

Win the Waiting Game

Making On-Hold Systems Work for Your Practice

Orthodontic practices today are looking for ways to market their practice and expertise to new patients and existing patients. Isn't what we need called a practice spokes person? Someone who can make connections with new and existing patients, inform patients on current procedures, doctor and staff credentials, general practice information, answer frequently asked questions and promote upcoming events and contests. In other words, a spoke person in the know who can get the word out and work for your practice. A spokes person you say, that sounds expensive. You don't have to go out and hire a new employee or a marketing firm. What you need to do is use your on-hold messaging; it is easy, inexpensive, you control its content and the "spokes person" will work for you 24/7.

General Practice Information: Shannon, your patient is at work and a co-worker asked about an orthodontist. She gives them your name, Dr. Smith and recalls at her last visit seeing a sign at the front desk stating the practice's new website. Shannon wants to give the web site address to the co-worker but can't remember what she saw, so she decides to call the office. When Shannon calls the office, the receptionist is busy scheduling an appointment and places Shannon on hold for a moment. While on hold, Shannon hears the website address, writes it down and decides to hang up. That was all she needed. Shannon gives the web site address to her co-worker and the receptionist has one less blinking light to deal with on her telephone.

Solicits New Business A mother calls your practice to schedule a new patient exam. You place them on hold while you are scheduling another patient. While she is holding, she hears about adult treatment, clear braces and lingual orthodontics. She was only calling to schedule her daughter for an exam, but after hearing 30% of your patients are adults and many are choosing clear or lingual braces she decides to schedule an exam for herself. All thanks to the receptionist for being busy and the power of your on hold messages.

Basic information A caller needs to know your office hours for the upcoming week and where you are located. It is 3:30 in the afternoon, patients are stacked on each other and your receptionist is busy and has to place them on hold while she takes care of the three patients in line to schedule an appointment. While on hold, your caller hears office hours and location—which is all she needed anyway. She hangs up and continues with her day. Everyone is happy!

Branding You're a "high tech" office, with "soft touch" customer service, your brand is "we make our patients smile". You and your team have spent many hours and thousands of dollars marketing to patients, dentists and the community. For pennies every caller placed on hold will hear your brand and what it means. Think about how many phone calls come into your practice in a week and how many potential contacts you can make.

Calms "hot" emotions One of your patients received an incorrect statement from you. When they call you, they are a little frustrated. While the financial coordinator places the caller on hold to check the patient's contract and ledger, the caller hears cool music and a pleasant voice assuring the caller that "we're doing everything we can to come back to your call just as soon as possible" as well as "patient satisfaction is important to us."

Credentials As the patient is placed on hold they hear your message which includes, "little known facts such as, Dr. Valant is a graduate of West Point, was an Airborne Ranger in the U.S. Army and currently teaches orthodontic students at Baylor one half day a week. These messages reinforce your professional accomplishments and add a sense of "this is who I want to take care of my needs".

Perception is Reality There's nothing worse than a patient calling your practice and being placed on hold to "dead silence"—it makes you wonder if you've been disconnected or worst of all forgotten. On top of that, the caller begins to form a negative opinion about the practice because it appears you didn't think through every aspect of your relationship with them—in person, on the phone, and on hold. Too many practices miss opportunities to shape how their patients feel about them—all because they neglected their patients' on-hold experience.

Here are some facts to consider:

AT&T Study

- More than 70% of business calls are placed on hold for an average of 45 to 60 seconds each. 60% of the callers placed on hold hang up, and 30% of those that hang up never call back. *(These could be potential new patients)*
- 94% of advertising budgets are spent to induce a call and only 6% is spent to handle the call once it comes in. *(What type of investment are you making in your on hold messages and on-going training for your receptionist?)*

North American Telecom

- Callers with silence on hold will abandon their calls in less than one minute. Ninety percent hang up within forty seconds. *(Would you want a new patient to hang up and try another orthodontist?)*

- Callers with music on hold will stay on the line thirty seconds longer than with silence.
- Callers with information on hold will stay on the line for up to three minutes longer.

US West Communications Study

Providing information on hold results in:

- A 40% increase in retention of callers on hold
- A 15% increase in inquiries
- A 12% direct increase in requests for products and services mentioned on hold. (*This is valuable when you mention more that orthodontic care and break down your services such as: adult treatment, specialize in timing treatment appropriately for children, clear or lingual braces for the esthetic conscious patient*)

More On Hold Facts

- The average executive spends 17 minutes per day on hold. *Office Team Survey*
- The average person spends 60 hours per year on hold. *CNN Survey*
- 55 seconds is the national average hold time for companies with more than two telephone lines. *CNN Survey*
- Over 85% of callers prefer on hold messages over silence. *Cellular Marketing Magazine*
- 1 in 5 respondents made a purchase or a decision based on information they heard while on hold. *Telemarketing Magazine Survey*

Using on-hold messages in your practice provides all your callers a sense of who you are and what your practice is all about. Don't miss out on the opportunity to add this valuable service and marketing tool to your existing marketing plan.

Cathy Sundvall
262 Marabella Loop
Kissimmee, FL 34759
863-427-4346
csundval@earthlink.net