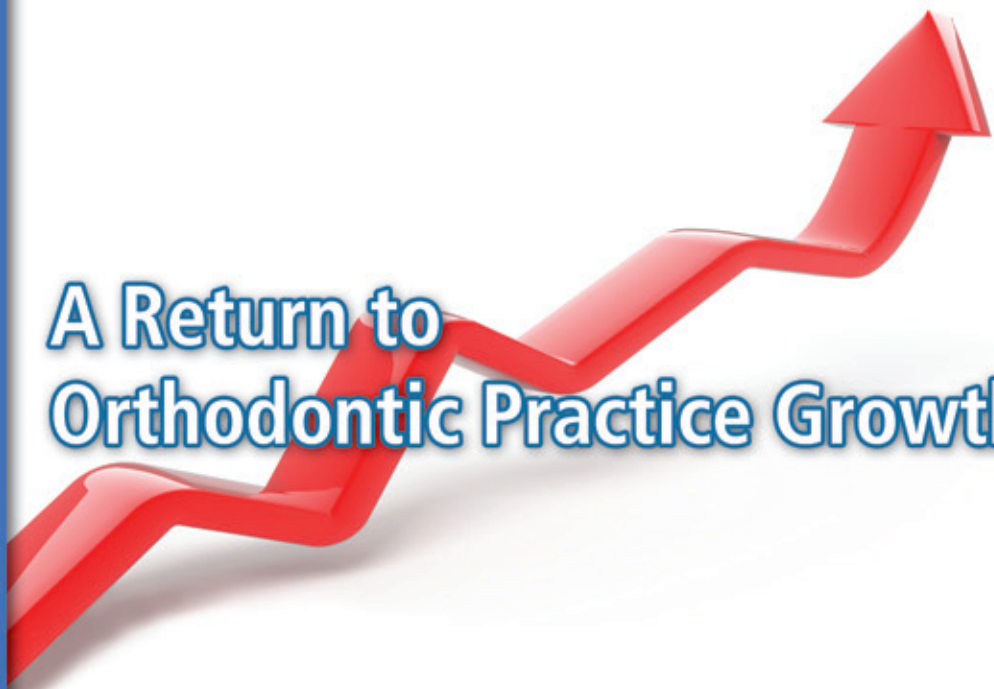




Dr. Roger P. Levin DDS
Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc.

A Return to Orthodontic Practice Growth



A Monthly Article on Practice Management Presented by Dr. Roger P. Levin and Ortho Technology, Inc.

As the recession winds down, many orthodontists are wondering if they can return to a state of steady growth. The answer is "yes," if orthodontists apply the right marketing and management solutions to their practices. In fact, Levin Group clients have seen exponential increases in production by targeting these four growth factors:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. DENTIST REFERRALS | 3. OBSERVATION PATIENTS |
| 2. PATIENT REFERRALS | 4. STARTS |

1. Dentist Referrals

Increasing the number of referring dentists can take an ortho practice to surprising levels of profitability. The addition of one top referring doctor can boost practice production by \$100,000 to \$250,000. The greater the number of quality referring dentists, the better the ortho practice is able to grow despite fluctuations in the economy.

Ortho practices that maintain a consistent referral marketing program enjoy a high level of regular referrals and the addition of new referral sources. Some orthodontists would prefer to focus only on referrals from current patients. Such a limited marketing approach will prevent these orthodontists from reaching their true practice potential. It is only a referral marketing program that focuses on increasing referrals from both doctors and patients that leads to the highest increases in production and profitability.

Referral marketing, when properly implemented, works like compound interest. At first, it builds slowly. After four to six months, when the method is properly followed, the orthodontic practice will begin to see a significant return on investment. Over the course of a 20-year career, referral marketing can add millions of dollars of new revenue to the practice.

To operate a successful referral marketing program, ortho practices should employ a Professional Relations Coordinator (PRC). This part-time position, pioneered by Levin Group, focuses exclusively on marketing the practice. Orthodontists who try to manage a marketing program on their own usually let it lapse in less than 90 days due to the demands of providing patient care. This is why PRCs are so valuable. They take on the

marketing tasks that doctors and other clinical team members do not have time to perform. In any given year, Levin Group works with 400 – 500 PRCs throughout the United States and worldwide with all these practices experiencing significant referral growth within four to six months.

A strong referral marketing program is a necessity for orthodontic practices, particularly in a sluggish economy. Programs that pursue numerous contact opportunities and develop a pipeline of new referral sources can jumpstart growth for any orthodontic practice. Orthodontists are better positioned to become production leaders in their areas when they consistently and effectively engage in referral marketing. For a more detailed discussion on referral marketing, see my December article, "How Referral Marketing Grows and Protects Orthodontic Practices."

2. Patient Referrals

Patients are usually happy to refer friends and family if new patients are clearly welcome in the practice. Orthodontists can tap into this potential with a strong patient referral program. Practices should remind patients how much the office appreciates referrals by placing signs in the reception room, clinical areas and at the front desk. These signs should clearly state that the ortho practice wishes to thank patients and parents for showing their confidence through referrals. Make sure these signs are prominently displayed throughout the office and have a professional look. To take this effort a step further, incorporate referral language into any materials used to interact with patients such as the practice's website, correspondence, newsletters and brochures.

The orthodontist or the office manager should call and thank all parents and patients who refer friends and family. Levin Group recommends that the orthodontist should make the call, if possible. Patients who receive personal phone calls from the doctor are motivated to refer others.

3. Observation Patients

Observation patients are a key component of future success. The more observation patients a practice has, the greater the potential for future growth, provided the practice has a system for activating those patients. Observation patients should be managed with the same focus as new patient starts. Siblings of every patient entering the practice should be offered free examinations to convert them into observation patients.

Levin Group recommends scheduling these patients as early as possible. Then evaluate their status on a six-month basis. Calculate a weekly statistic for the number of overdue observation patients. The goal should be to keep that number below one percent. A well-managed observation program will pay dividends in the years ahead as siblings are converted into active patients.

4. Starts

During consultations with potential new patients and their parents, practices should set a goal for closes of more than 95%. Is this possible? Absolutely. With a well-trained Orthodontic Treatment Coordinator (OTC), practices can increase the new patient close rate well beyond the orthodontist's capabilities. Using an OTC allows the practice to focus exclusively on new parents and patients without taking up too much of the doctor's time. A treatment coordinator handles many aspects of orthodontic care for new patients, including scheduling and case presentation. This critical team member is the patient's liaison with the practice and the conduit for building trust. With an effective OTC in place, the orthodontist is better able to focus on providing excellent patient care and remaining highly productive.

Conclusion

The economy is expected to begin recovering in the next six months. By targeting these four growth factors, orthodontists can position their practices to take full advantage of the economic turnaround. Prepare now and grow exponentially in the new economy!

*Levin Group clients
have seen exponential
increases in production
by targeting these
four growth factors:*



Building TOTAL PRACTICE Success™

Our commitment is to help every orthodontist grow regardless of the economy. Every orthodontic practice has the potential to transform into A Levin Practice™ and anticipate these results:

- Continually increasing production
- Continually increasing profit
- Continually increasing referrals
- A low stress practice environment
- High levels of professional satisfaction
- Reaching financial independence sooner

Our consulting programs are based on proven systems and strategies that have delivered successful results to thousands of practices for more than 24 years. Levin Group Consulting Programs are the established benchmark for practice management excellence in our profession.