

INFLUENCE on Patient Response



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The fitout of a dental practice is an art as well as a science. When done well, the result can be an environment that uplifts the people who work there as well as the patients attending. When done badly, there is a feeling of awkwardness for those it accommodates.

A dental interior should be created to not only function at a high level, but create a positive patient response. This can be approached effectively if a practitioner can identify and outline the characteristics of the ideal patient that they wish to attract to the practice.

Identifying the target market is a starting point in any successful business plan. Analysing the data on the patient base can be informative in assisting this identification process. It can inform, at minimum, the age, and gender of the majority of the patients. Having this information gives the practitioner/practitioners, the opportunity to tweak or change the practice profile if beneficial or build on it. Is it best to attract more of the same, or attract more of a subgroup of the current patient base, ie, increase the number of ideal patients that suit the developed skills and ideals of the practice?

Not rocket science nor a mystical process. We only need to look at what type of stores, restaurants, and other establishments attract us and we can see a pattern in the mysterious art of psychological response to environment. What attracts a teenager to a particular service business may keep an adult away. If this business is targeted to teenagers, then the approach to interior finishes has been successful. What attracts a middle-aged man to enter a store may keep a young adult female away. Again successful targeting if middle aged men need the product or service on offer.

Conversely, if the target market is young adult female then the business is creating a negative response and will suffer accordingly.

Patients should feel like they have come to the right place when they walk into a dental practice for the first time. Creating a positive response in patients matching the ideal patient profile will be a solid business-building characteristic of the practice.

Environmental psychology is a relatively new discipline in the universities of the world and remains unlisted in some. However, it is a growing discipline and one in which research is developing strongly. Hospitals have started using the research very successfully to influence patient response, which has an impact on recovery rates, levels of independence, treatment compliance, and state of mind. There are a growing number of conferences and seminars all over the world presenting the research in this area.



Many successful practitioners have valued this approach to creating positive patient response. It is an investment in time and energy to identify the ideal patient profile that has substantial return as many decisions can flow from this information.

Professional designers and architects generally work with this outline as part of the brief for their involvement in the project. Selection of finishes for a project is influenced by a range of factors which are outlined in the following sections.

PRACTICE BRANDING

If there is an existing brand in place, it is an ideal time to consider the need for any changes, tweaks, or rebranding when a practice is relocating or refurbishing. The colouration of the brand should be reflected in the selection of finishes. This does not need to be absolutely literal however, the brand should sit comfortably with the finishes selected.

If the brand uses blue or orange or both, then it is beneficial to use some elements of these colours within the interior. The strength or balance of colour can be juggled to suit however the relationship needs to be seen. This creates higher brand awareness.

DEMOGRAPHIC OF THE AREA

There is a wealth of demographic data accessible online. This generally includes an outline of gender, age brackets, education, ethnicity, languages, employment status, family status within the area, as well as approximate socio-economic bracket. The ideal patient profile should be strongly relative to the demographic of the area for a successful practice.

Generally, areas with a higher socio-economic bracket would benefit by the use of a higher level of natural textured finishes, with a lower level of colouration perhaps. A simple fresh and natural palette is usually beneficial for patients engaging in higher cost aesthetic dental treatment. These patients are generally a little older also.

In contrast, areas of lower socio-economic profile generally benefit by higher use of stronger colouration. Bright and chirpy mostly suits these areas where young families are predominant.

The subtleties of any demographic can be reflected in the approach to finishes. It is also important to note here that people are aspirational. They will be drawn to a practice which is a little above the standard of their home environment. If it is too far above their dwelling standard, they can be put off, seeing a practice as out of their reach.

IDEAL PATIENT PROFILE

It is always a delight to work on particular projects where the ideal patient profile is clearly outlined. Some practices have relocated within an area and totally changed their ideal patient profile, and we have successfully assisted them to achieve this by creating a very different practice aesthetic. They need not estrange the existing patient base, however, a subtle change in emphasis and appearance can build a practice by attracting more of a particular market segment. For example, those patients wanting a higher level of cosmetic dentistry will place more value on practice aesthetics.

A practice that targeted primarily men would have substantial differences to one which targeted women.

PRACTICE LOCATION

The locale is a critical factor in practice aesthetic considerations. Finishes should ideally have a subtle reference to the surrounding locale. For example, a coastal practice in a beachside suburb can use a watery colour scheme effectively. Alternatively, a regional practice in a country area can use an earthy palette of finishes to their benefit. An urban practice can use an industrial contemporary palette, which would be out of place in a regional country practice.



For those practitioners who design and co-ordinate the fitout of their own practice, there is one common pitfall. They will often approach the finishes from the perspective of what they like personally, rather than what type of finish is appropriate to the practice from a demographic, patient profile point of view.

The creativity of professional designers is innate, and working with the guidelines of a specific demographic brief can be challenging and rewarding. Ideas are not copied, but generated. Designers work from a brief and create. Non-designers look around and copy ideas they have seen. We are often asked as designers where we get our ideas. The inference is one of copying something. The world is full of stimulation to a designer, and the challenge of satisfying a specific brief suited to an ideal patient profile is a delightful task.

A practice that successfully addresses all the above in the palette of finishes will generate a positive patient perception and thrive. A great starting point for any new practice or refurbishment, as there is substantial expense involved, but the rewards can be even greater. ♦

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