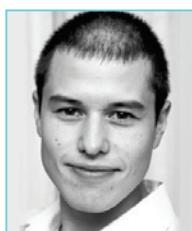


# Are you being served?

Managing the patient experience using Touchpoint Management

By Kim McCotter



*“Most patients don’t possess the ability to assess your skill or work. They rely on... four experiential cues to assess your service quality...”*

**W**hat is the number one reason for treatment plan failure? Is it the technical complexity of the case, techniques used or poor patient cleaning habits? No, failure is guaranteed when the patient doesn’t come back.

In essence, as the practice owner, your aim is to minimise the gap between a patient’s expectations and their perception of care received.

You could achieve patient satisfaction in your patient base by targeting large volumes of patients that have very low expectations. Unfortunately, this type of patient tends to be price sensitive and is won or lost on a whim; this would be like building your business on sand.

If you’re looking to build a solid patient base, the best way is to target profitable market segments and improve your service quality.

A lot of delivering good ‘service’ is intuitive, normally gained through years of experience. Using professional consultants like practice management trainers, interior designers, graphic designers, business coaches and marketers speeds up this process.

When selecting any professional consultant you expect them to have expertise in their chosen field and to give you the right advice. The best can translate their expertise into simple terms you understand.

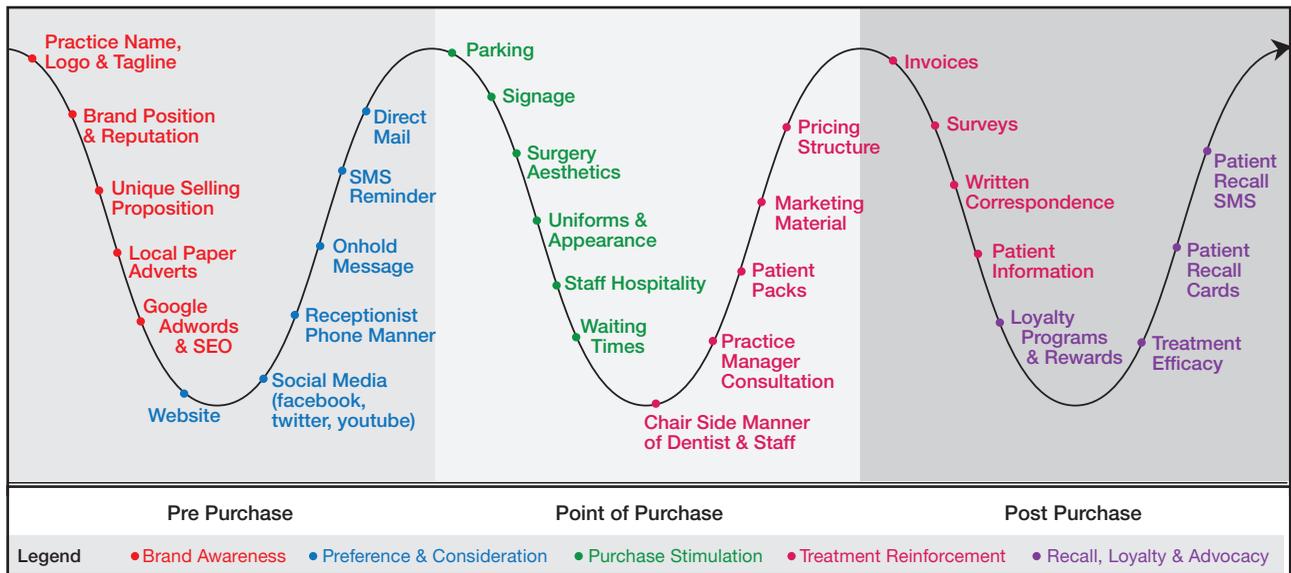
That is why we like “Touchpoint Management”, it is a multi disciplinary business management tool used to connect online, offline and interpersonal interactions to enhance a patient’s experience.

