

Never Think Small

By investing in his business, one dentist attracts more patients.

Roshan Parikh, DDS, MBA, says that the worst times are the best times for dentists to invest in their business. With a dual background in dentistry and business, he makes it a point to never think small. “I believe that, in spite of the economy, people must still visit the dentist,” he says. Not only that, in uncertain economic times, it’s especially important to keep one’s practice up to date and to advertise, or market to, the local community, he adds. “Patients need to be confident their dentist is doing well,” he says. So, Parikh has gone so far as to take out a 51-foot billboard ad.

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Parikh and his wife, Neeta Bhushan, DDS, own two practices – one in Olympia Fields, Ill., and the other in Lisle, Ill. – and he is looking to acquire a third in 2011. His Olympia Fields-based practice alone sees between 150 and 200 patients each week. He recently added another dentist to his staff of 11 assistants and office staff, two hygienists and a periodontist. “I would like to acquire a second practice in this neighborhood,” he says. If so, he plans to expand by adding two new operatories to accommodate a larger patient base, as well as expand his usage of digital radiography.

“In terms of the economy, we’ve been fortunate,” Parikh says. “This year, business has been up by 31 percent and we’ve been able to invest a considerable amount of money

[in the practice].” For instance, he recently expanded his Olympia Fields periodontal suite, converting it to a surgical suite equipped to do implants. “We’ve added a new X-ray unit, new cabinetry, a handpiece system and compressor, and a new chair,” he says. By installing a 42-inch flat screen TV, he and his staff can better educate patients. And, for some, television can help them relax during a procedure, he notes. “Our patients leave with fewer questions and more confidence in their decision [to move forward with treatment],” he says. “And, patient comfort plays a role in their choice of dentist.”

Digital a must

Today, dentistry and digital go hand-in-hand, according to Parikh. “Digital radiography is a must for dental practices,” he says. “Having digital X-rays and being able to show them to your patients on a large monitor can be very helpful. Recently, a patient who was in town for a visit came in with a lot of tooth pain.” As it turned out, her father was a dentist, he adds, noting she was more comfortable getting his opinion. “I e-mailed her X-ray and intraoral photo to her dad,” he says. “I could then talk to him and put together a treatment plan in 45 seconds.”

Digital radiography can not only make a huge difference in terms of patient education and communication, it also helps facilitate communication between dental practices, Parikh points out. “When my periodontist is out of the office, I can e-mail [images] to her and we can discuss them.” This is more efficient, effective, and it makes the dental community smaller and more personalized, he notes. And, from a patient safety standpoint, “I can check patients’ allergies [on my computer] before ordering their prescriptions,” he adds.

Reps play a role

In spite – or perhaps because – of his business background, Parikh depended on his sales reps to help him invest in a digital radiography system that could meet the

needs of his practice. “Our reps definitely played a role in determining which digital radiography system was best for our office,” he says. “Also, our sales reps helped us determine the number of sensors we should purchase. I would have bought four, but it turned out we only needed three. I save \$12,000. Reps have a good idea of how much a dental practice needs based on all the practices they service.”

Indeed, Parikh, who works with up to five different dental reps at any given time, appreciates their consultative, value-added approach to sales. His reps often offer perks through their vendor partners, he says. They also schedule lunch-and-learns. And, they’re not shy about referring Parikh and his colleagues to other dentists who have had

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a good experience with a certain product or technology. “I look for sales reps who go that extra mile,” he says. “Lunch-and-learns give us the opportunity to see how a piece of equipment is working and what its value is. And, when I am looking into big-ticket items, I appreciate referrals to other dentists. Even if I don’t call them, I like to have that option.”

That said, he’s not too wild about working with *pushy* sales reps. “I’m a big proponent of learning and education,” he says. But, reps who keep calling and e-mailing, even after he has decided against implementing a particular system, can be a turn-off, he says. “This suggests they aren’t being sensitive to the needs of our practice,” he says. **[FI]**