

## INDUSTRYBEAT



*In an age when advanced computer technology has revolutionized how people interact, some orthodontists respond by offering Internet services to their patients. Frith Maier, CEO of Pt Interactive, Seattle, shares how this company's online patient communication system is meeting the needs of orthodontic practices.*

**Q** *How can websites provide customer service?*

**A** With Ortho Sesame, we have taken the one-dimensional website and transformed it into a doctor-patient communication system that harnesses the power of the Internet to make practices more efficient and profitable. Our system solves several very expensive problems—missed appointments and the staff time taken by answering routine questions. The Ortho Sesame technology copies data from practice management software and transfers it to secure servers on the Internet. We show patients their appointments, personalized treatment images, and comprehensive personal and insurance payment histories. The website makes it easy for patients to get the information they need any time, and doctors save money and provide a higher level of service.

**Q** *What is the advantage of automated emails?*

**A** Patients register their email addresses to use our online service. Most Americans check email every day, and patients want easy access to information from the orthodontist. Every night, our software uploads the information entered into the doctor's database. Our service then sends appointment reminders to scheduled patients. We send birthday greetings, recall reminders, treatment letters, and overdue payment alerts. We are automating many of the tasks that have traditionally been done manually.

**Q** *How can orthodontists direct traffic to their websites?*

**A** The best referral sources are still family and friends. The traffic that we believe is important to be sending to the websites is existing patients, motivating them to refer others. For a typical doctor, we sent 10,000 emails last year. The email appointment reminder is effective at eliminating no-shows, and it also helps build community because patients get messages that keep them in the loop about what is going on at the doctor's practice. Doctors include news about contests, continuing education, and the people on staff. It is a very powerful tool for outreach. Email reminders prompt patients to click back to the doctor's website, and these emails get forwarded to family and friends.

**Q** *How do patients respond to orthodontic websites?*

**A** We get hundreds of surveys from patients every month, and 97% tell us that they found the answers they needed on Ortho Sesame; 98% say that it is more convenient to get information online, as compared to calling the orthodontic office. Patients are very appreciative of the orthodontist who shows respect for their challenges—juggling their schedules and getting information. For any orthodontist who wants to improve office productivity and patient satisfaction, smart Internet services are essential. Noninteractive websites have not proven to make much of a difference in a practice. Ortho Sesame's sites are dynamic. The information is new every day, and that is why users go back. □

—Lauren Hirigoyen, Associate Editor