

Exclusive 2019 National Survey

The
**Secret
Life**
of the
**Dental
Office
Manager**

A Comprehensive
Look at Today's
Practice Management
Professionals



The Secret Life of the Dental Office Manager

Part 1: Today's Practice Management Professionals

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Research Methodology

This report analyzes the results of a nationwide online office manager survey. It includes the answers from 356 dental office managers who took the survey between March 11, 2019 and April 26, 2019.

Executive Summary

This is Futuredontics' fourth survey of dental office managers since 2012. Previous surveys examined the role and responsibilities of managers strictly from a business perspective. The focus was always on operational topics, like daily business priorities, staff training, practice marketing, new patient acquisition, appointing, etc.

For this year's survey, we wanted to give managers the opportunity to share what it's really like to have the toughest job in a dental practice. So, we expanded the scope of our inquiry to include a series of "Secret Life" questions. These were designed to provide new, much-needed insight into the career goals, business concerns and personal challenges of today's practice management professionals.

We want to thank everyone who participated. Your eye-opening responses deepened our understanding and respect for you and your hard work.

Key Findings

Our study found that the personal preferences of office managers as revealed in their responses to “secret life” questions have a real and lasting business impact on practices.

Business Life

- Managers rank practice marketing and dormant patient reactivation as low priorities. Long-term practice profits are jeopardized by the lack of attention afforded these two areas.
- Online reviews are viewed as a practice’s most important marketing activity.
- Nine out of ten managers believe word of mouth referrals are the top source of new patients.
- 16% of practices do not consistently track the source of new patients.

Secret Life

- The overwhelming majority of office managers are women. Today, just three percent are men.
- The profession is greying. Nearly one-third of working office managers are 55 years old or older. Less than ten percent are under 35.
- Recruiting experienced managers is a challenge. Six out of ten plan on spending the rest of their careers at their current practice.
- The majority of office managers say they enjoy a good-to-amazing work/life balance.
- Managers employed by DSOs rated their happiness higher than those working at private practices.
- One-third of office managers earn over \$60,000 a year in salary and bonuses.
- Only 25 percent of managers have a bachelor’s degree.

Demographics

Just looking at the raw data, our research found that if there were such a person as a “typical” dental office manager she’d be a 45-plus year-old high school graduate, married with children who has been managing a private practice for more than 15 years. But, a deeper dive into the numbers reveals a much fuller, more complicated picture of the individuals who manage the success of today’s dental practices.

Dental office managers today are significantly more experienced than those of 2012 when the largest cohort (37 percent) had five or less years’ experience in the role. Today, the largest group of respondents (41 percent) have more than 15-years’ experience. A surprising number of respondents to our latest survey have worked as office managers for 40 years or more! One such veteran describes her 41 years as in the business as “longer than superhuman.”

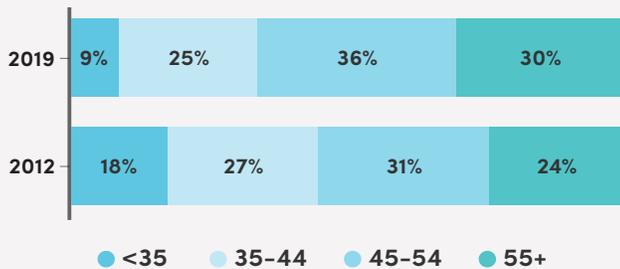
The profession is greying. Today, 66 percent of office managers are over 45. That’s an 11 percent increase in just seven years. Nearly one-third of today’s office managers are 55 years old or older. In 2012, 18 percent of office managers were under 35. That number is now down to 9 percent. This shift may be attributed to the longevity of the career. Also, the lack of upward mobility once someone tops out in this role isn’t creating openings for new office managers to fill.

Another trend of note is the disappearance of men from the profession. While women have long dominated the field, men made some inroads and actually accounted for 8 percent of office managers as recently as 2014. Today, only 3 percent of office managers are male.

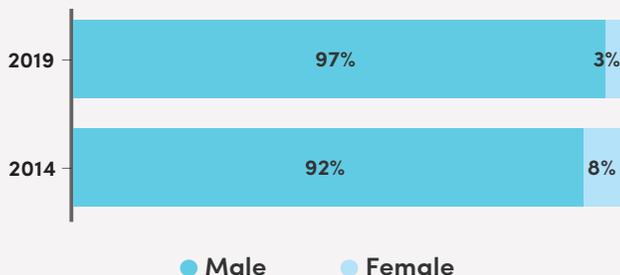
Years worked as an office manager



Average age of an office manager



Office manager’s by gender



SECRET LIFE:

84% of Office Managers are married or in long-term relationships. 81% have children.



How much do you earn (salary and bonus) per year?



For the majority of office managers, working in practice management is a well-paying career. Thirty-three percent of all survey respondents (as well as 33 percent of all female respondents) are earning over \$60,000 a year which exceeds the national average of \$47,600 for full-time workers in the United States. This figure is even more impressive when gender-based wage disparity is considered. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual median salary for women in the United States is \$41,912.ⁱ

BUSINESS LIFE:
 Working in Practice Management offers women the opportunity to earn above average salaries.

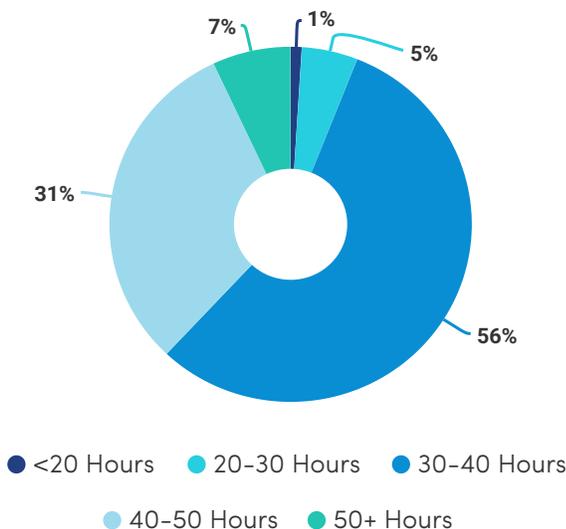
Worklife

Preferred Job Title

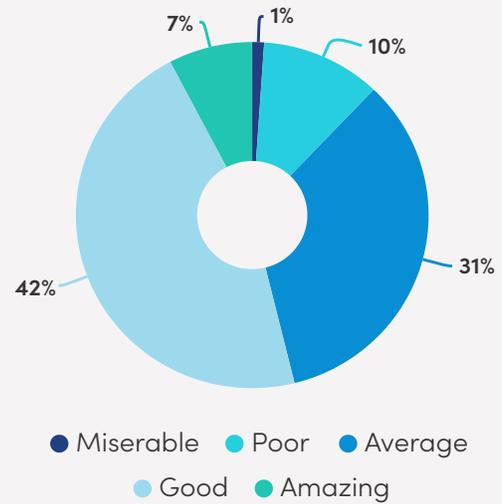
Office Manager	52%
Practice Manager	12%
Practice Administrator	9%
Office Administrator	7%
Business Manager	6%
Mother of Dragons	4%
Director of Operations	3%
Other (ie: Solutionist, Queen Bee)	7%

The professionals responsible for the day-to-day business success of dental practices go by many titles, but if you ask them the majority prefer to be simply referred to as “Office Managers.” This response was more than four times more popular than the next choice “Practice Manager.” Several respondents suggested some rather interesting alternative job titles including “solutionist,” “face of the office,” and “queen bee.”

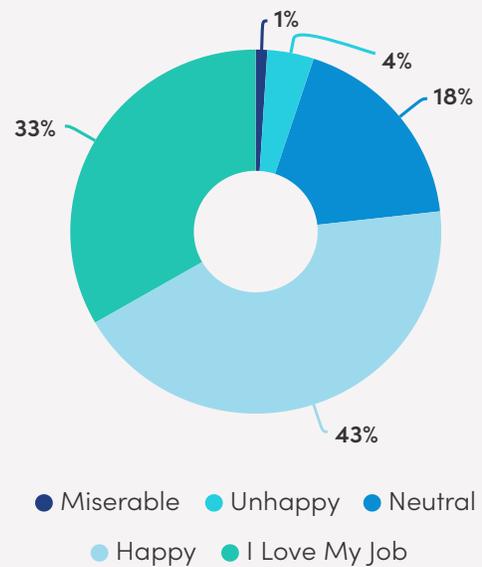
How many hours do you work in an average week?



