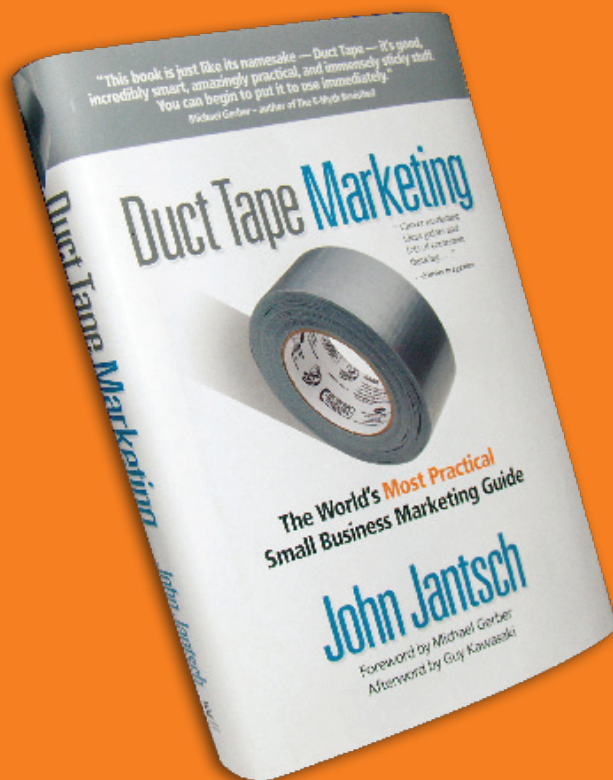


7 Steps to Dental Practice Marketing Success

Written by John Jantsch



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Practiced effectively, marketing is simply a system.

While this may be hard for some dental practice owners to come grips with, like those who feel that “marketing is a strange form of creative voodoo thinking,” marketing is not only a system—it may be the most important system in any business.

To understand how to approach marketing for a dental practice, it may be helpful to understand the Duct Tape Marketing System definition of marketing. Marketing is getting someone who has a need to know, like and trust you.

One could argue about what “like” or “trust” is in any given industry, but now more than ever, this definition gets at the heart of the game.

Here are the 7 core steps that make up the simple, effective, and affordable Duct Tape Marketing System. Dental practices that appreciate and implement this approach to marketing grow in a consistent and predictable manner.



- John Jantsch
Duct Tape Marketing



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Step 1

Strategy Before Tactics

*"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."
– Sun Tzu*

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Dental practices always want to grab the idea of the week. And dentists are absolutely the worst at this because they're doing a hundred things.

So the shiny object that makes the most noise this week is now the marketing plan. The thing is, if a dental practice owner gets the strategy part right in marketing, he or she can surround it with just about any set of tactics that are performed and measured consistently and be successful. That's how important the strategy piece is.

There are two very significant components to getting a marketing strategy down for a dental practice: to narrow focus down to an ideal patient, and to find some way to clearly differentiate one's practice.

Now those may not sound like earth-shattering ideas, but most businesses don't think about them as thoroughly as they should.

Part One: Define the Ideal Patient

Many dental practices try to be all things to all people and find it hard to really focus or succeed at serving narrowly defined market segments. Dental offices don't necessarily intend to be all things; it just sort of happens from a lack of focus and a patient on the phone asking for some help in an area that's not really the practice's thing.

While it may seem like growth to take on a new patient, if that patient isn't a good fit, it can actually stunt real growth. In some cases, trying to work with patients who are not ideal patients can lead to such a bad experience for both your practice and the patient that you actually create vocal detractors for your practice.

Most businesses are best suited to serve a narrowly defined market segment – a sweet spot. This doesn't mean the sweet spot won't grow, evolve and change altogether over time, but at any given time there exists a set, ideal patient for most dental practices.

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The trick is to discover what that ideal patient looks like in the most specific way possible, and then build an entire marketing strategy around attracting more of these.

For some, an ideal patient might simply be a subset of people who can afford what you offer. For others, the ideal patient might need and value cosmetic dentistry. In the latter, a practice is probably better off working with patients who are a perfect fit or life may get miserable.

A perfect fit may mean that the patient has the kind of need your practice can really help with, but it also might mean the patient values your unique approach and treats your staff with the respect the relationship deserves. A multiple red flag patient, taken because they said they can pay, will suck the life out of a practice faster than almost any other dynamic.

