



# Dental Practice Marketing Pulse Report

2018 Edition



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# Introduction and Methodology

## INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

To get a pulse on the current marketing activities of dental practices, ProSites conducted an email survey on dentists and dental office staff between February and April 2018. Participation was completely voluntary with respondents entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift card.

Over 400 dentists and practice staff provided insights into current marketing practices. A response to every question was not required.

# Executive Summary

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2018 Dental Marketing Pulse Report revealed both the expected and the unexpected.

Nearly one-third of respondents reported to be busier than normal, representing a 10% increase of practices experiencing growth compared to a 2016 Benchmark Report. However, a larger percentage of practices reported to be less busy than usual over the past year, a 37% increase since 2016.

As anticipated, most respondents manage their marketing in-house, though only 14% have dedicated marketing staff. Interestingly, practices with dedicated marketing staff enjoy higher revenues than those without.

We were surprised to see leaner marketing budgets compared to the 2016 Benchmark Report. Nearly half of respondents spend under \$250 on marketing each month. Just as surprising, the amount of time and money invested into websites, social media and search engine optimization has dropped markedly over the past two years.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All is not bleak, however. When we honed-in on the busier and even million-dollar practices, we discovered these groups utilized digital marketing methods more heavily than other dental offices.

While personal phone calls remain the most popular means of communicating with patients, most practices have also adapted email and text messaging. Here again, the busiest practices as well as practices with the highest revenues were the heaviest users of email, text messages, and social media communications.

Overall findings suggest that dental practices who reach out most to patients via digital media and an array of communication channels are busiest or generate the highest revenue.

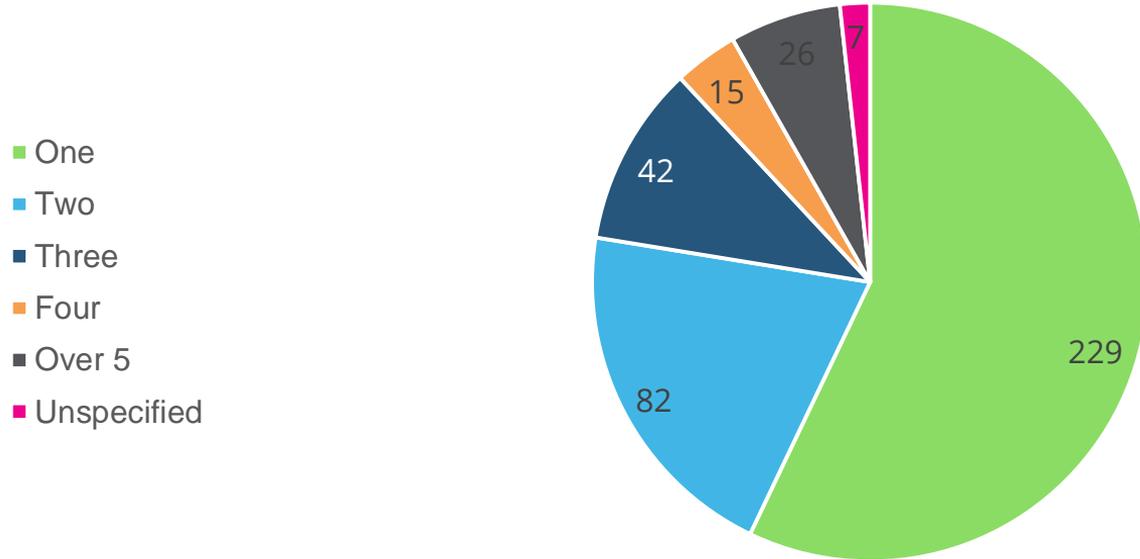
In the pages that follow, explore the marketing habits of your colleagues, broken down by marketing budget, overall busyness, and revenue range to gain insight into what does and does not work in growing a dental practice.

# Practice Specialty and Size

## PRACTICE SPECIALTY AND SIZE

Most respondents (82%) work in general dentistry and are part of a single-doctor practice (58%). The remaining 18% comprise a range of specialties including pediatrics, orthodontics, and oral and maxillofacial surgery.

How many dentists are in your practice?



## PRACTICE SPECIALTY AND SIZE

Thirty percent of respondents reported revenues over \$1 million while 15% were at the other end of the spectrum reporting less than \$250,000 per year.



