

## GENERATING REPEAT BUSINESS

By William Neal

The worlds of dental technology and dentistry are moving forward at a rapid pace. New developments in materials and CAD/CAM technology, advanced digital impressions, and a host of other new products too numerous to mention, have created an onslaught of advertising and marketing campaigns all aimed at taking a piece of your business. As a result, you and your laboratory may lose a chunk of your customer base to the companies who offer these new products and services. However, if you concentrate on key elements of good customer relationship management, you may find them returning to do business with you once again.

Some Key Elements of Generating Repeat Business:

- Put your customer first
- Focus on service
- Provide technical and industry information
- Get the first case right
- Stay ahead of the competition

### *Put your customers first*

Keeping your existing customers is the singular most important thing you can do to keep your company viable. Inevitably, as with any industry, some of your customers will move, pass on, or retire. Yet, if you focus on getting to know your customers and provide them with what they want and need, you stand a better chance of keeping them over a long term. In the coming years, it is important that you pay close attention to information regarding Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as it involves getting to know your customers. While it may seem that CRM is for larger companies, its fundamentals boil down to how businesses interconnect with their customers, irregardless of company size. In his article on the subject, Norman Jones, a solutions consultant for JD Edwards wrote, "It is vital now more than ever that companies retain existing customers and encourage repeat purchases as the task of acquiring new customers is costly and time consuming."

### *Focus on Service*

Essentially, laboratories need to do everything in their power to make sure that they handle existing customers correctly; in other words, they need to provide exceptional service. Essential components in providing such a service are both maintaining a consistent level of quality in all of your delivered work, and providing fluid communication within the laboratory. Communications with anyone in the laboratory must be based on a good knowledge set that pertains to each unique customer. This means that all likes, dislikes, case preferences, and all other idiosyncrasies should be noted. Moreover, all laboratory personnel who have contact with a particular dental office must also be aware of these specifics. Performing this process not only makes for better communication, but also conveys to your customers that you care about them, and that they are important to you and your business. Above all, people like to know that their business is

appreciated. If they feel that way, you will have a better chance of keeping them when small problems do come up.

#### *Provide Technical and Industry Information*

It is important to understand that your customers rely on you for information on the newest, latest, and greatest products and services that are available. Selling existing customers more products and services is contingent on having good information about their practices; their needs and wants; and their perception of value regarding laboratory services. What are their goals? How do they like to treat their patients? What kinds of services or products interest them? What kinds of problems or issues have they had with unsuccessful laboratory relationships?

Cross-selling services to generate repeat business in a dental laboratory is an art, and this art requires good communication. Your customers will have to become aware of all of the products and services your laboratory has to offer; therefore, you are responsible for providing various methods that will raise this awareness. With a program in place that allows you to continually inform your existing dentists of services they have not used, you will open the door for additional business. Cross selling takes constant communication, which may occur via phone, by mail, or through seminars.

#### *Get the First Case Right*

The first case is an excellent opportunity to start the business relationship off on the right foot. The next step, and a rather important one, is simply placing a phone call to let the dental office know that you received their case. Astonishingly, there are laboratories out there who never call the dentist that sends in their case. Imagine: a dentist sends a case to a laboratory for the first time. No one calls when the case comes in to the laboratory. What can the dentist be thinking at this point? The dental laboratory business is about relationships, and the most trying time for a dentist is sending a case to an unknown laboratory. Even if the laboratory was referred to the dentist, he or she still needs to have some form of communication with their destination laboratory. It is important that laboratories convey a genuine sense of concern to their doctors; a sense that everything will go right with the case from start to finish.

At some point, you might ask to discuss with the doctor some particulars about the restoration, as well as any specific preferences he or she may have. Since the doctor is most likely with a patient, your call is a good time to introduce yourself to the person on the other end of the line. After all, they may be one of the most important people in the dental office. Get to know the person and their responsibilities—and, most importantly, be truly interested! After introductions, ask for a more convenient time to call and discuss the case with the doctor. Make a note of the best time to call and follow through. However simplistic it may sound, these steps will help you establish and maintain healthy, long-lasting relationships with your clients.

After the case is completed, consider having the case delivered by someone who can discuss technical details about the case. If this is not possible, call the office after the doctor has had

some time to inspect the case thoroughly. At this point, ask the doctor what he or she noticed about the case. Hey, I know we don't like to do this, but sooner or later it's going to come up. Why not sooner? Are we afraid to hear something we don't want to hear? Better to find out than risk losing a customer. Plus, it's a good opportunity to learn more about what the dentist expects from his or her dental laboratory.

After delivery, call the office and ask to speak to the doctor to find out how the case went. This is the basis for building your laboratory's long-term *business* relationship with the dental office. If it went well, it is okay to ask when you might see the next case. If it didn't go well, you'll need to find out why in order to correct any deficiency. These are basic customer relations rules which successful dental laboratories perform routinely. Following them can help your laboratory run smoother, and you will be able to make, win back, or maintain your customers over a long term.

### *Stay Ahead of the Competition*

Many successful laboratories are continually finding ways to provide the newest technologies to attract new customers. Many of these new materials have stirred interest with the dental profession, and offering them can do several things for your laboratory. First, when you offer new technology, your doctors perceive that you are on the leading edge—helping you attract clients who want to experiment with those technologies and materials. Secondly, because you are marketing your laboratory along with the technology, you are attracting new dentists to your laboratory.

Once you have decided to offer a new technology, don't keep it a secret. Utilize newsletters, opt-in e-brochures, e-newsletters, and a well thought out direct mail campaign to inform current and potential customers. Additionally, statement stuffers, case stuffers, as well as seminars and clinics go a long way to inform dentists about the services and techniques you offer...all important aspects of generating repeat business for your laboratory.