A less than ideal patient can also come in the form of a person with whom a practice would love to work, but they just don't really have the need that matches what the practice does best. Think of a good friend or relative who works for an organization that's not a good fit, or buddy at your golf club who needs some dental work you would like to help, but doesn't have the resources.

The 5 steps below, applied to a current patient base and worked in order, will tell dental practices more about their true ideal patient than any marketing class or book ever will.

- 1) Find your most profitable patients.
- 2) From the above group, identify those that refer.
- 3) From that even smaller group, find common demographic characteristics
- 4) Take the time now to understand the behavior that makes them ideal.
- 5) Draw a fully developed biographical sketch to use as a marketing guide.

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Part Two: Differentiate the Practice

Dental practices absolutely must find or create, as part of their strategy, a way to differentiate their practice from all the other practices that claim to do the same thing.

This isn't necessarily a new concept, but it's one of the hardest to get practices to actually do. Everyone wants to think what they do is so unique. Unfortunately, in most cases, it's something that everyone either can or does claim as well.

Here's a good way to get a sense of this idea. Cut and paste the first paragraph of your top five competitors' websites, blacking out all references to names, and then pass the document around the office to see if anyone can recognize which practice each paragraph belongs to. Chances are, the descriptions will be nearly impossible to tell apart.

One of the most effective bits of research you can conduct to help find what really sets your practice apart is to sit down and interview a handful of your best patients. Ask them these questions:

- What made you decide to come to us?
- What's one thing we do better than other practices?
- What's one thing we could do better?
- Would you refer us or do you refer us?
- If you would refer us, what would you say?

If your patient simply tells you that you provide great service, then push a bit with questions such as:

- What does good service look like?
- Tell me a story, or a time when we provided good service.
- What did that entail?

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It's amazing how quickly core differences come to the surface, directly from the mouths of satisfied patients. Look for common threads that surface in conversations, and then develop a core message that supports those themes. It's not easy because practice owners often want to be like everyone else; they don't want to be the different kid. Everybody in the dental industry talks about their services in the same way, so that's what practice owners think they need to do.

Stepping outside the box is essential. It's actually how practices charge a premium for their services. It's also one of the hardest things to do.



If your practice is receiving phone calls and inquiries, and one of the first questions is, "How much?" there's a really good chance you're not differentiating your practice.

If prospects can't tell how the practice is different, they're going to use the one measure that makes sense: price. As many dental practice owners have discovered, competing on price is not fun. There's always going to be someone willing to go out of business faster.

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What patients like most may not sound unique or sexy. It might be the unique products and services, but often it's a practice's way of delivering an experience. It's the front office, professionalism, wait, care, and special touches. It is how the dentist positions their practice to solve a problem that everybody in the industry is having. That's what people buy.

World Case Study: How One Dentist Differentiated his Practice

A new dental client was asked how he was different than other dental practices. He responded that he wasn't sure. So I interview twenty of his patients to find out. A large majority of them said the same thing. "He never pushes treatment; he gives me an option and educates me on the best direction to take. He also performs a lot of the difficult procedures himself, so I rarely have to see a specialist."

Now when asked what he does for a living, the dentist replies, "I am an All Care Dentist; I help patients receive treatment only when necessary."

Step 2

“When it comes to lead referral generation, the customer experience is it.” – John Jantsch

The Marketing Hourglass TM

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Most marketers are familiar with the concept of the Marketing Funnel: a whole bunch of leads are loaded into the top of a funnel, and they're choked until a few patients squeeze out the small end. With the introduction of Twitter and Facebook, people are even hungrier for more leads. The game is always about putting more and more patient leads into the top of the funnel.

But what good are leads if they aren't converted into patients, repeat business and referrals? What if, through remarkable customer experience, a practice had the ability to retain the same patients and generate a significant number of new leads and referrals from those happy patients?

When it comes to lead referral generation, the patient experience is it.

The marketing hourglass suggests that there's a logical progression through which every patient comes to know, like, and trust a practice. Once that occurs, the patient then decides to try, buy, repeat, and refer.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the logical path a patient should follow to participate in a fully developed Marketing Hourglass. This concept is one of the key elements of the Duct Tape Marketing System.



