer have a common goal.

A key part of this process is communicating your ideas and thoughts regarding the workings of the practice. It is a good idea to write these thoughts down early on in the process so that you can analyse your requirements. Some questions you may ask yourself are: What type of dental services do you intend to offer? What type of patient are you catering for? Are you hoping for a progressive modern interior or a more family oriented interior? How do you see the future of the practice?

We ask our clients to gather ideas in the form of pictures, cuttings from magazines – anything that inspires them. This information forms the basis of a 'wish list' enabling the designer to explore the creative possibilities and arrive at the best design scheme for you.

3. Know your budget

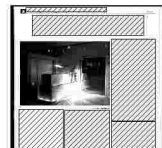
In order to start the design work your designer will need to know your budget, the services that you will be offering, basic workings of the practice, and your future plans i.e. a 'Wish List'. It is a good idea to gather ideas in the form of pictures and magazine cuttings – anything that inspires you.

Good design is not synonymous with expensive design, and can be achieved at many sizes of budget. The difference between a £400-per-square-metre practice and a £800-per-square-metre practice comes down to the selection of finishes for the space: Granite countertops vs. plastic laminate, carpeting vs. stone tile, etc. Every decision you make regarding your level of finish has a direct effect on your cost of construction. By asking the right questions, your designer will help you select finishes that are both affordable and appropriate to your style.

With all this information available, the designer is ready to explore the creative possibilities, and prepare a scheme.

4. Choose the right builder

Many factors will influence your final choice of builder namely budget, estimated completion date, and not to be overlooked, a good rapport. Your designer will help you choose a contractor that has experience within the dental industry or demonstrates



quality of workmanship within their portfolio. If you decide to appoint your own contractor is advisable to obtain references and perhaps meet with him/her at the designer's office to raise any queries before the project commences. A good contractor will not compromise the design scheme and should always consult the designer before making any alterations.

The success of your project not only relies equally upon the designer's expertise in translating ideas but also the ability of the builder to execute the work. When you engage your designer, be sure that he/she can offer services that can extend to the completion of construction. Your designer is your "agent", interpreting the drawings and attending weekly meetings during the course of construction. Your designer can see to it that all specifications stated in the drawings are adhered to by the general contractor.

5. Marketing

Dentists should be aware that in order to achieve the right image, and to maintain their profile, an overall marketing strategy should be adopted. This marketing message will be carried in the interior design. This should be on-going and constantly developed in accordance with the changes that are occurring within the dental industry.

In addition to this, it is important to look at how other professional groups market themselves and to study the media and the messages they use to promote their products and services. The strategies that they employ may apply to your practice. But above all the key to successful marketing is to establish to what you are trying to communicate and the outcomes that you desire, and then to present your marketing message in a consistent manner. This will build awareness in the minds of your target audience, and raise your profile.

The benefits to you and your practice

Good design leads to good flow and ease of use, which increases productivity. This is true whether you're talking about a dental practice, a restaurant or any commercial space. A beautiful dental practice is a recruitment tool, not only for patients but also for staff. Finally, good design reflects on you the dentist. While you may or may not have a sense of your personal style, your architectural designer will work with you to develop a look and feel for your practice that is consistent with who you are and how you work. The design of your dental practice is an opportunity for you to express yourself through your built environment.

For more information please contact:

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Aqua dental spa reception

Dental treatment room



Glass water feature in waiting area

