

How to make the most out of the slow periods: Digital housekeeping and more!

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Even the most successful businesses and practices among us have slowdowns. Everything from national holidays to signature local events that occur every year can play a role in lacklustre traffic. It is important not to dread these normal ebbs and flows nor to panic unless the slowdown truly comes as a surprise. As we will discuss later, a little time spent on “discovery” to pinpoint the source(s) of an unexpected slump can be helpful. It may prove enlightening, offering beneficial insights into your operations and what may have changed that could negatively affect traffic at a given time.

Otherwise, for those “explainable” and anticipated nadirs and troughs, best practices exist to use this rare asset of “time” to the fullest. That way, you can come out of the slow period stronger than ever, optimally positioned to maximize the ultra-busy period that often follows. This resource of time should also be leveraged to ensure you are fully prepared for the onslaught of calls, emails, appointments, [virtual consultations](#), and so on that await “on the other side.”

Upskilling

Education is the gift that keeps on giving. One of the best things you can do during slow periods is to “retrain” or refine your staff’s best practices on phone [etiquette](#) and other communications and “soft skills” that can easily be overlooked during busy periods. These skills tend to become a little rusty when we are in the day-to-day grind mode. Problems may arise that lead to dissatisfied patients or to a bad first impression among those individuals who may be considering your practice as their family’s dental home. These problems only worsen if they are not addressed promptly and properly. These trough periods for business also represent opportunities to explore training and education on new services. Identify any novel, timely, and highly marketable services, treatments, and capabilities. Start the journey to becoming proficient in those areas when time is actually on your side.

Touching base

It is rare to have the time to identify patients who may be overdue for a checkup or those highly valued, loyal patients whom you do not see as often anymore. During this slower timeframe, accelerate your process of tracking patients. If you do not already have a system to follow up with patients, there is no time like now to begin integrating such methodical approaches into your business. Explore options to automate some of these processes. Whenever you follow up, ensure communications are not overly generic. Add the personal touch. Mention how long it has been since that particular patient’s appointment and the nature of that visit. So, patients are reminded that you care about them as unique individuals. They are less likely to see that the grass is greener at another competing dentist’s office.

Build your “thought leader” credentials

Sure, you have lots of thoughts. But we know you rarely have the time to adequately share all that expertise and experience with the broader community. We truly encourage our dentists, practice managers, and other dental clients to build their authority in given areas. Seek opportunities to speak with and mentor young dental professionals or early careerists and focus on starting or building up blogs or other outlets to convey valuable personal insights and knowledge. Connect or reconnect with podcasters and known [thought leaders](#) in their own right.

Audit your website

In the offline world, poor phone etiquette or response times can damage your reputation for exceptional service and care. Likewise, errors on your website and other online spaces can have a tremendous adverse impact on your reputation in the digital world. Look for outdated content when reviewing home, procedure, and other pages throughout your website. Also, zero in on any content that may no longer be relevant to your practice specifically, i.e., any technologies or services you no longer offer. Likewise, update and add any new technologies that could be particularly attractive to potential patients and Google searchers.

Additionally, your website may contain erroneous or misleading information, which could be content from a third-party website or party. As appropriate, refine the information to reflect your (accurate and credible) insights and to bolster its [quality](#). Ensure all information is meaningful and relevant to your target demographics. You may need to remove the content entirely if it does not check all these boxes.

Brush up on your editorial calendar

A little content planning upfront can be beneficial; however, we rarely have the time to adequately plan such items well in advance in our day-to-day lives. Use this slower period as an opportunity to brush the dust off of your editorial/marketing calendar. This calendar should serve as a guide when planning content – both the type and the anticipated publication dates for such content on your website and other channels. Be aware of any relevant awareness holidays and [observances](#), as they present abundant opportunities to develop content around a given and timely topic. As an example, plan to run a blog or social media posts about the role that gum disease plays in the development of cardiovascular disease and the mouth-heart connection to coincide with [Heart Month](#) in February.

Practice good program “hygiene” (or build anew)

There are numerous ways to attract new patients and build loyalty among existing patients. These opportunities include cost-saving membership plans and loyalty programs. If these programs are already a staple of your practice, use the time that is freed up now to inventory these offerings. *How have they resonated? What are the potential sticking points? How can you make these programs more attractive for better results, “buy-in,” or enhanced engagement?* For those who have not taken advantage of these opportunities, create a “wish list” showcasing the features you want to see in an ideal program. Get a feel from the get-go for what your patient base wants. Survey patients formally or informally for

trends and ideas for benefits to incorporate into these programs, as well as fresh and well-suited ways to structure any membership plans.

Build your community

Reconnect with potential, well-aligned partners in your neighbourhood and the broader market. Identify potential partnerships with like-minded health-oriented and self-care businesses and organizations. Get into a healthy habit of contributing to mutually beneficial community organizations, nonprofits, or those close to your heart. Remember that your practice community likes to see such involvement with good causes. So, keep your camera/mobile ready and be sure to get plenty of photos and videos of your team pitching in for events. While it's a good business opportunity, it is also a great way to build employee morale and can double as a "team-building" event. More than anything else, it fuels the often elusive professional-personal balance and helps to keep things in perspective during a period that can be challenging and fraught with negativity and worry, as anytime there is a slowdown, even seasoned businesses tend to panic. Don't. Make the most of your time to build your talent's expertise, loyalty, community connections, and a new and loyal base of enthusiastic patients.

A final note

We started this article by referencing expected slow periods and unwanted surprises, the type of lacklustre traffic that seemingly blindsides you. Depending on the nature of the slowdown, it may warrant taking a closer look at what could be responsible. Are factors outside your control to blame, such as a new competitor nearby? Or is the culprit a factor squarely within your control, such as a new customer relationship or telecom system that may have some kinks to work out? And even those seeming "uncontrollables" deserve attention. You need to take control of situations such as a new office in your market. It would help if you got to know that competition as a means of understanding your value proposition and what makes you the more appealing choice. These differentiators should then be reflected in your marketing and content on all digital channels.

About the Author

Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of [Ekwa Marketing](#), has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy



dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing – Lila, by clicking <https://www.ekwa.com/msm/> or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.