

Winning New Patients on the Telephone

Ideas for Dentists and Practice Leaders



Your dental practice spends money to make your phones ring.

If your team books appointments for 30% of the people who call your office, is your staff doing a pretty good job? Or do they need an intervention?

This article will help you decide. If you conclude that your office ought to achieve much better results, you will discover proven ways to do so.

Why you must pay close attention to conversion rates

As long as your dental practice books enough new patients to achieve your growth goals, why obsess about conversion rates?

Here's the answer: If your practice books appointments with 30% of callers, you lose potential revenue from the remaining 70%. That means for every dollar you've spent on marketing, 70 cents go down the drain. And you miss a lot of revenue.

How low conversion rates waste your marketing dollars

It doesn't matter how good your practice may be at marketing. If your front-office business conversions aren't as effective as your marketing, they will constrain the results of your marketing.

Suppose you spend \$6,000 a month on marketing. And suppose your staff converts 30% of callers into new patients. That means you waste \$4,200 (70%) of your marketing investment. It amounts to \$50,400 a year.

The more you spend on marketing, the worse the hemorrhaging gets—unless you fix the problem in your front office.

What practice can afford so much waste?

To put it bluntly, your front office may be limiting the growth of your practice. That's why you must understand and monitor their effectiveness in converting callers into new patients. But, that is not the only reason. You want more new patients. You want to grow your practice and revenue.

How to start improving your conversion rates

In our experience at Patient Prism, most dental practices don't pay much attention to how many phone calls they receive in a day or a week. Nor do they track how many of those calls result in appointments with new patients.

For the reasons you've seen, lack of attention to these key metrics is the Achilles heel of even well-planned and well-executed dental marketing programs.

To achieve better marketing productivity, you must improve your conversion rates on the telephone. But where does the process start?

As with all positive change, it must start at the top. The following 11-point action list explains actions you can take as a leader of your dental practice.

None of these actions requires an additional investment, other than time and attention. If you have limited time and attention, you can invest in tools that will help make the process faster, easier, and more accurate.

11 first steps to improve new-patient conversions on the phone

Example of setting quotas

Goal is to convert 50% of callers

Office receives 40
new-patient inquiries
per week
(10 per business day)

Front-office quota
is 20 booked
appointments
per week
(5 per business day)

(50 work weeks x 20 new patients)
1,000 new patients per year



1. Establish clear priorities.

Your goal in managing inquiries from potential new patients is simple: It's to get a first appointment so you can show them the excellent care you offer.

2. Count inbound calls and conversions.

Be aware of how many new-patient inquiries your office receives each week and month.

Also be aware of how many of those inquiries result in new-patient appointments. These are key metrics for measuring both growth and staff effectiveness.

3. Set monthly quotas for booking new-patient appointments.

Break the quotas down by week and by day. Suppose your office receives an average of 40 new-patient inquiries a week, and you book 15 new-patient appointments.

That's a 38% conversion rate. It breaks down to 10 new-patient inquiries received and 4 new-patient calls booked per business day (assuming your switchboard is open four days a week).

If your goal is to convert 50% of callers, the weekly quota is 20 calls booked. The daily quota is 5 calls booked.

4. Track how well your office performs against their quota.

Also track the performance of individuals on your team. Reward good performance with recognition or bonuses. Coach and train to improve poor performance.

5. Reserve time on your office calendar to book new-patient appointments.

Don't make new patients wait too long for a first appointment. You may lose them if they have to wait too long to see a dentist. Make sure you reserve enough new-patient time each week and month to achieve your weekly new-patient quotas.

6. Understand when your inbound call volumes are highest.

Keep track of call volume by time of day, day of week, and day of month. Also track seasonal changes. Then make sure you schedule enough staff to handle the volume of calls from new patients.

7. Tell your staff to try hard to answer each phone call within three rings.

For every call that rolls over to voicemail during business hours, the likelihood of booking an appointment decreases.

8. Make sure your staff has enough time to speak to each caller without rushing the conversation.

Your staff should have time to focus on the call without putting the caller on hold to take care of interruptions or distractions.

9. Advise your staff how to handle conflicting priorities.

If the phone rings when your staff is in a face-to-face conversation with a current patient, tell them to give priority to the current conversation. It would be rude to interrupt the current conversation for a phone call.

The most effective dental practices assign a backup receptionist who can answer the phone when the primary receptionist is speaking with a patient. Make sure this backup person is also well trained to answer calls and respond to inquiries.

Sometimes your staff will be so busy that a call has to go to voicemail during business hours. This may be unavoidable, even when you've taken care to schedule your staff to accommodate heavy call volumes.

If a call from a potential new patient has gone to voicemail, tell your staff to return it within a few minutes. Callers are looking for services now. They are probably calling several practices.

Callers will book an appointment with the first practice that appears likely to meet their needs. The longer you delay, the less likely it is that you will win the appointment.

10. If you use an automated phone-answering system, review your recorded tree of messages.

Make sure your greeting message is clear, simple, friendly, and up to date. Consider offering a priority path for both emergency calls and calls from potential new patients.

11. Put the right people on your phones.

The people who answer your phones will be most effective if they convey energy and enthusiasm. If they take pleasure in serving others and pick up the phone with a smile, they are a priceless asset to your practice.



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What to do next

- 1 For a guide you can share with your front-office team, **download** Patient Prism's "Front-Office Guide to Booking More Appointments with New Dental Patients." It provides detailed suggestions for your front-office to structure conversations with potential new patients.
- 2 For ideas on how to reduce waste in your marketing investments, **download** the free document "Dental Marketing: How to Stop Wasting 30% to 80% of Your Marketing Budget."
- 3 For information about Patient Prism's software, **download a free brochure**.
- 4 Start a conversation and **request a Patient Prism demo**.

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About Patient Prism

Since the early 2000s, Patient Prism's founders have worked with hundreds of dental practices. They started in the role of certified public accounts. As CPAs, they prepared the books of diverse practices.

That experience helped them see the differences between thriving practices and others whose growth had stalled.

They saw how fast patient attrition can cause a practice to shrink. It happens unless the practice constantly invests in marketing to win new patients.

For several years, Patient Prism's founders offered marketing services to dental practices. They built and

managed websites. They ran pay-per-click ad campaigns.

From that experience, they learned which marketing investments consistently deliver high returns.

More important, they saw how many practices waste money on marketing. To their surprise, they noted that many practices waste a lot of money even on tactics that generate plenty of new-patient inquiries.

Although the phone rings often in these practices, inbound calls don't bring in as many new patients as they could.

The waste occurs when dental practices don't monitor how

effectively their front-office staff manages incoming phone calls.

With that insight, they switched their focus to helping dentists manage calls from potential new patients.

Working with dentists, they developed and tested patent-pending technologies to measure key marketing performance metrics.

Today, Patient Prism's software shows which marketing investments generate the highest-value phone calls from potential new patients. The technology also enables busy practices to convert more of these callers into patients.



For more information, call Patient Prism at **800-381-3638** or visit us online at **www.patientprism.com**

We bridge the gap between your dental marketing and patient conversion.