

THE NEW INVISALIGN PATIENT JOURNEY

Third in the series and written by



One of the best pieces of business advice I was ever given was to absolutely nail my patient journey before I spend a penny on advertising, states Martina Hodgson

Four months ago I was about to sit down and write this article. And then Coronavirus happened. Our dental practices closed their doors, and so did the world.

Reeling from that knockout blow, with little birdies still tweeting round my head, Looney Tunes style, the novelty of all day (every day) drinking and Netflix marathons eventually subsided. Deciding home schooling was not my calling, I thought I might have a crack at drumming up some business.

I recorded a short video inviting people to have a video consultation for Invisalign, and spent a modest few quid on Facebook advertising to test the waters. Lo and behold, the response was massive! People were sat at home all day with time and money on their hands. The cost of advertising was cheap as competition was low, and

every lead that we contacted picked up the phone! By the end of lockdown my Treatment Coordinator Tracie and I were crazy busy

needs to be spot on. It is like a relay race where every member of your team needs to smoothly and perfectly pass the baton on.

If they drop the baton, you've lost the patient, and the money you spent on attracting that patient has been a waste. It takes a lot of training and the right people to win gold in the relay.



THE OLD PATIENT JOURNEY

Pre-Coronavirus, a lead (new enquiry) would contact us, either through Google Ads, Facebook Ads, social media, or directly. The lead would be nurtured through a specialist dental CRM (Customer Relationship Management system) called Dengro, which is a

website that collects the details of the person interested in Invisalign.

Dengro sends your leads automated emails and text messages and you can use it to set reminders to contact the patient again if you haven't got through the first time. It is more than worth the small monthly investment.

Once we received the lead we would contact them via telephone to arrange a free consultation with my treatment coordinator. This is an important step as it starts the relationship building process and qualifies the leads (meaning the tyre-kickers and those not appropriate for treatment are weeded out). We would take a £20 refundable deposit for the consultation which prevented no-shows.

The face to face consultation would then take place with my TCO, who would talk the patient through the Invisalign system,

doing video consultations and had 20 new Invisalign patients booked in for when we reopened our doors, with deposits paid. As you can imagine, that is an almighty weight off any practice owner's shoulders when you've just spent four months worrying how to keep your business afloat and your team in jobs.

NAIL YOUR PATIENT JOURNEY

One of the best pieces of business advice I was ever given was to absolutely nail my patient journey before I spend a penny on advertising.

And so I did. It was hard work and took a long time. It is also a constantly evolving process. From the minute a patient makes contact with the practice, through whatever channel that might be, every touch point

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Martina recently gained the Postgraduate Diploma in Clear Aligner Therapy from the City of London Dental School, sits on the Private Dentistry Journal Editorial Advisory Board and regularly writes articles for the dental press.

She is the co-founder of Inspiring Women in Dentistry, organising events, mentoring and support for women in dentistry, and her awards include Dentist of the Year (highly commended), Best Team UK, Best Patient Care and Practice of the Year.

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carry out an iTero scan and show them the outcome simulation of what their teeth could look like after treatment. If they decided they would like to go ahead with treatment they would then get booked in with the Invisalign doctor for their oral health assessment, orthodontic assessment and records. We would take a non-refundable £100 deposit for this appointment.

THE POST-COVID-19 PATIENT JOURNEY

Just as we thought we'd got a good thing going, Coronavirus turned out to be a real party-pooper. Prisoners in our own homes, we had to rethink our approach. I could see there was a demand for cosmetic dentistry out there. So we had a go at video consultations, each time learning how to refine our process further.

We found that patients loved them. Surprisingly, we were still able to build great rapport, and patients were becoming used to video conferencing technology, whether they were using it for work, or to catch up with their mates online. Stressed-out parents with wild eyes attempting to home-school, furloughed employees still in their pyjamas, and the new army of people working from home all loved the new video format.

The problem we had was how to give any meaningful kind of consultation without seeing the patient's teeth. We know that when patients attend for an initial consultation for Invisalign they want to know four things:

1. Am I suitable?
2. How much will it cost?
3. How long will it take?
4. Why should I trust you?

DENTAL MONITORING

Answering these questions was made easier when my Dental Monitoring (an orthodontic remote monitoring company) area manager got in touch to let me know that a new Artificial Intelligence software called Smilemate was being made available for no fee during lockdown.