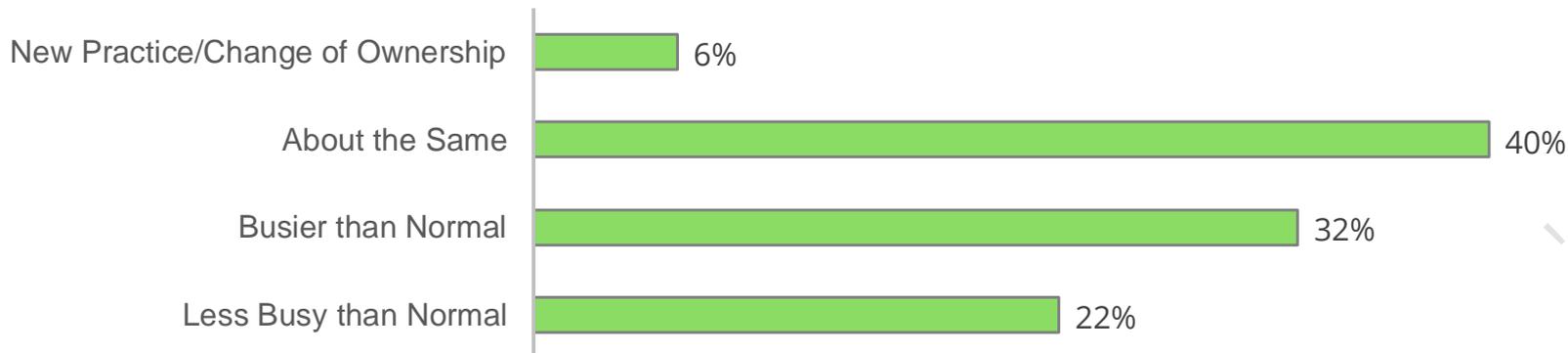
# How Busy Are Dental Practices?

## HOW BUSY ARE DENTAL PRACTICES?

Nearly one third of respondents report they've been busier than normal over the past year. This is up from the 2016 Benchmark Report on the status of dental practice marketing, where 29% of respondents reported being busier than normal.

Unfortunately, work slowed for 22% of respondents compared to 16% in the 2016 Benchmark Report. In taking a closer look, we found a correlation between the flagging practices and a decided shift in marketing tactics, as detailed in the remainder of this report.

How would you best describe your practice over the past 12 months?



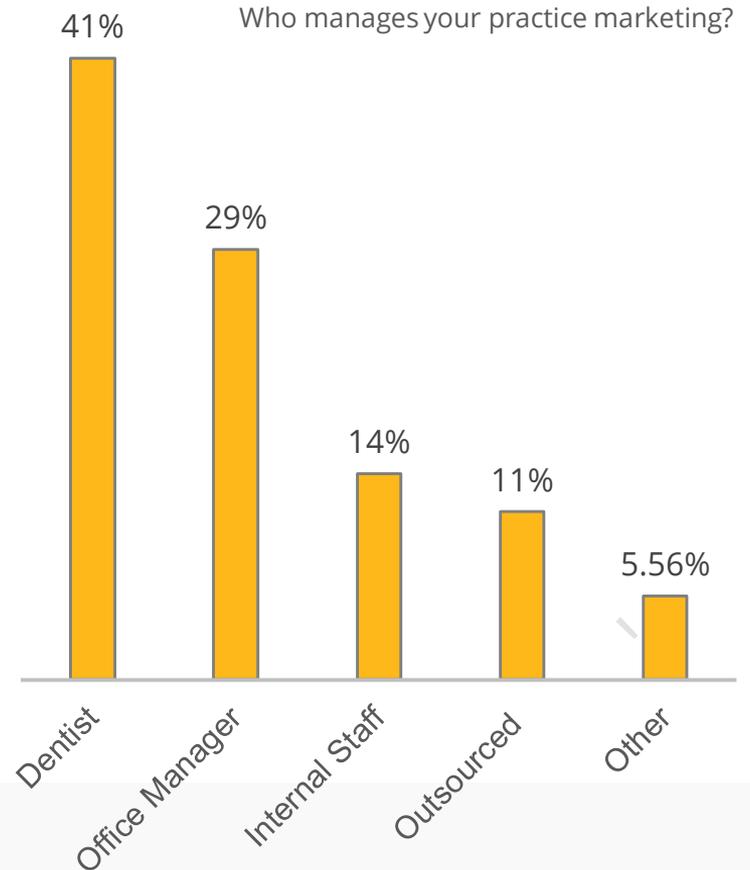
# Dental Practice Marketing Tactics

# WHO MANAGES THE PRACTICES MARKETING?

Most dental practices (41%) manage marketing in-house, with doctors wearing the “Marketing Manager” hat themselves. This figure is down 5% from the 2016 Benchmark Report which indicated that more doctors delegated this function to their staff.