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The Marketing Hourglass™

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When one overlays the Duct Tape Marketing System definition of marketing: – “getting someone who has a need to know, like and trust you” – with the intentional act of turning know, like and trust into try, buy, repeat, and refer, the entire logical path for moving a patient from initial awareness to advocate becomes a very simple process.

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The key is to systematically develop touch points, processes and product/service offerings for each of the 7 phases of the hourglass.

- 1) **Know** – ads, articles, and referred leads
- 2) **Like** – website, reception, and email newsletter
- 3) **Trust** – marketing kit, white papers, and sales presentations
- 4) **Try** – webinars, evaluations, and nurturing activities
- 5) **Buy** – fulfillment, new patient kit, delivery, and financial arrangements
- 6) **Repeat** – post patient survey, cross-sell presentations, and quarterly events
- 7) **Refer** – results reviews, partner introductions, peer-2-peer webinars, and community building

Far too many practices attempt to go from KNOW to BUY and wonder why it's so hard. By creating ways to gently move someone to trust, and perhaps even creating low cost offerings as trials, the ultimate conversion to buy gets so much easier.

In order to start thinking about the hourglass concept and current gaps, one should ponder these questions:

- What is the free or trial offering?
- What is the new patient offering?
- What is the “make it easy to switch practices” offering?
- What is the core offering?
- What are the add-ons to increase value?
- What are the members-only offerings?
- What are the strategic partner pairings?

Step 3

"Your content and publishing efforts must be focused on achieving two things: building trust and educating." – John Jantsch

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By now practice owners are tired of hearing the phrase, "Content is King." As true as it may be, today's prospects instinctively gravitate to search engines to answer all their burning questions. The mistake many practices make is that even if they churn out continuous content, they don't make it part of their overall strategy.

Your content and publishing efforts must be focused on achieving two things: building trust and educating.

These two categories of content strategy must be delivered through the creation of very specific forms of content, not simply through sheer volume. Every practice is now a publishing business, so you must start to think like one.



Content that builds trust

- **Blog.** Blogs are the absolute starting point for content strategy because they make content production, syndication and sharing so easy. The search engines love blog content, not to mention the fact that blogs allow one to produce and organize a great deal of editorial thinking. Content produced on a blog can easily be expanded and adapted to become content for articles, workshops and eBooks.

- **Social media.** The first step in the social media content game is to claim all the free opportunities to create social media profiles on sites like LinkedIn and Facebook. Also claim your profiles within the national and local magazine communities. Building rich profiles, and optimizing links, images and videos that point back to the main site is an important part of the content strategy play.

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- **Reviews.** Ratings and reviews sites such as Yelp!, MerchantCircle and CitySearch have become mainstream, user-generated content hubs. The fact that Google, Yahoo and Bing all allow others to rate and review businesses makes these sites an increasingly important category of content that savvy practices must participate in. Your office will never have total control over this category, but ignoring it may be one of the most damaging forces for a brand. Proactive, aggressive monitoring of this channel is a must.

- **Testimonials.** Patient testimonials are a powerful form of content. Every practice today should seek patient content in multiple forms: written, audio and video. This content adds important trust-building endorsements and makes for great brand-building assets on Google and YouTube.

Content that educates

- **The Point of View White Paper.** Every practice should have a well-developed core story that's documented in the form of a white paper or eBook. This content must dive deeply into what makes a practice different, what the secret sauce is, how the dental office approaches patient service, and why the practice does what it does. This idea is expounded upon in The Referral Engine. This is the primer for a company's educational content push.

- **Seminars.** Today, patients want information packaged in ways that will help them get what they want. Presentations, workshops and seminars (online and off) are tremendous ways to provide education with the added punch of engagement. Turning one's point of view white paper into a 45-minute, value-packed session is one of the most effective ways to generate, nurture, and convert patient leads.

