



# Dr. Joyce Bassett on marketing: “It works and really won’t cost you a lot”

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*Dr. Dalin: This month we are talking with Dr. Joyce Bassett, a cosmetic and restorative dentist in Scottsdale, Ariz. Dr. Bassett is going to address the marketing and branding of dental practices. We are in one of the toughest economic periods in the history of this country. Many dentists are experiencing this economic “pinch” on their bottom lines. Joyce, I know that you have had great success in marketing your practice. How do you recommend that dentists approach marketing during this difficult economic time?*



**Dr. Joyce Bassett**

**Dr. Bassett:** I think I have an innate sense and intuitive feel for marketing. The “market” is always a complex place. During these times of national financial strain, it is particularly challenging. It is important to understand that “marketing” and “advertising” are not the same thing.

Marketing in our practice is basically an ongoing quality improvement process. We work on it every day, and continually seek to improve it. The overall marketing plan and brand differentiation is a continuous process and an integrated part of our culture. It is not greatly impacted by the state of the economy. The budgetary constraints that are a reality today, therefore, only directly impact the “advertising” component of marketing.

During these times of challenging economic conditions, all our clinical schedules have slowed. This presents a great opportunity to spend more time with the patients we do have. I am less stressed for time and, consequently, I use this space to develop relationships with my patients. I become better acquainted with them and become more astute at understanding their needs. Thus, I can better understand what I can do to create value for them. This is a prime example of internal marketing and something all of us can master.

This available time has also allowed me to become a better businessperson. I have “trimmed the fat” by cutting supply, laboratory, and direct labor costs. This decrease in expenses provides a cushion of security, and in fact, has allowed me to invest more heavily in external marketing (advertising) at a time when most practices have scaled back.

Since others have made cutbacks in this area, I think that I now have greater exposure.

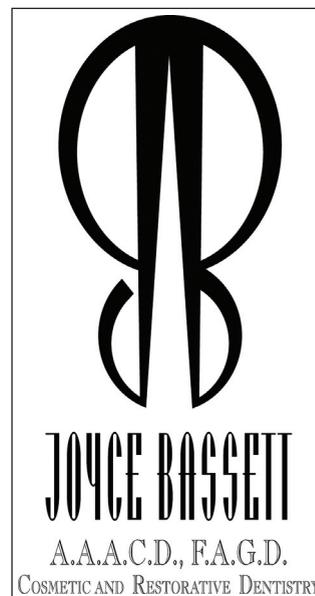
*Dr. Dalin: Branding is something that helps give you an edge in competitive markets. Can you talk about branding in general, and how it can be used in a dental practice?*

**Dr. Bassett:** Advertising is the part of marketing that heightens the awareness of your presence to the market. It needs to identify your “brand” but it cannot sustain the brand image unless the total product can validate the advertised message. The “brand” is the value the market places on a given product. Branding is the alignment of advertising, treatment environment, patient management, technical result, and realization of the patients’ expectations of these factors.

In our case, we make no compromises in our effort to produce and deliver a highly differentiated product. This is a global approach to the management of our patients. This includes creating an environment, service-wise as well as environmentally, that communicates excellence with no compromises. It begins with our first patient contact. Each subsequent interaction is designed to validate our commitment to patients and the excellence they can expect.

The final product, even if perfectly executed from a technical and surgical perspective, will only be perceived as congruent with our brand if it meets the high expectations of our patients. In order for this to occur, we not only need to communicate our brand and create appreciation for our product, but we must listen to patients so that we can understand their goals and expectations and provide the needed education. Through this process, we can align expectations with realistically attainable goals and assure satisfaction.

