



## **Dentist Split on the Ethics of Dental Marketing: The Wealthy Dentist Survey Results**

*Dentists are in an ethical quandary when it comes to dental marketing, according to a Wealthy Dentist poll. Just over half of dentists reported feeling that dental practice marketing is bad for the profession in the eyes of the public. However, with dental advertising more common than ever, many feel pressured to join the game in order to stay competitive.*

Tiburon, CA, July 29, 2007 --([PR.com](#))-- Though [dental marketing](#) has become widespread, most dentists are torn over the ethics of advertising, as reported in a recent survey of dentists conducted by The Wealthy Dentist. When asked if [dental patient marketing](#) sullies the reputation of dentists in the eyes of the public, respondents were split on the issue. The slight majority (54%) felt that dental practitioners should hold themselves to a higher ethical code than used car salesmen. The other 46% of respondents believe that today's world is filled with ads, and consumers won't judge a dentist negatively for advertising.

Specialists were significantly more opposed to dental marketing and advertising than general dentists. As the general dental marketplace becomes more competitive, general dentists are more likely to feel they must actively market their practices in order to stay in business. Specialists, on the other hand, are more likely to receive new patients via referrals from other dental practitioners.

Those outside of the dental industry are unlikely to realize how different marketing dentistry is from other services. For many years, dentists who engaged in marketing and advertising were viewed as unprofessional, the health-care equivalent of a personal injury lawyer putting ads on late-night TV. Even modest dental practice marketing campaigns were ridiculed, criticized, and taken to court.

Over the years, it has become clear that dentists who want to remain competitive need to have some sort of marketing plan. However, the ADA has strict marketing guidelines against "false or misleading" advertising. For example, a dentist's marketing materials must not "contain a material, objective representation, whether express or implied, that the advertised services are superior in quality to those of other dentists, if that representation is not subject to reasonable substantiation." Claiming that one is better than one's competitors (the core concept behind most marketing programs) is not an option in dental practice marketing.

"If it diminished the profession in any way, the public would not go to those docs, and the ads in the phone book would be getting smaller. As it is, some ads are now two pages. It's a far cry from the ad that got me in trouble with the dental board 25 years ago," said a Georgia dentist.

It used to be that dentists depended on referrals from friends and family for new patients. "I was brought up to believe that a professional's morals, ethics, quality of dentistry, and honesty brought patients to the office," said a Mississippi dentist. "I have depended on word-of-mouth referrals for the thirty-seven years I have been in practice."



Today, marketing has become such an integral part of the dental industry that those who don't advertise risk falling behind those dentists using internet dental marketing, dental patient newsletters, and other such efforts. "It costs so much to market, it's hard to tell if its working, and we all have to do it to keep up with the other dentists who have started advertising," said one California dentist.

For many dentists, it's a fine line between advertising that's effective and advertising that's unethical. "Marketing itself does not necessarily demean the profession, but the majority of what is going on in dental marketing does," opined a Texas orthodontist. A New Jersey periodontist agreed, saying, "While most is ethical, it walks a fine line." Complained one Illinois dentist, "Too much unneeded 'cosmetic dentistry.'"

Many expressed concerns that dental advertising lowers the public's esteem for the profession. "Heavy advertising reduces dentistry to a commodity rather than a professional service," said a North Carolina dentist. "We are cheapening our profession," moaned a Washington general dentist. "I am very disturbed in the direction the profession is headed... 'Pain free dentistry' as opposed to what? Painful? It is all feeding into a very unprofessional, cut-throat and unethical atmosphere."

Of course, there's no shortage of those cheering for dental patient marketing. "Today's consumers rely on advertising to make their choices," said a New Hampshire dentist. "People used to rely on neighbors to recommend dentists. Now you are lucky if you meet your neighbor within five years. I have increased my advertising over the past 18 months, and it has been very rewarding financially."

The sheer effectiveness of dentist marketing campaigns has convinced many. "It doesn't matter whether or not we think it negatively affects the public's opinion; it only matters what they think. And since the marketing is so effective if done right, then they obviously are okay with it," commented a Pennsylvania dentist/manager.

Some feel it is just not professional for health care providers to loudly advertise their services. "When was the last time that you saw splashy ads (like those common among dentists) placed by your local neurosurgeons or obstetricians? How about anesthesiologists? Pediatric oncologists? Those doctors are regarded by the public as professionals because they act like professionals," said a California dentist. "Dentists are increasingly not so regarded because they increasingly do not act like professionals."

To some, it simply comes down to the financial bottom line. "Something has changed over the years, and 'higher ethical codes' don't pay for college tuition for the kids, nor do they pay into one's retirement!" observed a Texas dental sales consultant. "Unfortunately, some dentists did not recognize early on that they were running a business. Because of their inability to market themselves, the business ends up running the dentists and they fall prey to the 'PPO Plague' just to get rear ends in the chairs... If one wants to gain back control of their business they must first change their way of thinking and understand that marketing is part of the game. (Yes, a game.) Every dentist needs to market themselves in all ways, always."

"Sooner or later, all dentists will realize that if they don't market their dental practices, they're going to go



out of business," said Jim Du Molin, founder of both The Wealthy Dentist and the Internet Dental Alliance. " A lot of them still have a hard time with this; it makes them feel dirty somehow. Sure, some dental marketing campaigns are unethical, but it's not fair to paint the entire dental marketing industry with that same brush. I've saved many a dental practice myself."

For additional information on this and other Wealthy Dentist surveys, as well as more dentist comments, visit [www.thewealthydentist.com/survey](http://www.thewealthydentist.com/survey).

The Wealthy Dentist is a dental marketing and dental management resource featuring dental consulting expert Jim Du Molin. The site's weekly surveys and dental newsletters are viewed by thousands of dentists across the United States and Canada. The Wealthy Dentist is a sister company of the Internet Dental Alliance, Inc. ([www.internetdentalalliance.com](http://www.internetdentalalliance.com)). IDA is the largest provider of websites for dentists, email patient newsletters and dental directories in North America.

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