



# Don't spend another cent on paid advertising or marketing until you've read this article!

By Julie Parker

**H**ow much are you currently spending on marketing activities for your practice? Add up all the costs involved in activities like: Website construction and maintenance; Local newspaper adverts and advertorials; Discounted prices to attract new patients; External signage; Social media advertising; Banners at sporting arenas; Letterbox flyers; Search Engine Optimisation; Google Adwords; Referral incentive programs; Radio promotions; Local community education and awareness programs; and Joint promotion with other local businesses.

There will be different sums, of course, as practices have different approaches to building and maintaining their patient bases.

Whatever the amount that you spend on advertising and marketing, the intention is to drive more new patients to your practice. I presume that with every cent you spend, you would like a healthy return on that investment. That is, with every marketing campaign, you expect to have an increase in the number of new callers to your practice.

Now, here is my next question... and it's an important one!

## How much coaching and training do you provide for your receptionist in the management of these new callers?

**I**n my experience, the answer in many practices is "not much".

My advice to all dental practice owners is therefore two-fold:

1. Start tracking your new callers; and
2. Regardless of how experienced your receptionist is, provide as much coaching and training that is needed to gain the benefits I am discussing here.

Colleagues in the dental marketing industry consistently tell me of their concerns when generating high new caller rates for their dental practice clients. The metric the practice owner uses to gauge the success of their SEO marketing is the number of new patients entering the practice. In actual fact, the more accurate and useful indicator is the number of new callers ringing the practice. And these two figures can be wildly different!

Converting new callers into new patients in the appointment book is a learned skill. Your success at doing so is called "the conversion rate". It is one of the most important numbers that every dental practice owner must monitor.

The receptionist needs to know how to build quick rapport with new callers, create an environment for the caller to share their reasons for calling and what they are seeking in a dental practice and engage them in the benefits that the practice offers. Identifying and resolving the barriers to scheduling the new patient appointment is part of the role of every receptionist.

Receptionists have specific challenges to overcome in order to achieve impressive and profitable results with new callers. One of these challenges is the limitation of effective communication when they are on the phone. Effective communication is more easily achieved when a patient is physically in the practice. This is because you have all modes of communication available to you: Language/words; Voice tone and modulation; and Body language. However, when the receptionist is on the phone, she/he loses the ability to exhibit and read body language.

Given that body language makes up a whopping 55% of effective communication (Figure 2), it is understandable that they often find this to be an enormous challenge. However, there are ways to address this issue.

### Build verbal rapport

**O**ne of the methods used to build rapport is "mirroring". That is, copying the caller's style of speaking. People are comfortable when they observe that which is familiar to them. Mirroring the voice volume, the rate of speaking, words used and level of energy builds quick and strong rapport.

### Likeable

**P**eople enjoy speaking with someone they find likeable. Develop likeability by being happy (smile when speaking over the phone), helpful, understanding, listen without interrupting and be interested in what the caller says. Using the patient's name routinely throughout the conversation also adds to your likability.

### Empathetic

**O**ften, patients are calling because they are experiencing discomfort or trauma. By using effective voice modulation and verbiage you can help the patient feel understood and cared for.