Rate your work-life balance



How happy are you at work?

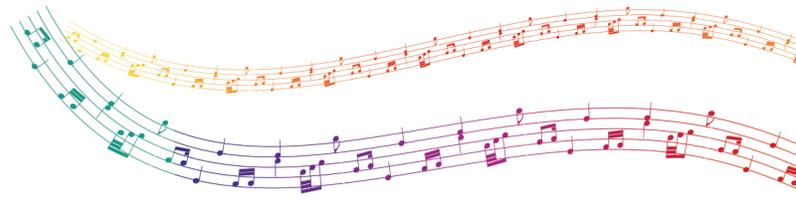


As demanding as it is to run a dental practice, the majority of managers are able to do their job without putting in overtime at the office. More than half of all respondents say their average work week runs between 30 and 40 hours. However, nearly one-third of office managers have duties requiring a 40 to 50-hour work week and nearly 10 percent are working 50-plus hours.

Office managers are generally pleased with the work-life balance their profession offers. This is especially true of respondents with children: fully 60 percent of which rate their work-life balance “Good” to “Amazing.” The level of satisfaction office managers enjoy runs counter to national trends. Sixty-six percent of full-time employees in the U.S. do not strongly believe they have work-life balance.ⁱⁱ

SECRET LIFE:
One-third of Office Managers say they LOVE their job.

The majority of dental office managers enjoy their jobs. Fully 76 percent of all respondents say they are either “happy” at work or they “love my job.” Interestingly, that grows to 100 percent when we just look at the responses of office managers who work for dental service organizations (DSOs). This is excellent news for practice owners and especially DSOs. Research on the American workplace shows that happy employees are 12 percent more productive, take ten times fewer sick days, and stay twice as long in their jobs than unhappy employees. They also spend double their time at work focused on what they are paid to do.ⁱⁱⁱ



Which song best describes your typical day at work?

HAPPY <i>Pharrell Williams</i>	27%
SHAKE IT OFF <i>Taylor Swift</i>	22%
LET IT GO <i>Idina Menzel</i>	14%
I WILL SURVIVE <i>Gloria Gaynor</i>	12%
GIRLS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN <i>Robert Hazard / Cyndi Lauper</i>	11%
MY WAY <i>Frank Sinatra</i>	5%
9 TO 5 <i>Dolly Parton</i>	5%



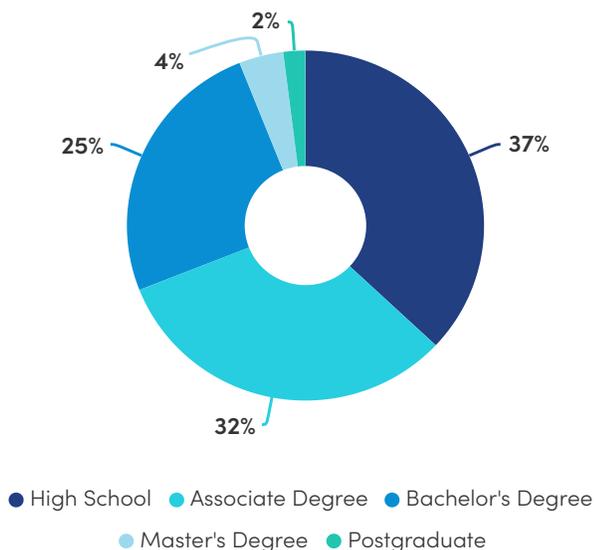
The Making of a Great Office Manager

The office manager position is unusual for the dental field in that there is no set career path, college curriculum, or certification program designated for the role. Candidates can come from a variety of areas, both within and outside the dental field. Anecdotally speaking, many managers begin their careers as hygienists or spouses of dentists while those from outside the field often have administrative or clerical experience.

