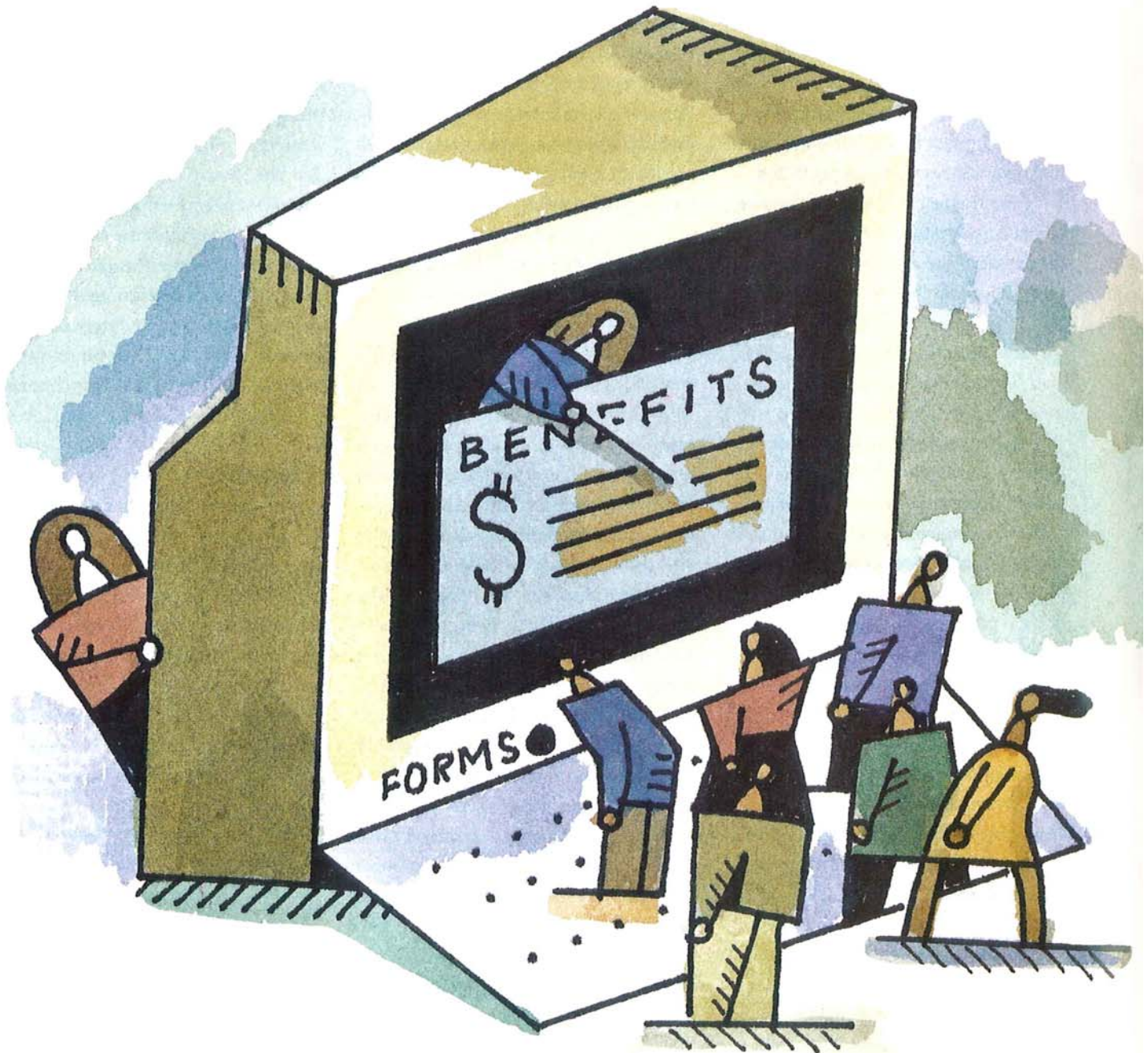


# The Internet and

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# Case Conversion

BY BRIAN POVOLNY, DDS, MSD, PHD

How often do prospective patients choose to start treatment in your office on the first appointment? If you're batting over 900, let me know so I can find out how you're doing it! But if your practice is like mine and not all prospective patients who are ready to start sign up immediately, read on to learn how to boost your conversion rate using the Internet.