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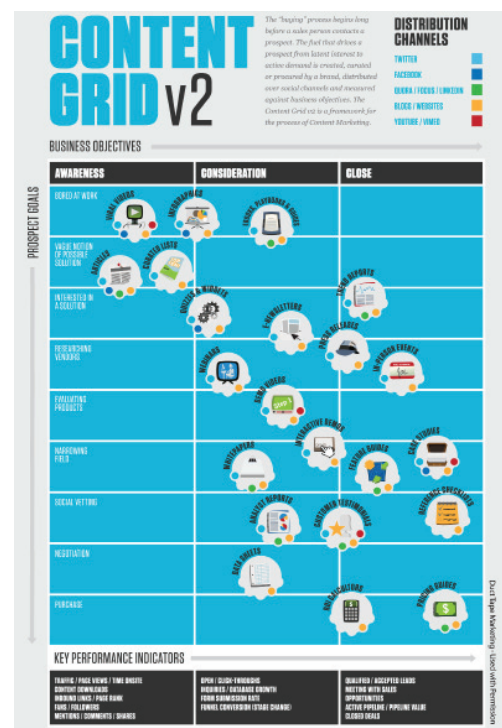
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- **FAQs.** There are those who want to know very specific things about the practice or approach, and these learners get the most value out of the traditional "frequently asked questions" approach. There's no denying the value of information packaged in this format. Go beyond the questions that routinely get asked and include those that should get asked but don't, particularly the ones that help position the practice favorably against the competition.

- **Success stories.** Building rich examples of actual patients succeeding through the use of the product or service offerings is a tremendous way to help people learn from other patients and practices just like them. When patient prospects see themselves in a success story, they can more easily arrive at a place where they can imagine getting those same results. This is another form of content that begs to be produced in video.

- All of the above elements should be built into a marketing plan with a process to create, update and curate each other.



Step 4

"Create a total web presence... or face extinction!"
– John Jantsch

Create a Total Web Presence

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There was a time, just a few short years ago really, when dental practices finally concluded they must use the web to supplement their marketing efforts and create another potential channel for marketing messages.

Today's practices must evolve that thinking radically again—or face extinction. The onslaught of social media use didn't simply create another set of marketing tactics; it signaled, to those viewing it strategically, a shift in the marketing landscape that has become preposterously evident.

The Web and digital interactivity now represent the center of the marketing universe. Most marketing decisions must start and end there. Today's practice must view its marketing strategies and tactics with an eye on growing the online center and radiating beyond with spokes that facilitate most of the offline transactional functions that drive patient acceptance and service.

All practices, regardless of industry, have become what we like to refer to as O2O (online to offline) businesses. Their primary marketing objectives are focused on driving potential patients online to engage offline. In that effort, the online core web presence has significantly heightened responsibilities.



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Furthermore:

- While advertising was used primarily to create a sale or enhance an image, it must now be used to create awareness about web content.
- While SEO was primarily a function of optimizing a web site, it must now be a function of optimizing brand assets across social media.
- While lead generation used to consist of broadcasting messages, it must now rely heavily on being found in the right place at the right time.
- While lead conversion often consisted of multiple visits to supply information, it must now supplement web information gathering with value delivery.
- While referrals used to be a simple matter of passing a name along, referrals now rely heavily on an organization's online reputation, ratings and reviews.
- While physical practice location has always mattered, now the online location for the local practice has become a life and death matter.

If you are still looking at marketing efforts in a linear way – with online tactics falling somewhere in line – it's essential that you change this view entirely. Today's practice owner must build a marketing strategy with the online engagement at the center. Only then can the dental office create the strong foundation that will carry the practice's marketing efforts into the next decade.

Step 5

Operate a Lead Generation Trio

*"Small businesses must think more in terms of being found and less in terms of finding."
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Traditional lead generation tactics—Yellow page directory advertising, radio, magazine, print ads—are quickly losing appeal with practice owners. There are two very good reasons for this decline:

- 1) Traditional methods are some of the most expensive.
- 2) Traditional methods are proving less effective in terms of lead generation.

Message and information overload, technology to block ads (Caller ID, TiVo, XM Radio) and the availability of information may make traditional and more expensive outbound marketing efforts a thing of the past.

Dental practices must change the way they think about and approach patient lead generation. They must think more in terms of being found and less in terms of finding. People are still looking for solutions, trying out new services and buying things they want, but they've just changed how they go about doing it. In a way, the control of message consumption has changed with it.

Technology has made the phone directory pocket-portable. There is no need to travel to the trade show because the interactive demo is on YouTube, blogs, search engines and social media sites. All the product information, answers and reviews one could ever consume are delivered without ever leaving home.