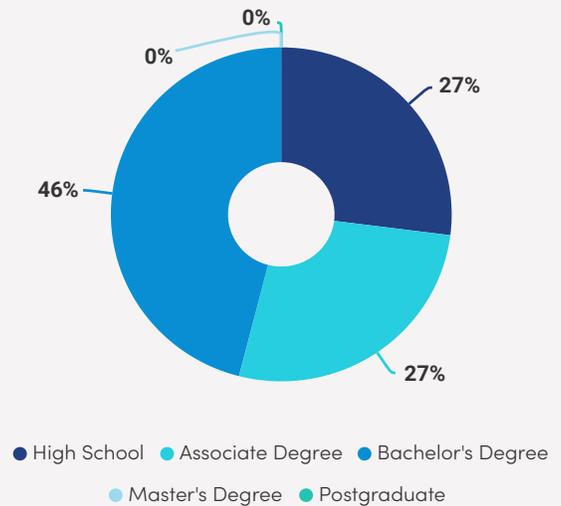
Since individuals from diverse backgrounds can and do become highly proficient office managers, we wanted to learn what commonalities our survey respondents say the best practice administrators share.

Important as experience is, excellent soft skills, including communication, organization, flexibility, empathy, confidence and enthusiasm, dominated the list of most important qualities managers feel they possess.

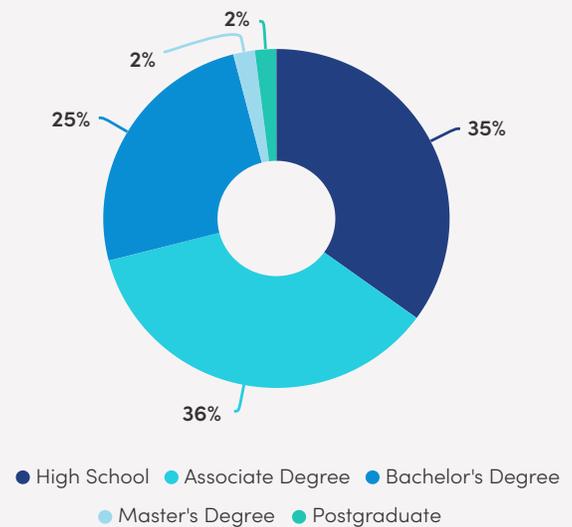
Highest level of education



Income under 30k/yr based on education level



Income over 60k/yr based on education level



Interestingly, higher education's impact on the profession is not as great as one might expect. Nor is it an indicator of financial success. Nearly half of managers earning under \$30,000 a year have a bachelor's degree. This is about double the number of top earning managers (\$60,000 or more a year) possessing that same degree.

SECRET LIFE:

Level of education is not a main driver of compensation.

How did you prepare for your career in practice administration?

(Check all that apply)

Learned on the Job	88%
Worked My Way Up / Mentored by Another Manager	54%
Webinars, Newsletters & Podcasts	46%
Dental Industry Conferences	43%
Online Learning	38%
AADOM Membership	26%
College Classes	25%
Whitepapers & Reports	13%
Other	8%

In many ways, dental office management is the ultimate learn-on-the-job career. That's how nearly 90 percent of managers learned their job. Fortunately, over half of them report having a mentor who helped show them the way.

Experience may be the best teacher, but top managers' long-term success in the profession requires self-motivation and ongoing self-education. A wealth of educational resources in the form of webinars, conferences and online classes is available from a variety of professional organizations.





The Job

What is the day-to-day working life of an office manager like? While no two offices or office managers are exactly the same, the survey revealed many common themes, challenges and successes that are applicable to the majority of practices.

Most Important Business Activities

2019

1. Patient Interaction
2. Staff Training
3. **Insurance Processing**
4. Keeping the Schedule Full
5. New Patient Acquisition
6. Appointment Reminders
7. Practice Marketing
8. Dormant Patient Reactivation

2016

1. Patient Interaction
2. Staff Training
3. Keeping the Schedule Full
4. Appointment Reminders
5. New Patient Acquisition
6. **Insurance Processing**
7. Practice Marketing
8. Dormant Patient Reactivation

2014

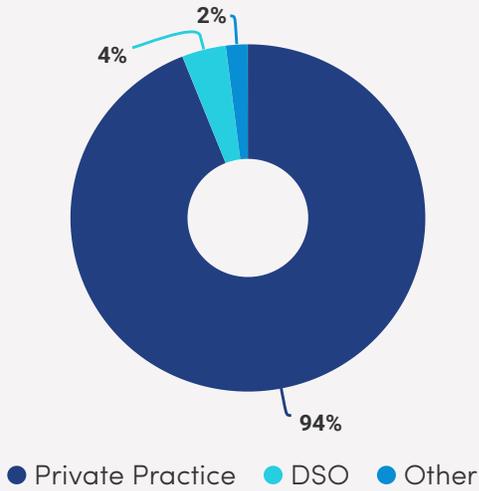
1. Patient Interaction
2. Staff Training
3. Keeping the Schedule Full
4. New Patient Acquisition
5. Appointment Reminders
6. Practice Marketing
7. Dormant Patient Reactivation

Whether working in a small office for a solo practitioner or managing a large team in a multi-dentist DSO practice, the majority of managers are consistent in their rankings of the importance of key business activities. However, several of their priorities have changed dramatically since our 2014 and 2016 surveys. While “Patient Interaction” and “Staff Training” remain firmly entrenched in the top two spots, “Insurance Processing” has supplanted “Keeping the Schedule Full” as the third most important business priority – moving up from sixth place in 2016 and not even making the list in 2014.

BUSINESS LIFE:

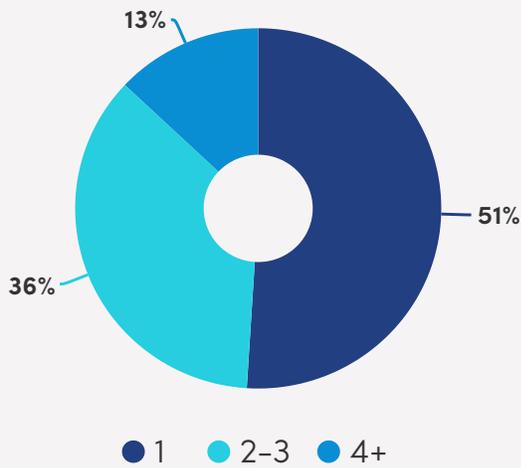
Patient Interaction and Staff Training remain the #1 and #2 top priorities, while Insurance Processing has jumped to #3.

Employer



BUSINESS LIFE:
83% of office managers are supervising more than 5 staff members

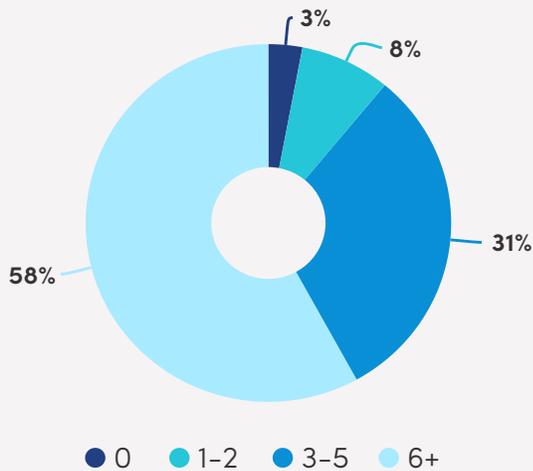
Number of dentists associated with your practice



Nine out of ten survey respondents are employed by private practices. Slightly more than half of these office managers work with a single dentist and 58 percent are responsible for supervising five-plus team members.

While only a fraction of respondents currently work at dental service organizations (DSOs) that number is sure to grow as more and more independent practitioners elect to join dental groups. These professionals face significantly different office dynamics. Ninety-two percent of them have more than three dentists in their practice and 83 percent are supervising more than five staff members.

Number of staff members supervised



SECRET LIFE:
91% of Office Managers say their practice is a great place to work.

Does your practice give you enough support to do your job well?

	Yes	No
Office Tools & Technologies	87%	12%
Autonomy	71%	20%
Training	70%	27%
Staffing	70%	27%
Budget	70%	18%
Hiring Authority	69%	22%
Marketing Support	65%	25%

BUSINESS LIFE:

25% of office managers say they need more marketing support

The majority of managers are satisfied with the level of support practice ownership provides them with to do their jobs. At the high end, the numbers show that owners are more than willing to invest in office tools and technologies that help improve operational efficiency. While approximately seven out of ten respondents say they have the support they need across the board, the survey identified several areas of concern. At least one-quarter of managers feel their practices are underperforming due to insufficient investments in training, staffing and marketing support.

Which of the following activities do you enjoy most?

(Check up to 3)

Patient Interaction	83%
Keeping the Schedule Full	39%
Insurance Processing	37%
Staff Training	36%
New Patient Acquisition	29%
Practice Marketing	28%
Social Media	18%
Appointment Reminders	7%
Dormant Patient Reactivation	6%

Eight out of ten managers say that “Patient Interaction” is by far the #1 most enjoyable part of their job. “Keeping the Schedule Full” and “Insurance Processing” follow at a distant second and third both with under 40 percent of respondents saying they enjoy those activities. Coming in dead last for enjoyability is “Dormant Patient Reactivation.” The fact that managers also rank it as their least important business activity makes one wonder if patient reactivation were more fun would it get more attention from managers.

SECRET LIFE:

83% of Office Managers say that patient interaction is the most enjoyable part of their job.



Training & Staff Development

In the majority of practices, the office manager is responsible for all phases of staff development. Typically, this encompasses everything from onboarding new hires to providing the one-on-one training necessary to make the staff member a fully functioning member of the team.

What types of staff training are you responsible for?

(Check all that apply)

Scheduling	73%
Proper Patient Interaction	72%
Insurance Processing	70%
Marketing (reviews, social media, SEO, website)	53%
Promoting Technology to Patients (Zoom, CEREC)	44%

When it comes to actually training staff members, we found that the specific areas in which doctors/owners expect managers to engage in varied somewhat from practice to practice. Seven out of ten managers are training staff in scheduling, patient interaction and insurance processing, while just over half of managers provide training in marketing. This may be due to the increase in the number of practices that have a full-time marketing manager on staff. Only 44 percent of managers say they are involved teaching team members how to promote technology to patients.

SECRET LIFE:

Training is impacted by the fact many Manager's see Marketing as an unenjoyable, low priority.

Ranking the Top 5 Staff Training Areas

1 Proper Patient Interaction

	2019	2016
Very Important	98%	96%
Important	2%	4%
Not Important	0%	0%

The importance of “Proper Patient Interaction” was driven home by the managers’ response to the question, “How important do you believe staff training in the following areas is to your dental practice?” Patient interaction dominated the list of responses with nearly 100 percent of the respondents ranking it their #1 choice. “Scheduling” following as a close second.

2 Scheduling

	2019	2016
Very Important	96%	95%
Important	4%	4%
Not Important	0%	1%

Across the board, we saw a two to six-point uptick in the percentage of managers saying specific training areas were “Very Important” with the exception of one. Practice Marketing, which includes managing online reviews, social media, the practice website and SEO, etc., saw a five percent drop in its “Very Important” ranking since 2016. The reason for this drop could be due to a variety of reasons, ranging from a manager’s lack of time, interest and marketing expertise to having a dedicated marketing manager not under the office manager’s purview handling the responsibilities.

3 Insurance Process

	2019	2016
Very Important	85%	81%
Important	11%	13%
Not Important	4%	6%

4 Promoting Technology

(Zoom, CEREC, etc.)

	2019	2016
Very Important	80%	76%
Important	12%	15%
Not Important	8%	9%

Managers in surveys all the way back to 2014 have consistently rated “Marketing” as one of their less enjoyable and the practice’s least important business activities. One has to wonder about the economic impact the lack of focus is having on the practices bottom line profits.

5 Marketing

(reviews, social media, SEO)

	2019	2016
Very Important	65%	70%
Important	24%	19%
Not Important	11%	11%

Practice Marketing & Patient Acquisition

There have been several key tactical shifts in how practices are approaching new patient acquisition. At the top end, there has been an expected increase in the use of practice websites, online reviews, SEO, and patient video testimonials. What is more telling is the drop in the number of practices utilizing many formerly tried and true patient acquisition tools ranging from Yelp and paid Google search to online Yellow Pages and mailers.

Does your practice's patient acquisition strategy currently include the following marketing activities?

	2019	2016
Practice Website	95%	92%
Online Reviews	88%	83%
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	73%	72%
Word of Mouth Referral Incentives	72%	71%
Organic Social Media	61%	82%
Yelp	48%	56%
Facebook Ads	38%	NA
Online Yellow Pages	33%	52%
Paid Google Search	27%	30%
Video Testimonials	26%	24%
1-800-DENTIST	21%	NA
Mailers to a Purchased List	18%	25%
Other Paid Referral Lead Services	17%	25%
Billboards/Bus Benches	4%	6%

In your Opinion what are your top sources for new patients?

