A STRONG "BENEFITS LIST" BENEFITS YOU!

By Nancy Hyman

The challenges orthodontists face today in building and maintaining a successful practice far outpace concerns of the past. I typically receive weekly calls and e-mails from providers expressing apprehension over the state of their practice. In addition to the volume of solo practitioners within reach of a keyboard, the general public is also inundated with choices of dentists practicing orthodontics and the mushrooming of dental service organizations. With the advent of Internet searches, it appears that all practices are the same in the eye of the viewer, and the potential patient or parent may make determinations based on what seems to be equal choices, with cost being the only variable. Not true!

A progressive orthodontic office provides a myriad of patient service features. However, these excellent amenities are often the best-kept secret in town! Your target audience for spreading the word is extensive: the past, current, and future patients; parents; dental practices; and the community at large. As a practice growth consultant and promotional manager for Hyman Orthodontics, I have the opportunity to create lists and share utilization strategies within our practice and with practices nationwide. Every practice can create an advantageous reputation with a dynamic benefits list and strong support backing it up. Your ultimate goal is increasing your distinction at every step of the way, from a referral to patient enrollment.

The first step in turning your benefits list into a marketing tool is creating a vibrant list. Does your team know what you offer?

What about services that are common to the orthodontic practice: complimentary initial exams and records, progress panoramic x-rays, interest-free payment plans, etc.? Claim them!

Create a list of fifteen to twenty services and amenities provided by your practice. Gather your team into groups of two and ask them to brainstorm their list. Read each list and devise your final product based on common elements. Many of the benefits culled from the brainstorm list will match based on a clear mission and marketing plan for the practice.

Be very specific about benefit attributes. Consider complimentary beverages, reminder calls via text and e-mail, a game room, etc. Instead of stating you provide excellent customer service, show the reader clearly defined attributes that set your practice apart.

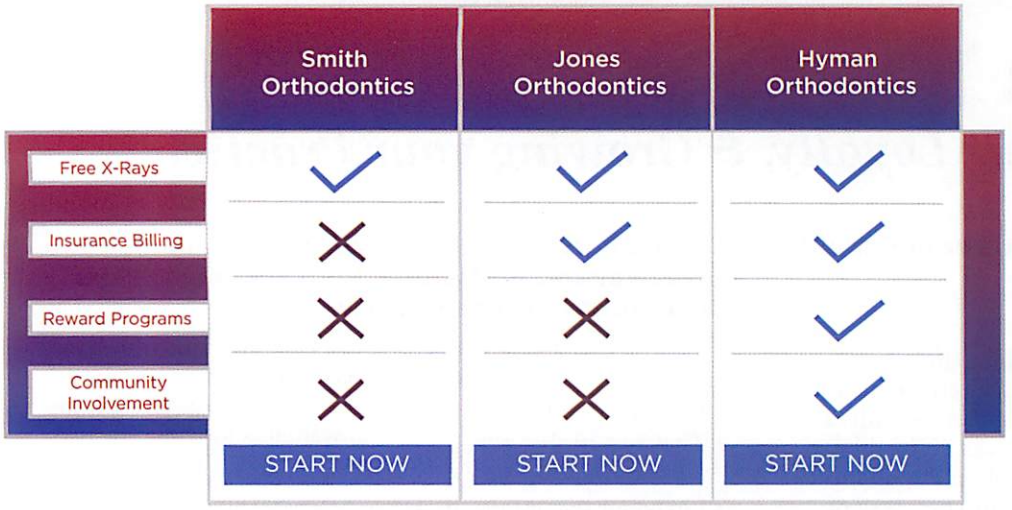
What about services that are common to the orthodontic practice: complimentary initial exams and records, progress panoramic x-rays, interest-free payment plans, etc.? Claim them! The patient or parent is not aware that practices may offer similar benefits. Although practices may offer amenities related to patient rewards, your rewards are certainly unique to you.

