

ORTHODONTIC PRODUCTS
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PATIENT CONTESTS
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Since most referrals come from friends and family, building relationships with current patients is essential for practice growth. Progressive practices continually look to improve internal patient relationships, deliver better value, create greater patient loyalty, and know patients better. Internal contests or events involve patients beyond their wire adjustments and help develop relationships between patients and the orthodontic team.

Recipe for Success

In general, your contests or events will follow the same structure in planning and implementation. Below are the steps to consider along the way.

1. Decide on a budget. Commonly, \$250 to \$350 per quarter is a good average.
2. Ask for volunteers to form an internal marketing committee. Typically, two to three staff members are needed to plan and implement the programs.
3. Select the type of contest based on the season, current events, school year, holiday, or special annual event. All contests can be modified to work with patients and referring dental practices.
4. Create posters, fliers, and entry slips. Take the posters to your local copy center and enlarge to 11" x 17" minimum. Laminate the posters or purchase acrylic frames and display.
5. Decide on your prizes. You can poll patients and staff members about desirable prizes. Cash and gift certificates work well because they are fitting prizes for both children and adult patients. Gift certificates can be from local malls, music stores, movie theaters, video arcades, or restaurants.
Consider your theme. For example, if the contest is to guess how many yards of floss, your prize may be a new electric toothbrush or a basket full of oral hygiene products. Be creative.
6. Set a time frame for the contest. Typically, a contest should run for 10 to 12 weeks, allowing all patients to participate at least once, maybe twice.

Spread the Word

Create fliers to post throughout the practice, reminding patients to participate. You may consider making fliers in-house and even allocating a computer to marketing projects.

Laminate or frame your fliers to post throughout the office. Nothing looks worse than a piece of paper taped or thumb tacked to the wall with tattered edges and smudges. You are a professional office delivering high quality service—do not scrimp on the small details

For best results, publicize the contest as much as possible on internal materials. Include a message about your contest and prizes on appointment slips, confirmation systems, websites, statements, and the check-in screen or office marquee. You must also create an entry slip to hand to each patient at check-in, in the operatory, and/or at check-out.

Fliers can also be sent to recall patients. These patients **MAY** not be due for another 6 months, but they drive by the office every day on the way to the grocery store or school. Let them stop by and play. It is your choice on retention patients, who are your word-of-mouth referral base. Keeping these loyal patients thinking about your practice is free marketing.

With proper authorization, take photographs of your patients, parents, or referring dentists participating in your events. Send the photographs and a brief write up to your local newspaper or community bulletins.

Create an office policy/standard and/or agreement that states, “All team members and doctor(s) will actively participate and promote the agreed by contest, event, or established incentive programs. The success or failure of any program is a by-product of the enthusiasm of the team members and doctor

With a little time, contests can be a fun way to engage patients in the practice and encourage them to spread the word to friends and neighbors.

Contest Idea

For under \$150, you can put on an exciting event and help your local animal shelter. You will need four large baskets, four to six large posters, announcements, entry slips, and prizes.

The goal is to fill four large baskets with dog and cat food, blankets, kitty litter, and toys to deliver to the local animal shelter. For each item patients bring, they are entitled to fill out an entry slip to win your great prize. That means if a patient brings in six cans of dog food, she can fill out six entry slips.

Use a large laundry basket to hold the supplies. To sort supplies, each basket should be labeled: kittens, cats, puppies, and dogs.

Decorate your bulletin board with pictures of cats and dogs. Create posters and fliers to place throughout the practice. If you use statements, include a stuffer announcing the

event and ask for donations. Also, be sure to add a note on your walk-out-appointment slips.

Call your referring dental practices, and ask them if you can drop off a poster and basket for their patients. The dental practices could have their own drawings and prizes. You just provide them with the tools to put on the event in their offices.

Once the contest is over, hold the drawing, and take the baskets to your local animal shelter. You may consider having the winners of the contest go with you to present the baskets. This event is newsworthy—call your local paper to let them know about the contest and the day you are delivering the baskets. Make sure to take pictures at the office and at the animal shelter.