1. Word of Mouth Referrals	92%
2. Practice Website	48%
3. Review Websites (e.g. Yelp, Nextdoor, etc.)	30%
4. Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	22%
5. Other (e.g. doctor referrals, drive-bys)	22%
6. Keyword Search / Paid Search	11%
7. Paid Referrals (ZocDoc, 1-800-DENTIST, etc.)	8%
8. Postcards	6%
9. TV or Radio Commercials	4%
10. Coupons	3%
11. Yellow Pages	3%

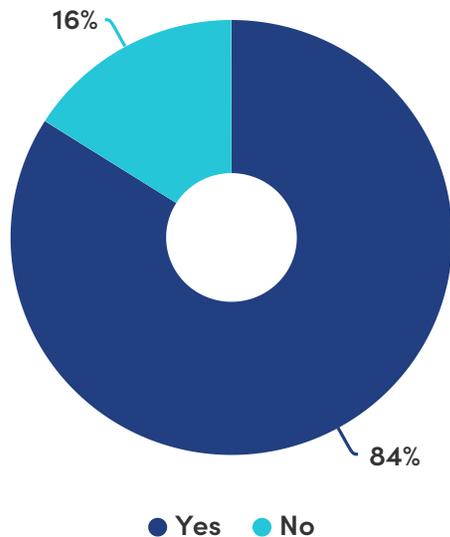
Managers have very strong opinions regarding their practices' top sources for new patients. As expected, word of mouth referrals led the list followed by the practice website 44 percentage points lower in a distant second place. Review websites, social media and "other" round out the top five answers – none of which rated above 30 percent. Several interesting sources were cited in the comments section of "other," including "Insurance Websites," "doctor referrals," "drive-bys", and – the best answer of all – "our phenomenal hygienist, Amy."

Office managers tell us that a lot has changed in practice marketing and patient acquisition since our last survey in 2016. For starters, online reviews have replaced the practice website as the #1 most important activity, the use of social media has been transformed by Facebook ads, and Online Yellow Pages have dropped off our managers' top ten list entirely. What is particularly interesting is the across-the-board drop in perceived importance for all marketing activities with the exception of online reviews and incentives for word of mouth referrals.

Top 10 Most Important Practice Marketing Activities

2019	Rated Very Important	2016	Rated Very Important
1. Online Reviews	78%	1. Practice Website	78%
2. Practice Website	73%	2. Online Reviews	71%
3. Word of Mouth Referral Incentives	64%	3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	64%
4. Search Engine Optimization	63%	4. Word of Mouth Referral Incentives	62%
5. Video Testimonials	39%	5. Organic Social Media	47%
6. Organic Social Media	38%	6. Video Testimonials	33%
7. Paid Google Search	19%	7. Yelp	24%
8. Facebook Ads	19%	8. Paid Google Search	21%
9. Yelp	18%	9. Paid Referrals (ZocDoc, 1-800-DENTIST, etc.)	14%
10. Paid Referrals (ZocDoc, 1-800-DENTIST, etc.)	11%	10. Online Yellow Pages	14%

Do you consistently track where your new patients come from?