Look at categories when compiling your list. It may be helpful to create separate groupings—clinical, rewards, parent and patient services, facility, financial ease, community involvement, etc.—to make your list more appealing. A few suggestions in each category include the following:

- Clinical: Complimentary x-rays (or records), retainer checks, observation appointments
- Rewards: Oral hygiene program, referral promotions, Facebook drawings
- Financial ease: In-house interest-free financing, insurance billing, no down payment option
- Community involvement: Charities supported by the practice

Create one "marquis" amenity that actually sets you apart from the competition. At Hyman Orthodontics I display a Spin it! Rewards Wheel. The custom wheel is a visual reminder of patient rewards and is supported by posters, e-mail blasts, website presence, and Facebook posts. The wheel figures prominently in our benefits list and marketing because it is an experience not encountered at surrounding practices.

Train your team to understand each benefit fully, and to be able to answer questions and assist in explaining and implementing promotions. If you reward patients, fully entrench your team in the steps to success; make sure they know the reward requirements and how to award



prizes.

Now that you have created your unique benefits list, spread the word! Do not be the best-kept secret in your community.

Select key points to promote. Internally, add a few points to the new patient phone script. Give your caller specific reasons to show up for that first appointment. Include a benefits list in the e-mailed reminder letter and new patient packet. I recommend transitioning away from a brochure and replacing it with a new patient packet with stepped inserts. The inserts may be updated individually to introduce new amenities. The doctor's resume, patient rewards, an Invisalign promotion, Kids' Club membership, a profile of the doctor's role in the community, and a benefits list are all excellent subjects for the stepped inserts. Include a warm welcome letter as well. Verbalize a few key points during the office tour and use them as talking points while waiting for the doctor during the initial exam and recall appointments. The full list may be presented during a fee presentation as well. I recommend displaying a laminated copy in the treatment coordinator room for discussion while waiting for the doctor. Certainly a quick appearance by the doctor is optimum; however, access to the benefits list as a conversational tool will smooth over the awkward silence that can occur during the waiting period.

What about utilizing the list for your referring dental offices? (Include other specialties such as periodontists, oral surgeons, and endodontists in your outreach.) Your referring offices do not know the exciting benefits you provide. Incorporate unfamiliar offices with your current referring offices. Presenting a benefits list to an unfamiliar office is a clever way to introduce yourself to unknown doctors. Offices may be given a laminated benefits list to familiarize the dental team with your practice.

Patients and parents are searching for a practice that will fulfill their needs. A benefits list and the attendant implementation will help the seeker match his or her needs and desires with the perfect practice.

Supplement your practice representative's (PR) visit with targeted messages from the benefits list. Select one or two points per visit and back them up with a written announcement. Consider designing a packet specifically for the referring doctor and team that includes a benefits list. Arming your PR with tools for a smooth visit will guarantee a positive response.

Don't forget to include a portion of the benefits list reflected in the dental referral card. When the dental team offers the prospective patient three different options and your card is a real reference piece; you can be confident that a call to your office will be made with enthusiasm.

The primary power behind the benefits list is a cohesive message about your practice. The dental or patient-to-patient referral suggests many incredible benefits are to be had by selecting your practice. This message is emphasized when the prospective patient or parent visits your website. The new patient call confirms key attributes. The collateral materials—the welcome letter, new patient packet, and practice posters—support your message as well. The office tour continues the theme of excellence and amenities.

Patients and parents are searching for a practice that will fulfill their needs. A benefits list and the attendant implementation will help the seeker match his or her needs and desires with the perfect practice. When you provide a potential patient with a complete sense of the practice, patient enrollment follows. When every step in the process is presented with confidence and style, the potential patient and responsible party cannot help but be wowed by your practice. Consistency is the key to choosing your practice in spite of perceived obstacles of fees and other areas of concern. Think of full immersion in the promotion of your benefits list as an insurance policy against lackluster competition.