## What is Touchpoint Management?

Simply put, a touchpoint is the interaction of your brand and service with patients, potential patients and other interested parties. Points of contact occur before a patient decides to use your services, while being treated in your surgery, when they pay and potentially for years afterwards.

If you reviewed every possible interaction between every interested party and your company, you would have hundreds of them. Touchpoint Management is an efficient way to focus on factors that will contribute to the long-term success of your practice.

One output of this process is a Touchpoint Blueprint. This maps your patients’ purchasing process (journey) with touch points they encounter along the way. In reality, this process isn’t always linear or sequential, but it provides a useful way of visualising sales and marketing tactics, practice presentation, operational considerations and finance procedures.



Example of a simplified Touchpoint Blueprint.

### Why use Touchpoint Management?

Baldwin & Sohal<sup>1</sup> found that the most important factors that significantly influenced dental patients perception of service quality were:

1. Responsiveness - A dentist's ability to keep scheduled appointments, while still fitting in patients at short notice;
2. Empathetic Assurance - Maintenance of patient comfort, self-respect and perceived pain;
3. Reliability - Perceived professionalism; and
4. Tangibles - Physical characteristics of the practice (decor, look, ambience, equipment, uniforms, marketing material).

Most patients don't possess the ability to assess your skill or work. They rely on the above four experiential cues to assess your service quality. The ease of getting an appointment, how long they waited, levels of anxiety experienced, whether they felt adequately informed about treatments and your practice ambience.

Small businesses tend to lack strategic direction, the end result is that these practices tend to be strong in one or two areas but not across all the areas that are required for excellent service.

A dentist offering next day treatment for emergencies, supported by caring empathetic staff is great for service (but maybe not your marriage or lifestyle). But if you're running late and operate from a surgery that has seen better days, you have to work harder to overcome these negative impressions.

Touchpoint Management is not intended to be a substitute for a marketing plan, as its use is as a decision making tool. It is a simple, visual tool that identifies areas in your surgery that require attention. It is particularly useful for practitioners who want to appreciate the bigger picture of their practice and patients.

### Can't my Practice Manager take care of this?

A Practice Manager (PM) is usually hired (or promoted) to ensure the business runs smoothly on a daily basis. Yes your PM acts as your right hand person and plays a key role in implementation, but as the business owner it is your responsibility to provide vision, leadership, passion and drive. Even the best aide will achieve little if the heart is not willing.

### How do I use a Touchpoint Blueprint?

Above is a simplified version of a Touchpoint Blueprint, it is used to challenge your perspective on delivering dental care.

For example, you notice that new patients are having trouble finding your practice. Upon this realisation, most practitioners would instruct the PM and receptionists to provide patients with detailed instructions over the phone when they make their first appointment.

If you were to review this approach against the Touchpoint Blueprint, you would realise that this is one of many points of contact. Other possible solutions would be to provide a map and instructions on your website, update your on-hold message, send SMS reminders with instructions, send out a direct mail piece prior to their visit or improve your signage.

If you systematically focus on the patient journey and achieve touch point consistency, then you will improve your service quality through Touchpoint Management.

Our next article will explain Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), how it works, ways to approach SEO, the benefits and drawbacks.

### Reference

1. Baldwin, A., Sohal, A., 2003, Service Quality Factors & Outcomes in Dental Care, *Managing Service Quality*, Vol. 13, No. 13, pp. 207-216.

### About the author

Mr Kim McCotter is Business Development & Marketing Manager at Levitch Design Associates. With a background and passion for business and marketing, Kim comes to LDA with experience in both service and product based industries. Having over five years of professional services experience and five years of marketing experience, he brings a fresh and professional approach to LDA. Kim holds a Bachelor of Business (UTS), Masters of Business in Marketing (UTS), and a Certificate in Digital Marketing (ADMA). He is continually investigating marketing and business techniques to find the next competitive edge. His methodical business development and marketing approach is outcome driven, his initiatives will be beneficial to the future success of our clients. He can be contacted on (02) 9880-9300.