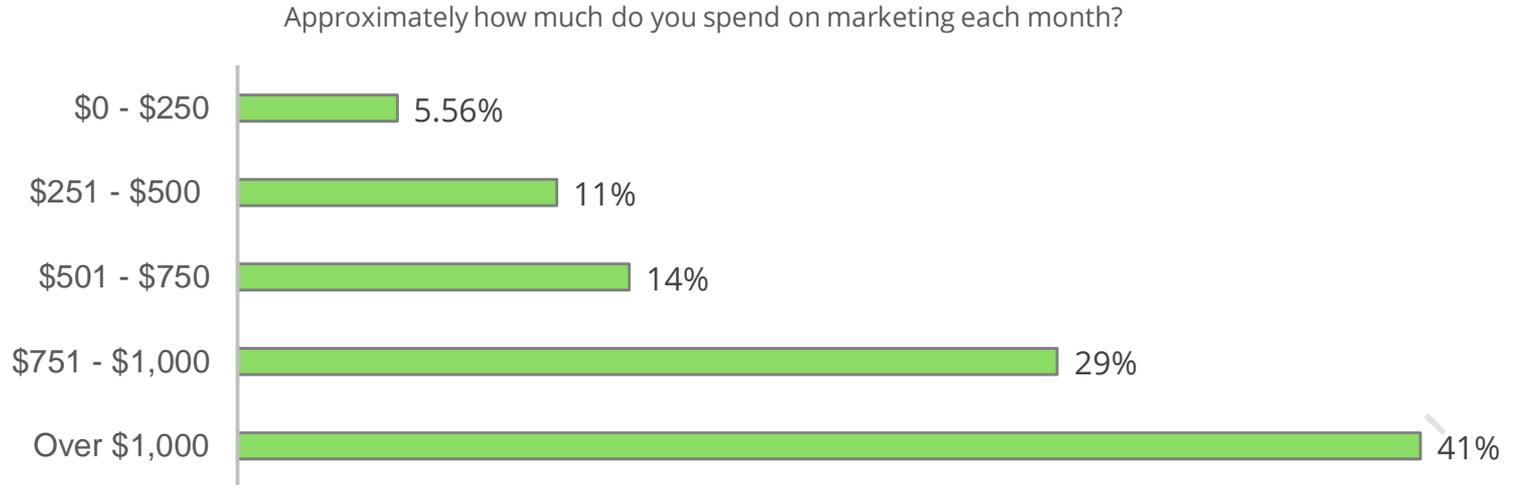
And though the minority of practices (11%) have a dedicated marketing coordinator, results indicate that these practices tend to see higher revenues than those without.

Hiring a single-minded marketing employee should improve practice revenues. On the other hand, it also increases payroll, payroll taxes and overhead. Where a dental office prefers not to add staff, outsourcing its marketing provides a dedicated resource without the organizational commitment of a new hire.



## HOW MUCH DO PRACTICES INVEST IN MARKETING?

Practices are spending less on marketing with most monthly budgets (43%) under \$250. By comparison, in 2016, only 10% of respondents reported to spend this little on marketing, and one-third of respondents spent over \$1,000 monthly to market their practices. This year, we see just 21% with budgets that high.