## Marketing Drives New Callers to

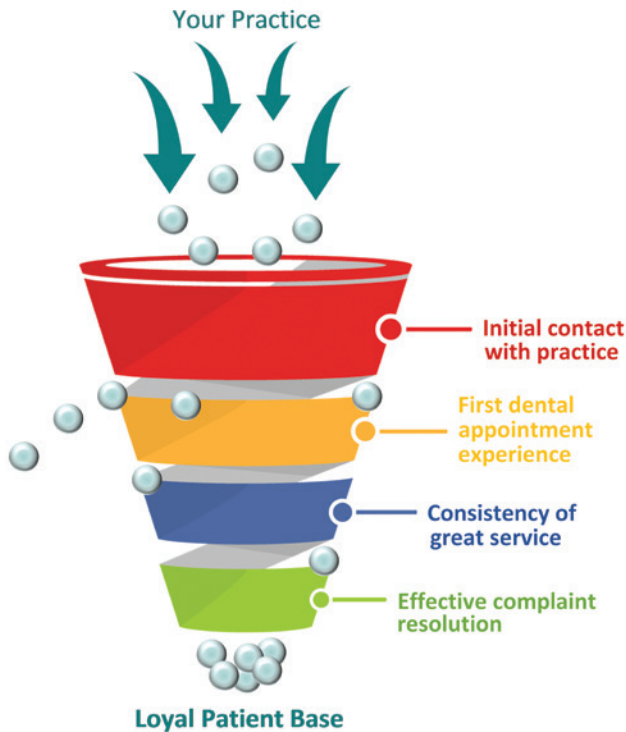


Figure 1. Successful new patient growth is a process of attracting new callers to your practice and then closing the gaps that may have them seek dental services elsewhere.

### Master of solutions

One of the most powerful phrases a receptionist can use with new callers is “You have called the right place!” New callers rely heavily on this first contact with a practice to determine whether they have called a practice that will treat them well. Regardless of the particular benefits your practice espouses, if a potential new patient is faced with a rude, dismissive and uncaring attitude over the phone, they are likely to hang up and call someone else. Using phrases such as “I can certainly help you with that”, “It will be my pleasure to make sure you are well looked after” and “I am here to help” build trust. Even when a solution is not immediately obvious, an effective receptionist will take the caller’s number down, discuss the situation with team members, then telephone the caller back with options to help them.

### Tracking success

There are tools that your receptionist can use to gauge their success with new callers. The first thing to do is track what is currently happening. Completing a form, such as in Figure 3, is one simple method that can be implemented immediately.

Determining your current baseline New Caller Conversion Rate provides a starting point. Using a log similar to that shown in Figure 3 will help you to discover valuable information including WHY new callers contact your practice. Make sure your receptionist is trained and coached to manage these queries and her Conversion Rate will steadily improve.

Remember, it is always better to find out information about how the caller heard about your practice during that first contact, rather than at the first appointment. In doing so, the information will be fresh in the patient’s mind.

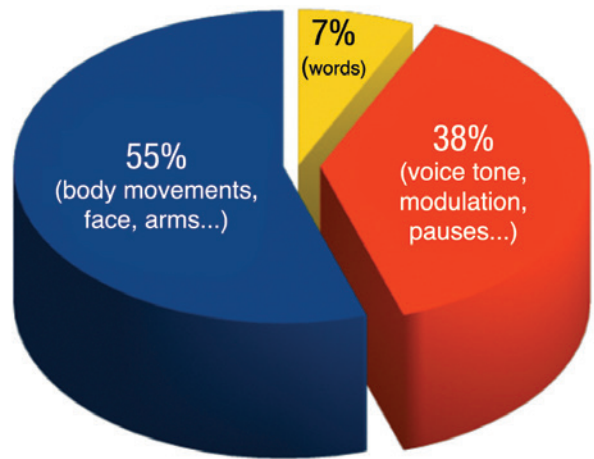


Figure 2. Telephone communication reduces our ability to effectively communicate. Instead of relaying and receiving messages through both verbal and non-verbal communication, telephone conversations must rely on the 45% verbal communication only.

Date	First Name	Query	Result	Booked

Figure 3. Track your New Caller Conversion Rate using a New Caller Log.

In order to continually improve our performance in an area of life or work, we need to learn better ways of doing what we do. We do not rise to the level of our expectations but drop to the level of our training (Archilochos).

If you would like to provide your receptionist with coaching in this area, JPPS have the webinar “Converting New Callers Into Appointments” currently running throughout Australia. Go to <http://julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au/events.html> to find a suitable session and register. The New Caller Log download is available upon request.

### About the author

Julie Parker’s whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind. Julie is a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnotherapy.