

by Melissa Herbinko

As professional relations coordinator for GKG Orthodontics in Wexford, Pennsylvania, **Melissa**



Herbinko fosters strong relationships between the practice, referring dentists and their staffs, and the public. Herbinko makes visits to local schools, helping to educate children on orthodontics and oral health. She also participates in community events, answering questions about orthodontic care while promoting the benefits of orthodontic treatment.

Make a Splash This Summer

These time-proven tips can help ensure your season
is a busy and productive one

Summer 2017 is approaching fast! As the professional relations coordinator of a busy three-doctor orthodontic practice in Wexford, Pennsylvania, I'm already brainstorming fun and creative summer incentives for patients and staff members.

The summer season provides opportunities to boost business and build relationships by participating in area community events and health fairs, which draw participants from near and far. By planning for these events in early spring, I ensure our booths have the best selection of staff and activities to encourage participation from current and potential patients.

Drawing people in

Start creating a buzz and draw attention to your booth by hanging bright, bold banners that display your practice's logo and contact information. Enticing children with a special activity always pays off. We often hire a local balloon artist named "Weird Eric," who's also a magician, and he catches children's eyes throughout the whole event. The excitement is contagious—when children see other kids with colorful balloon art they stop to ask, "Where did you get that?" and before you know it a new family is pointed in our direction. Once you catch a child's eye, watch out!

Another successful and entertaining strategy: Once a family arrives at our booth there's usually a line for Weird Eric, so we offer a Plinko board or a prize wheel with giveaways such as tooth-shaped squeeze toys, miniature bottles of hand sanitizer, ear buds, silver toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, water bottles and tumbler mugs. On hot summer days, hand out small bottles of water, sunglasses, or bandanas with your logo on them.



Conversation and communication

A staff member who has thorough knowledge about your practice and an awareness of local dental offices will foster trust and facilitate conversation that can lead to discussions with anyone who wanders up. Include a discount card of some value on the prize board to allow for friendly questions like, "Where are you folks from?" or "Who's your dentist?" Keeping your booth staffed with people who can answer questions about expanders, braces or Invisalign is essential to creating business.

When people become curious and express interest, it helps to provide visual tools that explain options. We display all the types of appliances used at our office, along with the different kinds of braces offered. We also have a TV display that shows before-and-after cases of our patients, which people love to see. As the slide show scrolls through, explain the treatment phases and types of cases. Be prepared to discuss which phases they or their child would fall under and if they'd be good candidates for treatment.

Indoor events provide an opportunity to take an iTero scanner for Invisalign. Offer to have people scanned to show the outcome simulator, which often leads to a few starts. After several visitors have been scanned, enter their names into a drawing for a discount toward treatment. If your practice offers accelerated treatments, consider offering a unit at a discounted fee or no charge. Through these methods, our practice has converted several case starts on the spot at community events.

We take time to explain to patients and their parents how our treatment plans are conservative and based on the latest research and technology. Our goal is to guarantee that patients understand our recommendations completely. It's important to make it clear that your practice takes great pride in patients.





Summer promotions and social networks

Most parents want their child to have a memorable and meaningful orthodontic experience. We do, too! Some promotions are designed to provide interaction that creates positive memories our patients can share with others.

- Our events for Summer 2017 will kick off with the announcement of a \$1,000 college scholarship winner.
- Our popular summer contest “Where in the World Is GKG Ortho?” gives patients the opportunity to borrow a photo-on-a-stick featuring one of our doctors and take it to a favorite vacation spot, where they can snap a picture and upload it to our social media page. We pin the photos on a map on the waiting room wall, too, so everyone can see the places across the world that our docs have been “taken.” Everyone who has a rewards card is awarded points for participation.
- Another successful contest, “GKG Claim It,” asks patients to place a bumper magnet by their license plate. When the GKG team spots the magnet while they’re out and about, they take a photo and share it on social media. If the owners “claim” their license plate, they get points on their rewards card.
- National Ice Cream Day may be July 16, but at GKG Ortho we celebrate it all year long by setting up a small freezer in our waiting room. After patients finish their appointment, they can enjoy a refreshing frozen treat. (Their siblings and parents are welcomed to one, too, of course.)
- We run several other promotions over the summer through social media, giving away tickets to amusement parks, the zoo, and Pittsburgh Pirates home games. These are always big hits, because families are looking for fun activities and this allows them to enjoy the best our city has to offer.
- Once August approaches many patients head back to school, but that doesn’t mean you can’t keep the positive vibes flowing throughout your patient community. For example, we create a back-to-school tote full of pencils, notebooks, folders, binders, hand sanitizers, tissues, pens, markers, colored pencils and a backpack for one lucky winner. This year we’ll have patients put their favorite teacher’s name into a drawing for a chance to win a school supply tote for his or her classroom, plus a Starbucks gift card to show how we love our local teachers.

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Remember to reward your team

Summers in an orthodontic practice are bustling and can be intense, so having a well-oiled team is key. Our staff is full of incredible, dedicated workers who promote and engage patients to participate in our activities.

We partner with a local technical school to hire a high school dental student to help us during the summer, which provides a great learning opportunity for the student. It also gives us an extra set of hands to sterilize instruments and set up the operatories, which helps keep the practice on schedule!

To boost staff morale, plan opportunities to gather for fun. We always have a pre-summer party where we rent a box at a Pirates home game, enjoy a night at the ballfield and plan for the productive three months ahead. Then, after the season's through, we plan a team dinner and drinks, followed by a group activity like a trip to an "escape room," where you must work together to get out before time runs out. Other adventures have included a biking trip, a mud run and a day at a waterpark. You must acknowledge that a practice's success comes from its devoted staff. Applauding your team will go a long way!

Soon the sun will be setting earlier and the days will be getting shorter, and it'll be time to start thinking about summer 2018's activities and promotions to keep our practice humming. Remember to keep the momentum going by repeating what you know works—and take some risks in the interest of growing the business and engaging your patients and staff in memorable, positive ways. ■