So, in order to generate leads and be found, practices must put themselves in the path of potential patients who are learning about, asking about, and shopping about their particular industries. Patient lead generation does not need to be done exclusively online. This advice should not lead practices to conclude that they shouldn't use advertising at all. What practice owners should understand is that their online presence is the hub of education, and that online and offline advertising, PR and referral systems must utilize this presence to its fullest potential.



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One can think of it as lighting candles along dark paths so that weary travelers can discover the practice in the dark. Those candles are the education-based entries in social media hubs like Twitter and Facebook – gentle guides of introduction. They are the PR efforts and articles, written to illuminate one's expertise. They are the blog posts, designed to attract surfers looking for the way. They are the strategic partnerships, alignments that evoke trust. They are the web conferences, providing interactive discussions with patients and prospects. They are the community-building events, places where candles can be re-lit and shared.

You can no longer sit back, dump an offer in the mail and start working the phones. You've got to build your inbound marketing machine and start taking advantage of the power of information, networking, trust, connection, and community to generate leads.

Today's integrated lead generation trio consists of creating education-based approaches that blend the use of advertising, public relations and referrals.



- 1) **Advertising.** Advertising is used in highly targeted, measurable ways to promote awareness of education-based content such as white papers, audios and seminars. It carries the highest cost and lowest credibility, but is also the only lead generation tactic that can be completely controlled. Advertising works when utilized as described and must be part of the overall mix.
- 2) **Public relations.** PR is such a powerful, credible and low-cost tool. It is an area that is often underutilized by practices. There's no real magic to generating positive press. It's a game of building relationships with a handful of key journalists and committing to creating announcements and small stories every month using a combination of local press contacts and online social media tools.

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- 3) **Referrals.** Referral generation is primarily a process of finding ways to be more referable first. It starts with the mindset of making every patient a referral source, and making it easy for them to be one. Once this is in order, you can move to building a network of strategic partners that can be relied on to refer new patients. These leads are often the highest quality.

While most practices find they develop a primary lead generation tactic, it's the thoughtful combination of repeated contacts, consistently placed, that leads to the greatest long-term, trust-building marketing.



Step 6

Make Selling a System

"The lack of a semblance of a systematic approach to selling is the biggest weakness for most small businesses."

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Oftentimes, the quickest way to make an impact on an organization's marketing results is to go to work on the lead conversion or sales process.

The lack of any semblance of a systematic approach to selling is the biggest weakness for most practices. The focus of marketing is almost always on generating more patient leads. While leads are certainly important, the obsession with generating them consumes a significant amount of time and money.

Installing a sales system, one that everyone in the organization who is involved in selling operates, is the fastest way to improve overall marketing results. We're assuming you've also [narrowly defined your ideal patient](#), created a significant way to [differentiate your practice](#), and are consistently [building trust through educational content](#).

The end result for most practices we work with is that we dramatically reduced the number of leads they are chasing (decreased expense) while also dramatically increasing the number of leads they are converting to patients (increased revenue).

If you're moving prospects logically through the [Marketing Hourglass](#), you will notice that by the time they get serious about a buying decision, they've already sold themselves. This approach almost makes selling a non-issue and delivers stunningly high conversation rates.

Below are the essential ingredients needed to operate your lead conversion system:

- **Discovery.** You must have a planned response when a patient lead asks for more information. I know this sounds obvious, but few practices do more than react. In order to move prospects, you must have a call to action, education plan, and filter that helps qualify and direct patient leads to the next step. This is a significant



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step and one that can help you stop chasing the wrong patients while also giving you an opportunity to create a unique experience. Interrupt the norm for your industry here and you'll help further cement how you're different.

- **Presentation.** Once a prospect determines they need to know more about your specific offerings, either by way of a demo or call, it's important that you have a set way to present your practice. This is a point where many front office receptionists go out and try to answer the questions that prospects have. The problem with this approach is most prospects don't know what questions they should have, so it's really up to you to start adding value in the relationship by presenting what you know is useful, while also discovering their unique challenges. This is part scripted, part art, but it should be practiced consistently across the practice.

- **Nurturing.** Depending on the buying habits of your ideal patient or sales cycle for your particular industry, you will need a systematic approach for keeping patients that are starting an information-seeking process warm as they move towards a selection decision. This is a place where technology can certainly help you make automated contacts via email or snail mail. Creating planned education events, such as online seminars and patient-to-patient discussions, is another very effective way to nurture leads and continue to educate.