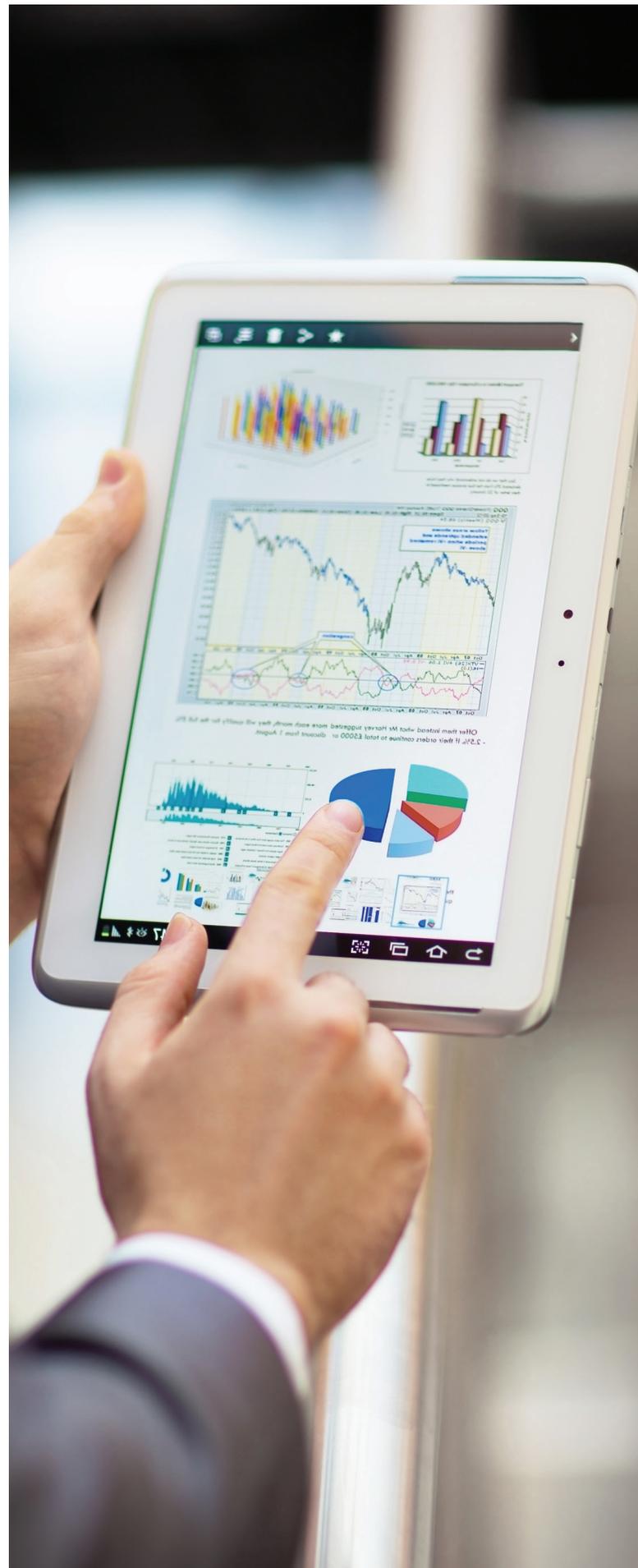


It's worth noting that while managers have definite views on their practice's top sources of new patients, 16 percent of practices still aren't consistently tracking the effectiveness of their patient acquisition sources. This is a fundamental mistake that negatively impacts their reporting and specifically the allocation of marketing funds.

And while we can't promise all your advertising efforts will hit the mark every time, just by taking stock of the marketing and promotions that got near the bullseye will get you closer to your target—qualified referrals who become lifelong patients.

BUSINESS LIFE:

16% of Managers report their practices lack reliable new patient data.



Conclusion

There's No Such Thing as a Typical Office Manager

The intent of this report was to provide a comprehensive 360-degree view of the professional life of today's dental office manager. In conducting our research, we quickly concluded that there is no such person as a "typical" manager. The business professionals who keep dental practices running smoothly are highly complex individuals, so much so that we felt a follow-up report focusing on career concerns of managers is warranted. Part two of the Secret Life of the Dental Office Manager will be available shortly from Futuredontics.

About Futuredontics

Futuredontics specializes in helping dental practices turn consumers into lifelong patients in the rapidly evolving digital world. Our mission is to Transform Lives Through Dental Care.

We are the industry's largest direct marketer that focuses solely on the challenge of maximizing dental practice production. Both independent practitioners and DSOs nationwide depend on us to provide qualified new patient leads and effective patient engagement solutions — including patient communications and social media enhancement, plus access to a library of educational resources and exclusive marketing intelligence. These advanced services, along with additional training and support, help practices to build profitable, long-term relationships with patients. Our products are marketed under the brands Dentistry.com, 1-800-DENTIST® and PatientActivator®.

Only Futuredontics offers the unparalleled expertise that comes with over 30 years of industry leadership to help dental practices grow their patient base and increase practice production year after year.

Learn more at www.futuredontics.com or call 1-855-248-4307.

Sources

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