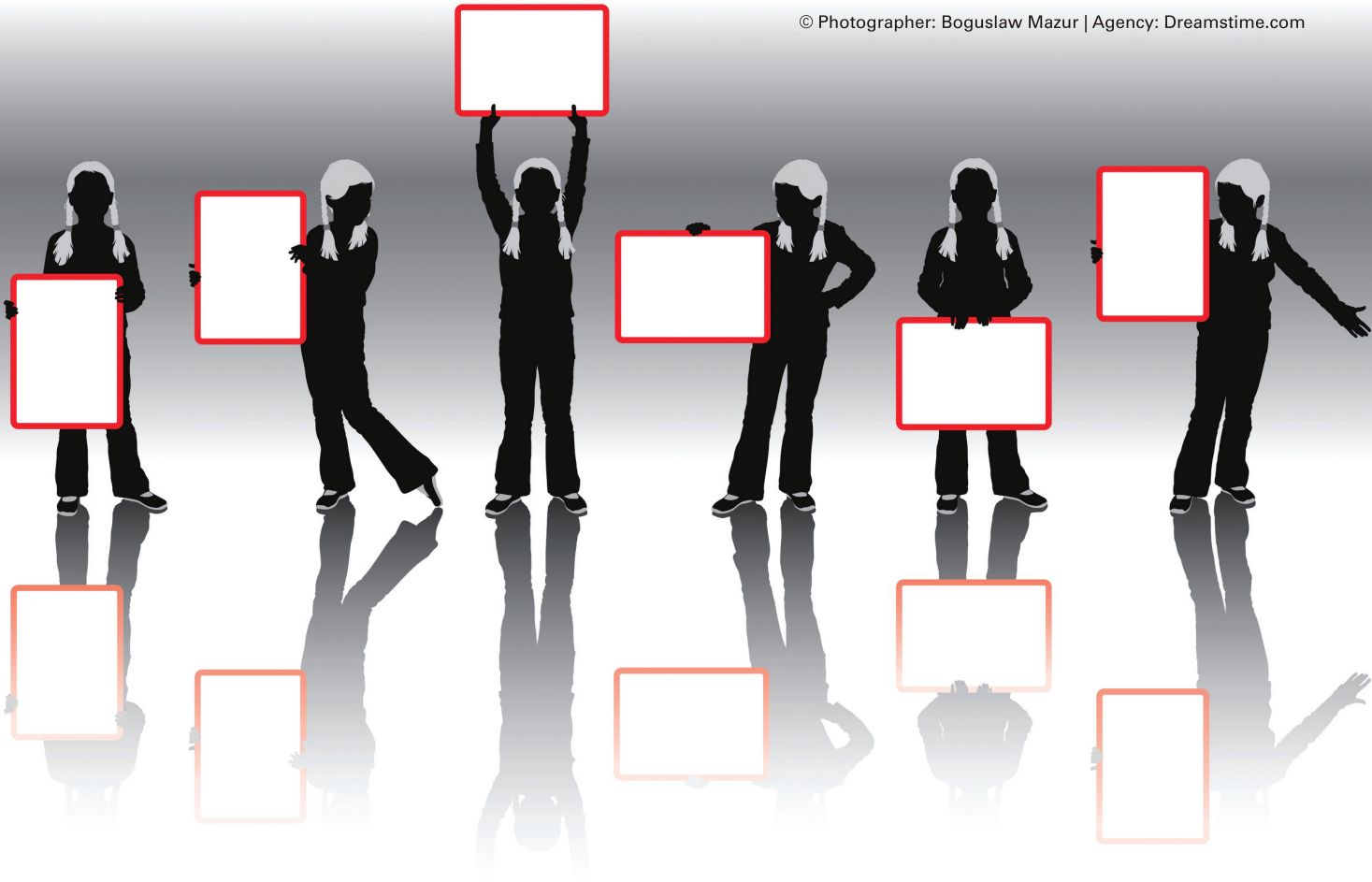
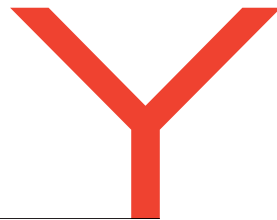


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Personal Branding

by Paul A. Henry, DDS



our practice is a direct reflection of who you are, what you believe in, and what you can do for others. The way the public perceives your practice is your practice “brand.” You create a practice brand, consciously or haphazardly, with everything you do.

You may have heard that a “brand is an implied promise,” but successful branding is actually a *strategically created expectation in the mind of the target audience*. Your patients chose you for some reason — they expected something. And what they expected was a *feeling*.