By sharing the Smilemate link with the patient, they are able to upload photos of their teeth from different angles onto the portal, where you can view the images. But it gets better. Using AI, you can send an amendable automatically created free report to the patient detailing every aspect of their oral health, from toothwear to oral hygiene. You can then host a video consultation through the Smilemate website using a video platform called "Daily", where you can screen share with the patient.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND TELEDENTISTRY

All sounds a bit Will Smith doesn't it?! [Cheesy reference to the film AI] So what is

AI and why on earth should you be interested in it? Ok deep breath, concentrate (I'm talking to myself here).

AI aims to mimic how the animal brain works. The goal is to create intelligent machines that have the ability to achieve goals like humans. But much more efficiently. It often relies heavily on neural networks with deep structures which are basically computing units that act like the synapses in our brain.

Dental Monitoring (who own Smilemate) use Artificial Intelligence based upon machine learning. To develop accurate AI, you first need to collect and then properly tag an enormous amount of data. This is done by a team of 10 "clickers" who sit there looking at submitted photos all day, "teaching" the AI what they see.

From this data the software learns what can be identified within a patient's mouth from the intra oral images taken by the patient. DM's AI can now identify around 180 different clinical situations from the patient's photos. Because patients take photos every week, in just a few years DM has gathered the largest amount of photos of any dental organisation.

After years of training and developing the neural networks, the AI will be able to detect the teeth and label them one by one, detect the gingival and different clinical situations. It will also crop the photos automatically to eliminate everything not related to the oral cavity.

And so the reason you should love AI is that this kind of automation will make your life easier and much more efficient.

HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL VIDEO CONSULTATION

Preparation

It is important to be just as professional during a video call as you would be in person. Make sure you are in a well-lit room – you can use a ring light if necessary. Have a plain background or better still, a branded banner behind you. You should be smartly dressed and presentable, or wearing your scrubs if necessary but no PPE. Ensure your eyes are level with the webcam – you may need to raise the height of your laptop using an object such as books or a box file.

Have everything ready that you want to screenshare open on your laptop and everything else closed. Have the patient's SmileMate photos ready, as this will help you give the patient a much more accurate idea of the type and length of treatment that may be involved.

A pre-prepared, branded PowerPoint presentation looks really professional. Ideas of what you could include on this are:

- Introduce yourself – a photo, qualifications and so on.
- Information on Invisalign – include photos

of IPR and attachments as well as what the aligners look like in and out of the mouth.

- Before and after photos – especially of similar cases.
- Your USP – what makes you special and stand out from the crowd? Why should they pick you?

Presentation

Once you have built initial rapport with your patient you can screen-share your presentation. You can also screen-share the patient's Smilemate photos and discuss with their own individual case.

Remember the four things patients want to know when they attend for their consultation:

1. Am I suitable?
2. How much will it cost?
3. How long will it take?
4. Why should I trust you?

If you answer these questions during the consultation, you are much more likely to convert the patient to treatment.

Sharing before and after photos of similar cases you have completed is particularly powerful. It is also great to share a video testimonial, or an emotional "reveal" video of a patient who has just successfully completed treatment.

Closing

Once you have reached the end of your consultation, explain to the patient the next step should they wish to go further. Offer to book them in for a full assessment and records. Take a non-refundable deposit (such as £100) for this. They may wish to have time to consider their options, which of course is fine, but make sure you have a system to follow up these patients, and offer to arrange a follow up phone call with them in about 3 days time.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Coronavirus has undoubtedly changed the way we work and interact with our patients. The applications for Smilemate are endless, and we have found that video consultations are not only successful but a convenient and in-demand service for our patients.

Done properly, early adopters of these new ways of working will be the most successful, set themselves apart from the competition and be rewarded with a steady stream of income in an uncertain economy.

As Charles Darwin once said, 'It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change.' ●

COMMENTS TO PRIVATE DENTISTRY

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