

Talk of the town

Dr Jaco Smith doubled his patient base through word-of-mouth recommendations.

CASE STUDY



In the 16 months since it opened, The Dental Studio has doubled its client base, built an enviable reputation and seen off tough competition to snare the Outstanding Customer Service Award at the Lloyds TSB Small Business Awards. And it hasn't placed an advert once.

"We've grown the business entirely through word of mouth," says director Dr Jaco Smith. "We've had a tremendous uptake because, who better to recommend you than your patients?"

Success is in the details, for the Jumeirah-based clinic. Smith realised early the importance of marking out a brand, drawing up a mission statement that staff still adhere to today. "You have to decide your identity," he explains. "We are probably a boutique practice, but I never wanted to be the biggest or the most expensive place in Dubai - I wanted to have a great place with great dentistry."

The practice philosophy that worked for Smith was 'creating a smile'. He's drummed it into his team, and he runs his clinic by it. "It literally means

from me putting veneers on a patient's teeth, to the receptionist smiling when they come in; that we try to create a smile every step of the way."

ELIMINATE THE NEGATIVES...

The Dental Studio brand is structured around the results of a survey run by Smith that asked patients to identify what they disliked about visiting the dentist. The results showed three clear winners. "They hate injections, they hate the sound of the drill and they hate the smell," reports Smith. Now, patients are offered a choice of DVD-goggles or an i-pod with custom-made music listings, to block out the sound of the drill. Staff burn essential oils in the clinic to counter the 'sterile' smell patients associate with visits, while Smith personally trains staff on pain-free injection techniques. "While we can't run away from the dental work, we've learnt to do it in such a way that patients feel comfortable."

Internal marketing is another cornerstone of Smith's approach, starting with a personalised approach to customers. Patients fill out a profile before they arrive so the team is familiar with their history. Pre-appointment reminder calls are routine, as are follow-up calls.



PUT UP A PARKING LOT

The clinic's location and décor has also been carefully chosen to reflect the Dental Studio style, starting with its access. "One of the most annoying things in Dubai is the parking," Smith explains. "I got special permission from the municipality to create parking at the front." The goal of a calm patient experience has also been prioritised in the clinic's design. The reception area has a spa-style look, with modern art and wooden floors.

"Customer service starts with getting these things right," Smith stresses. "People don't know what you do in their mouth - but if the clinic looks well, they believe it means we'll take care of their teeth."

Style does come at a price, but one that allows Smith to step away from the dental treadmill. He sees fewer patients and spends more time with the ones he has. "We aren't the most expensive, but we're also not the cheapest," he says matter-of-factly. The cost of a customer-focused approach also doesn't appear to deter patients. "I don't lose patients to other clinics," Smith reports. "These small things make a difference. We're not re-inventing the wheel here, it's just good customer care - and that's the key." ■



• Your clinic creates strong first impressions - make sure they are the right ones.