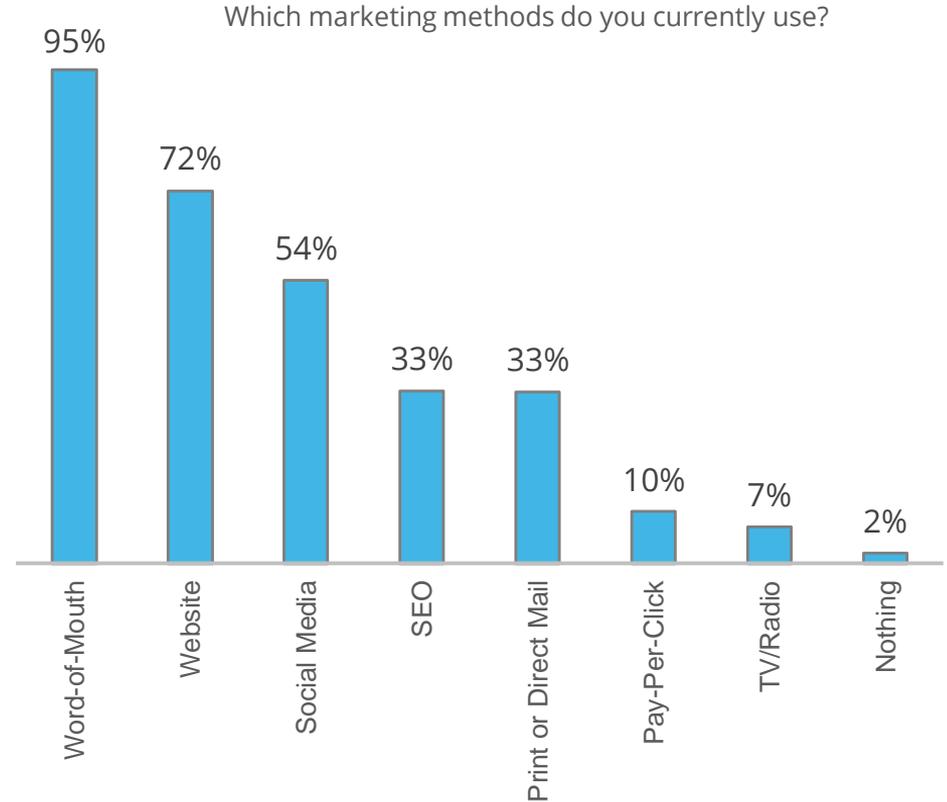


## WHAT MARKETING METHODS DO DENTISTS USE?

Word-of-mouth, a perennial favorite, continues to rank as the most popular means of new patient acquisition.

Unsurprisingly, **digital marketing methods are second in popularity** with respondents depending on a website (72%), social media (54%), search engine optimization (33%).

We were surprised, however, at the low percentages of digital marketing methods in use. And so, we dug deeper.



# Are Dental Offices Bucking the Social Media Trend?

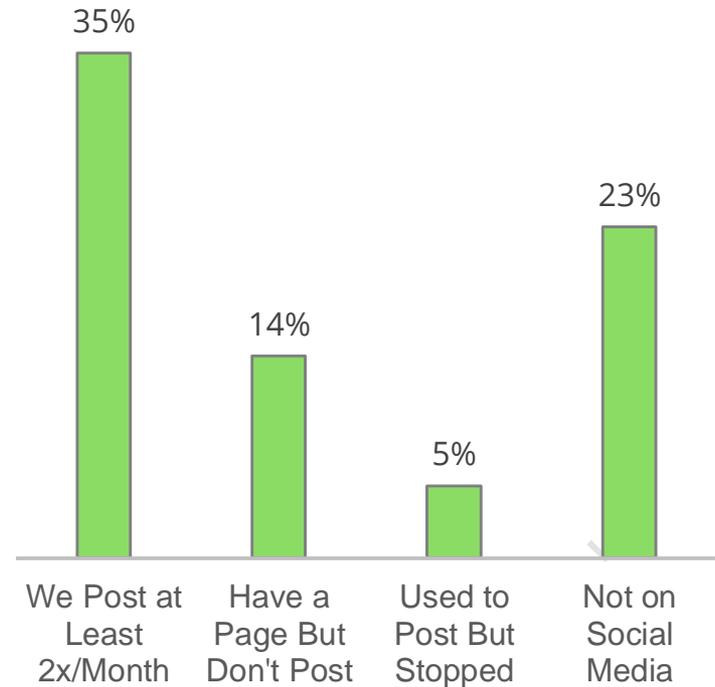
## ARE DENTAL OFFICES BUCKING THE SOCIAL MEDIA TREND?

Checking into our 2016 Benchmark Report, we discovered 88% of respondents were capitalizing on social media compared to 54% in 2018. Additionally, when looking at current practices, only 35% are posting regularly.