- **Transaction.** For many in selling, the game ends when the patient says yes. Your lead generation conversion system must be created in a way that delivers the same experience once a prospect becomes a patient as was delivered throughout the courting period. The best way to do this is through a planned orientation process where you continue the educational approach by teaching the patient how to get the most from what they've agreed to buy. This can be through a simple training video or a more elaborate new patient process, but this important step leads to a smooth transition from prospect to patient and often sets the tone for additional services and referrals.

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- **Review.** Your selling system won't be complete until you create a process that allows you to measure and communicate the results your patients are experiencing. One of the best ways to do this is through some form of planned results review process. By setting the expectation for this process up front, you send a very strong signal that results matter, but you also get the opportunity to address issues that didn't go as expected, as well as collect patient success stories and testimonials from your happiest patients.



Step 7

Living By the Calendar

"We are what we repeatedly do. Marketing, then is not an act, but a habit."
– Aristotle

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It's tough to get around to marketing. We get it. You didn't start your practice because you were dying to get your hands dirty with blogging, copywriting, and selling. But you soon found out that your practice would die if you did not. So, what to do?

The secret to getting marketing done is to make it a habit. Or, if we may roughly paraphrase Aristotle – "We are what we repeatedly do. Marketing, then is not an act, but a habit."

Most of us have more experience trying to break a bad habit than establish a good one. The secret is to create a system and practice until it becomes second nature.

When it comes to marketing, we've learned that dental practice owners can move towards making marketing a habit by doing these three things.

- 1) **Monthly themes.** Choose one marketing need – redo your website, write your marketing kit, create a new patient process – and make it the theme for that month. You can even plan out the next six months this way and you'll stand a better chance of actually getting these done. This is a great idea when it comes to getting your entire team focused on one thing. The problem comes when we try to do it all at once. We get overwhelmed and don't get anything done. Make it simple, take the long view, and watch what happens.
- 2) **Weekly reviews.** When it comes right down to it, once you're clear on your marketing strategy, marketing itself becomes a set of projects. When you start to look at marketing as the habit of focusing on a group of projects, you can begin to break those projects down into action steps or tasks. Your weekly marketing review should include everyone in your organization and post the simple question, "What needs to be done next?" to each project on your plate.

Step 7

Living By the Calendar

"We are what we repeatedly do. Marketing, then is not an act, but a habit."
– Aristotle

Step 1: Strategy Before Tactics

Step 2: The Marketing Hourglass TM

Step 3: Publish Educational Content

Step 4: Create a Total Web Presence

Step 5: Operate a Lead Generation Trio

Step 6: Make Selling a System

Step 7: Living By the Calendar

- 3) **Daily appointments.** While you may have many things on your daily calendar, make it a habit to schedule one time slot dedicated solely to marketing each day. This is the only way to keep the focus where it belongs – on constant advancement and improvement.



About Us

Duct Tape Marketing



About John Jantsch

John Jantsch is a marketing consultant, award-winning social media publisher and author of three best-selling books, Duct Tape Marketing, The Referral Engine and The Commitment Engine.

His blog was chosen as a Forbes favorite for marketing and small business, and his podcast, a top ten marketing show on iTunes, was called a “must listen” by Fast Company magazine.

About the Ultimate Marketing System

Created by John Jantsch, the Ultimate Marketing System is a complete small business marketing system consisting of 5 modules that include audio, video, workbooks, worksheets and additional materials – the product of over 20 years of working with some of America’s most successful small businesses and independent professionals.

Hire a Duct Tape Marketing Consultant

John Jantsch also created The Duct Tape Marketing Consulting Network that trains and licenses small business marketing consultants around the world.

Shawn Russell with Red Star Marketing is a certified Duct Tape Marketing consultant and specializes in dental practice marketing. He will help you complete your ultimate marketing plan. You’ll receive one-on-one attention from a marketing pro that can help you craft a powerful marketing plan, hold you accountable for completing each step, and then show you how to implement the plan to grow your dental practice.

To get started complete a free **Dental Practice Marketing Audit** (a \$250 value) by going to www.redstarmarketing.com. Also, while you are there sign up for our dental marketing tips.



RED STAR
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Painless Dental Marketing

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