How patients choose you

Some patients chose you because they live near your office, but they expected to *feel* that your location would be a convenient fit in their busy lives. Someone else may have

chosen you because you go to his or her church and expected to *feel* that you are principle-centered. Another may have “heard you are gentle” and expected to *feel* comfort while being treated. And yet others may have chosen you because you are in their insurance network, and they expect to *feel* financially secure if they ever need dental work.

But how many people have chosen you for the quality of your work, the level of your expertise, or the value of the relationship you consciously create with each person? In other words, how many chose you because they expected to *feel* that they are in the hands of a masterful practitioner who truly cares about what is in their best interest? If you intend to develop a fine relationship-based esthetic restorative practice and have those whom you serve truly appreciate what you are doing on their behalf, then you must create a practice brand in the minds of your community that will lead patients to expect these feelings.

Matches and mismatches

When people come to you with clarity regarding what they want, who you are, and what you can do, the chance of your meeting or exceeding their expectations is high. There is a fundamental match between their expectations and your capabilities. But when people come to you with expectations outside the scope of your primary purpose or capabilities, then there is a high risk of confusion, disappointment, and in many cases, conflict.

Conflict is the seed of discontent, and when expectations are routinely violated, confusion abounds. When confusion abounds, conflicts multiply. And when conflicts multiply, everyone in the relationship becomes unhappy. Unhappy people are prone to make poor choices and thus experience *more* negative feelings. And this is where many patients, practitioners, and staff get stuck ... in a “doom loop” of negative feelings about each other. Practitioners who are frequently in this negative place rarely succeed at developing their practices to the next level, regardless of their clinical prowess.

If you have a high level of skill and strive to provide more sophisticated and complex esthetic and restorative services, it is unlikely you will do so simply by waiting for it to happen. Practices filled with patients who seek fine, complete restorative services have first created positive value in the minds of their target audience — they have *branded* themselves with a reputation for consistently providing high-quality restorative care.

Personal branding

Personal branding is the process by which you carefully manage how your practice is perceived. In essence, you strategically influence how others think of your practice by carefully cultivating your personal reputation. This is achieved by effectively communicating to others how you can help them, what you believe in, and how you get things done. When personal branding is accomplished in an organic and unobtrusive fashion, it causes others to think that they’ve developed their perception of you all by themselves.

Once created, a personal brand is powerful and compelling. It becomes your “proxy self” by giving certain people good reasons to choose your practice, even when you are not around. Of equal importance, it gives reasons for others not to choose your practice, thus avoiding conflicts created by incompatible expectations. In this way, effective personal branding becomes a “self-screening tool.” It allows prospective patients to decide much earlier in a relationship, often before they even enter into one, whether or not a particular dentist is the best resource for them to address

their needs and desires.

Your personal brand keeps your practice and capabilities on people’s minds. It reminds them of your uniqueness and value, making you a contender to provide more of the kind of dentistry you want to be doing, and that makes you feel good about what you’re doing. When you and your team feel good about yourselves, you are much more likely to grow personally and profession-

ally. Thus, a positive personal brand causes growth in yourself, your staff, and your patients. And by patient growth, I am not referring to a simple measurement of increased volume, but a measurement of the increase in the value new patients place in your ability to help them achieve their oral health objectives.

Lastly, the process of personal branding must be authentic and fit with the overall practice development strategy, a principle-centered evolution catalyzed by internal and external marketing activities. Thus, dentists can’t “fake their way to the top.” Personal branding is what Avrom King called an “inside-out” process, and what L.D. Pankey referred to as an activity you must “have on the shelf first.”

The final outcome

The final outcome is that when prospective patients contact your practice, the same tone, image, philosophy, and

Benefits of Personal Branding

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- ➔ It keeps your practice and capabilities on people’s minds.
- ➔ It causes growth in yourself, your staff, and your patients.

approach are experienced that was projected via marketing initiatives, and are thus *expected* by the individual. And when patients finally arrive, they *feel* good about themselves and the choices they make in your presence. Hence, *personal branding is about managing how others feel about themselves when they are in direct or indirect contact with your practice. And when strategically accomplished, personal branding can be both practice- and life-changing.*

In my final article in this series, Dana Ackley, PhD, an internationally known expert and author about emotional intelligence, and I will explore the new-patient process, how emotional intelligence plays a significant role, and how this key system can make or break your plans to develop a fine esthetic restorative practice. **DE**

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