We wondered if practices are wise to buck the social media trend when 68% of Americans use Facebook, with half visiting the network multiple times per day. Instagram and YouTube are other social media powerhouses, with 80% of Instagram users following a business account<sup>1</sup> and 75% of Americans consuming YouTube's video content.<sup>2</sup>

Social media does require continual posting of relevant, engaging content. In addition to posts, articles, and photos, practices can create videos of patient testimonials or office tours and share them across all social networks.

Which statement best describes your social media marketing habits?



# Search Engine Optimization Usage Among Dental Practices

# SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION USAGE AMONG DENTAL PRACTICES

In the 2016 Benchmark Report, the majority of respondents indicated they were using search engine optimization (SEO), however that has dropped in the 2018 report to 33% utilizing it today.

As the name implies, SEO entails optimizing a website's content and technical attributes to boost its rankings. **Why the decline?** SEO can be complex and technical, so if most practices rely on internal resources for marketing, they may not have the proper skillset to plan, manage, and/or execute this strategy. Rather, SEO is best outsourced to a marketing provider, preferably with knowledge of the dental industry.

Without SEO, dental practices risk diminishing their online visibility to prospective patients. In fact, studies indicate **four out of five consumers perform local searches to find a business.**<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, second to personal recommendations, **online search is the preferred method of finding a new dentist by 54% of prospective patients.**<sup>4</sup> Though SEO requires a commitment, consumer behavior indicates it's a worthwhile and profitable marketing strategy. Enterprising practices can exploit the SEO decline by ramping up their own SEO activities to get a leg up on the competition.

# Marketing Habits of Busy Dental Practices

## HOW DO BUSIER PRACTICES MARKET?

Dental practices that indicated they are busier than normal are *also* the heaviest users of virtually all marketing methods, ranging from social media and search engine optimization to a mobile-friendly website.

	Direct Mail	Radio	Print	PPC	Social Media	SEO	Website	Word of Mouth
Less Busy than Normal	11%	9%	24%	9%	44%	28%	68%	94%
Same as Last Year	7%	3%	19%	9%	52%	33%	70%	96%
<b>Busier than Normal</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>93%</b>

## HOW DO MILLION-DOLLAR PRACTICES MARKET?

Offices making more than one million dollars per year focus on digital marketing *and* traditional methods, such as print or direct mail. Website usage and SEO are two strategies most heavily used by the largest dental practices.

	Direct Mail	Print	PPC	SEO	Social Media	Website	Word of Mouth
< \$249,000	7%	15%	3%	19%	47%	51%	90%
\$250,000 - \$499,000	9%	24%	5%	22%	37%	57%	95%
\$500,000 - \$749,000	10%	16%	11%	36%	54%	87%	98%
\$750,000 - \$999,000	16%	22%	14%	42%	64%	74%	92%
> \$1M	12%	29%	13%	43%	62%	82%	97%

# Patient Communication Channels

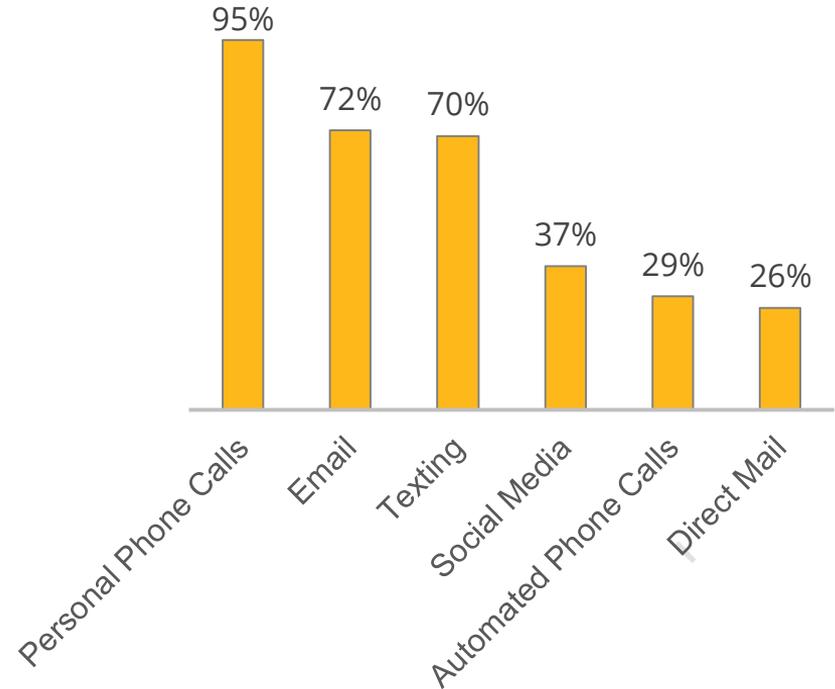
## HOW DO PRACTICES COMMUNICATE WITH PATIENTS?