*Dr. Dalin: I know that if you research about branding, you need to do the following: 1) Find the attributes and features that target markets really want, 2) Develop a profile of your target market, 3) Give your product a*



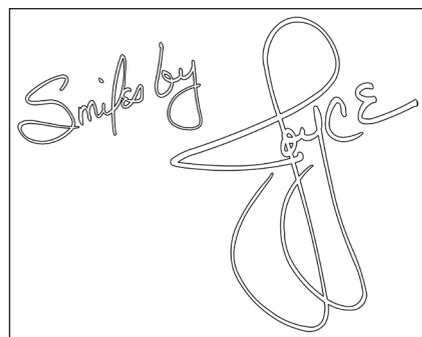
differentiated position, 4) Discover the perceived benefits of your product, 5) Create a name that communicates, 6) Develop messaging and imagery that rapidly communicates the benefits of your product. In dental terms, you can think of this as: a) What is your mission statement? b) What are the benefits and features of your products or services? c) What do your patients think of your practice? d) What are the qualities you want patients to associate with your practice? Can this be used in our practices?

**Dr. Bassett:** Dentistry today really provides two functions for patients. The first is the traditional role of the dentist. I refer to this as “the dentistry that we need”... that is to be a provider of health care. This includes traditional preventive health interventions and eradication of oral diseases. The second service is a newer phenomenon. I refer to this as the “dentistry that we want”... that is the provision of cosmetic treatment. This may not be “medically necessary” but helps the patient’s self esteem.

My patients know they are getting the best care possible in dentistry today. I am result-oriented and even my most demanding patients often need to be educated as to why we are making changes to what they perceive as already good results. I do each case with the anticipation of it being published and for case submission for fellowship in the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD). My patients think my “practice and I are both over the top.” I am proud to be thought of in this manner.

*Dr. Dalin: What about logos and taglines? Are they important?*

**Dr. Bassett:** They are important to the extent that they must be in harmony with your brand. For instance, if your



market position is well-differentiated, the logo and tagline must be also. If your practice is a high-volume mass production PPO-based practice, the logo and tagline should reflect this market position. In my practice, the logo

“Smiles by Joyce” is everywhere in the office. This includes computer screens, signage, stationery, and external marketing products. Therefore, your first task is to do some introspective thinking and decide what kind of practice you have.

*Dr. Dalin: What are your favorite ways to market your practice? Are you a fan of Web sites? What about direct mail, coupons, and gifts to referring patients?*

Through the years, I have found that word of mouth is the most powerful and effective way to attract patients who will value our services and be happy with the care they receive.

**Dr. Bassett:** Our most powerful message and practice builder is through word-of-mouth internal marketing. We take great care of our patients and deliver excellent products and results that meet or exceed their expectations. Through the years, I have found that word of mouth is the most powerful and effective way to attract patients who will value our services and be happy with the care they receive.

External marketing through print advertising, Web site search engine optimization — and perhaps most importantly — community involvement, have proven to be beneficial in attracting new patients. Good marketing of a practice does not need to be monetarily costly. It will cost a great deal of personal time and dedication. Coupons and direct mail are probably most effective in the high-volume oriented practice. This method of external marketing is not consistent with my brand, but many find it useful.

*Dr. Dalin: An interview with you would not be complete without talking about continuing education. What should our readers consider annually in terms of continuing education?*

**Dr. Bassett:** Continuing education is the lifeblood of any doctor regardless of market position. In fact, it reflects the very soul of our profession. It is the commitment we make to the profession and the patients we treat. My commitment to continuing education is about being the best that I can be and is a separate issue from the business aspect of my career. **DE**

*Joyce Bassett, DDS, graduated from the Ohio State University School of Dentistry. She is a Fellow and past president of the Academy of General Dentistry, an Accredited member of the AACD, a Fellow in the International Academy of Dental Facial Aesthetics, and has served on the editorial board of Practical Procedures & Aesthetic Dentistry. She is also the founder of the Women Teaching Women learning center, which is located in Scottsdale, Ariz. Contact Dr. Bassett by phone at (480) 367-8889, by e-mail at drmouthy@aol.com, or visit her Web site at www.drbassett.com.*

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