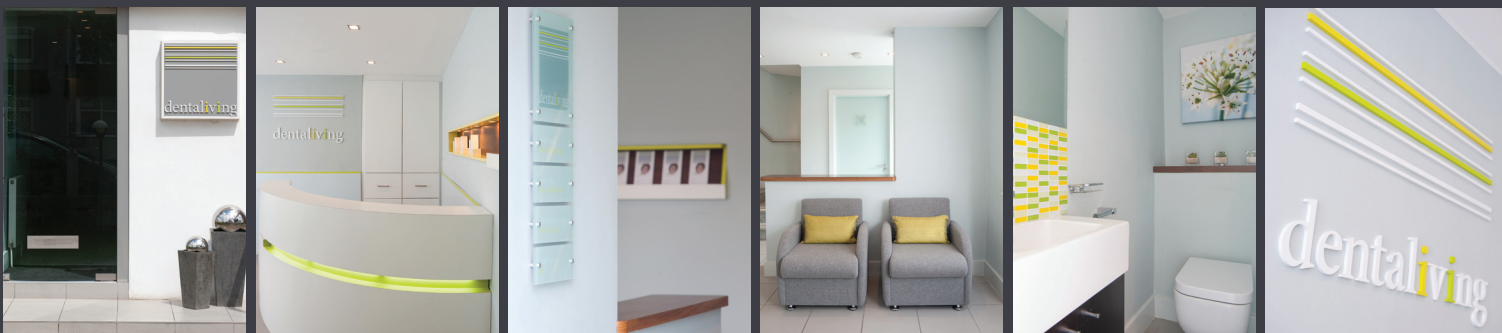


How to... incorporate your branding



A good brand is engaging, says **Gary Bettis** as he looks at ways to help practices make an impact

Dental practices often struggle with identifying who they are and what they do. They are aware of the physical benefits of their services, but very often lack the strategic insight to communicate what they have to offer, their values and the 'practice brand'.

Many practices think they have a brand – when actually they don't. They may have a logo and perhaps stationery incorporating the logo but this is not enough. Logos are not brands, they are merely representations of brands.

In essence, a brand is the sum total of all of the activities and messages that convey who you are and what you do. It is a way of creating a series of associations or connotations in people's minds in such a way that it persuades them to 'buy in' to that product or service. It extends to the interior design of your practice, location, the premises you occupy, the style of your advertising or website and the way that you and your staff interact with your patients. These are things that should be carefully considered if you really want to make an impact.

A good brand is engaging. A potential patient should already have an idea of your practice's personality, professionalism and overall identity before picking up the phone.

Why is a practice brand so important?

1. It helps distinguish you from your competitors

When a potential customer is confronted with a choice of comparable dental practices, they will always choose the practice they feel will suit them best. Your suitability for a customer is portrayed through your brand.

2. It means communication

An effective brand will communicate your practice's values, principles, message, and even characteristics.

3. Branding helps you establish a reputation

Branding helps people have these associations with and feelings about your services.

4. Brands promote patient loyalty and help promote your services

When a patient has a good experience with your practice, he or she will probably remember your brand, and recommend your services to friends or relatives.

5. A strong brand can help you influence and win your patients' purchasing decisions

Without branding, an existing patient may book a tooth whitening session at the nearest practice without realising that you offer the same service. Never underestimate the power of 'emotional buying'.

6. Better patient recognition and higher perceived value from patients

When you know who you are and you are able to convey that in a clear and simple manner, new and existing patients will be able to identify with you. You will have a 'patient for life' (provided you look after them!) because your patients will see themselves in your business, they will see your business as being 'like them'.

7. Higher employee satisfaction and retention, increased productivity, and better understanding of a practice's mission, vision and values.

A branded practice environment

The key to achieving the best 'interior branding' is to engage the services of an experienced practice designer.

He/she will work with you to create an environment that fuses good design principles and the characteristics of the practice brand. Their objective will be to generate a set of emotional responses that will keep your patients coming back and encourage them to tell their friends about how great they think you and your practice are.



Gary Bettis is architectural director of Designclinic. Since its formation in 1970, it has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work ranging from squat NHS dental practices to high-end private clinics. Visit www.designclinic.uk.com for further information.

It is crucial that your designer understands your target patient base. For example, if your target patient is an urban bachelor, the interior solution could be sleek and sophisticated. If the practice is directed toward families the interior may be more interactive, playful and fun. Whoever you are appealing to, your designer will ensure that your branding is carefully integrated to create a beautiful, consistent and unified interior.

Signage

Signage gives the customer orientation, information and an understanding of the brand identity and values. Whether your practice is located on a high street or within a residential property, patients must instantly recognise that you are a dental practice via well-designed signage.

Avoid corporate and obvious solutions to internal signage eg by placing a large logo behind the reception desk or off-the-shelf door signage. Instead allow your designer to integrate your signage in a more clever or imaginative way.

Personal service

Moving beyond the physical space created by your interior designer, the next component to defining your brand is human interaction. The focus once again is on how patients feel about coming to your practice. Are they greeted with a smile? Are their questions answered? Are procedures explained in layman's terms that are easy to understand or not explained at all?

More than anything else, your employees will be responsible for making the brand work. Make sure that everyone believes in it and encourage and take notice of any suggestions they may make to improve the delivery of the brand message. You may consider uniforms appropriate – helping allay patient anxiety and to encourage cohesiveness within your team.

Final words

Every experience a patient has when they set foot inside your front door defines your brand in their mind. Leaving that experience to chance rather than having it defined is gambling with your practice's future prosperity.

Branding will only work if it is consistent throughout every level of communication and interaction; from your website to the design of your corporate uniform and everything in between, your branding must be clearly seen.

Having a consistent and distinctive brand will not only set you apart from your competitors, but also enable your potential customers to recognise your quality products or services in an instant.

If your brand promises something to your patients, make sure you deliver it! A broken brand promise can quickly compromise the effectiveness of your brand and you could lose customers. **PD**