There is a surprising discrepancy between dental practice communications versus actual patient preferences.

**Dental practices are mostly utilizing phone calls to contact patients, however most patients (of all ages) prefer text and email appointment reminders.**<sup>5</sup> As texts and emails are much faster than personal calls—and more readily automated—these communication channels are best for dental practices, too.

**Direct mail is the least used method** of patient communications, no doubt due to the expense, time lag and work involved in preparing items to be sent.

How do you communicate with patients?



## IT PAYS TO HAVE BETTER COMMUNICATION

Busier practices make greater use of virtually all communication channels to patients, including automated phone calls, than the average practice.

Similarly, **higher-revenue practices use all channels to reach out to patients.** The broad use of patient communication channels appears to correlate to practice income.

Clearly, staying in touch with patients pays off, but wiser practices will heed their patients' preferred means and frequency of communications. Otherwise, they run the risk of estranging their patient base. **Seventy percent of buying experiences are based on how customers feel they are being engaged.**<sup>6</sup>



# Conclusion

## CONCLUSION

Our 2018 Pulse Report shows an increase in underperforming practices over the past two years, along with reduced marketing budgets and measures. Dental practices instinctively cut expenses when business is slow and the marketing spend is often the first to go.

However, independent studies show businesses which cut back on marketing during tough times lose sales and market share. By contrast, those that continue marketing efforts increase profits compared to those who reduced their marketing.<sup>6</sup>

Our Pulse Report seems to support these findings. Specifically, **when we examined the busier practices as well as those with higher income, we found both groups to be among the most active marketers and communicators.**

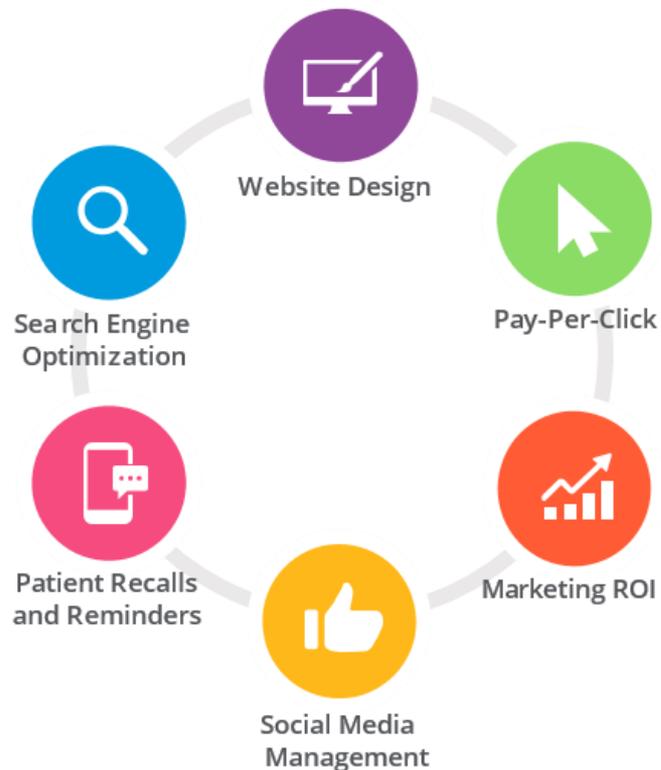
Dental practices that (1) have dedicated marketing staff, (2) employ marketing methods which are preferred by patients, and (3) communicate across a broad spectrum of channels to patients will fare best in our fiercely competitive industry.

# ABOUT PROSITES

For two decades, ProSites has been committed to helping dental practices achieve measurable practice growth through innovative marketing solutions.

Additionally, ProSites is trusted by over 7,500 dentists, endorsed by 11 state dental associations, and was voted the #1 dental website design and marketing provider in the Dentaltown Townie Choice awards two years in a row.

For more information, visit [www.ProSites.com](http://www.ProSites.com) or call (888) 932-3644.



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