I will use the term "post-exam conversions" to denote those patients who do not sign a contract on the first visit but require extra effort on the part of the Treatment Coordinator to get them enrolled. For the average practice, these post-exam conversions represent a significant percentage of all case starts. When someone leaves an exam without committing to treatment, I have already invested a substantial amount of time and resources: 20 minutes of my time, one hour of my Treatment Coordinator's time, an hour of chair time, and the cost of the patient's complimentary records. And that's not including any internal or external marketing expense to get them to our office in the first place. Post-exam conversions are as important in my practice as scheduling new exams.

Our message has to reverberate after that uncommitted patient has left the office. That's why a key part of our conversion strategy is making sure that we stay in relationship with those patients and parents who do not start when they first come in.

## THE ART OF WEB BASED CASE CONVERSION

Traditional ways of "getting the message home" include brochures, letters, presentation folders with information about the practice, and

maybe even an electronic business card. Without question, these tools are useful, but how significantly do they affect your post-exam conversion rate? Most of these materials end up in a pile on someone's kitchen counter. To envision what happens to your take-home materials, look no further than the stack on your own desk! Even when the material in that stack concerns products and services you're interested in, where do you find even ten minutes to sit down and focus on it? And how many times have you had the experience of putting a disk into your computer only to find that you have to download additional software to make it play? The fact is you can't rely solely on take-home materials to complete the conversion process for you, and in a world where most orthodontic con-



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sumers have access to the Internet you don't have to!

In my practice, we've developed a multi-faceted strategy for post-exam conversions. Every parent or adult patient leaves our office with the standard presentation folder, and receives a letter within several days. But before they leave, the Treatment Coordinator shows them how to visit my web site, [planetortho.com](http://planetortho.com), so they can see the digital images and radiographs we've just taken for them, as well as OrthoMation movies customized specifically for them that aid understanding treatment. They don't have to wait while we burn a CD.

We upload the new patient's pictures from our digital camera and their digital panoramic and cephalometric radiographs from our Digident system to our PracticeWorks Imaging server, just as thousands of other orthodontists do. Then, the Ortho Sesame service automatically transfers these records to the Web. This means that we have a full set of digital records online for each patient without my staff doing any extra work. And the images are all transferred securely, so we avoid the issue of sending

patient images as an email attachment - a questionable practice in the age of HIPAA. This is the first step in our post-exam conversion process.

As soon as the patient leaves, the Treatment Coordinator sends an email thanking the patient for coming in and letting them know we look forward to serving them. This email contains the link to the password protected page on our web site where they click through to see their x-rays, and intra-oral and facial photographs. I can't explain why, but new patients really love seeing their images on line.

Also displayed on the password protected web page are the OrthoMation case presentation movies we've selected for this patient. These movies are, again, automatically uploaded to our website. The x-rays, photos, and movies in combination pack the power of visual imagery. The still undecided patient or parent sees their photos and x-rays on our web site alongside movies illustrating how we will correct their orthodontic problem. They are picturing themselves with a new smile while looking at their own images on our web site.

The value of having this connec-

tion is hard to overestimate. By giving the patient compelling reasons to revisit our web site, we add another high impact contact with them. We believe that this at-home personalized contact is the clincher that makes the patient choose our office for their treatment. Plus, it gives us a good way to deal with the situation that arises when one parent (usually Mom!) has accompanied the child to the exam, then leaves saying "I'll have to discuss it with my husband." We didn't get to talk with Dad at the exam but now we can take our message into his home and have him see it while visiting our web site.

Sometimes, the person who doesn't commit at the initial exam is the analytical sort, who needs time and research to be comfortable with a decision based on information from a number of orthodontic offices. Our web service communicates to this person that we're on the cutting edge and that we are concerned with making her interactions with us more convenient and effective. She already knows that we'll help her remember appointments by sending an email reminder: when we scheduled the ini-

tial exam, we asked for her email address, so she received a reminder for that very first appointment. Now she sees that we also show her detailed information online, so she can check her appointments and view her account 24 hours a day. She can pay us online. If she wants Invisalign®, her ClinCheck movie will be viewable online. She inevitably compares these aspects of her experience in our office with the other offices she visits.

Our web presence makes it clear to prospective patients that we care about customer service. My relationship with my existing patients extends

beyond my office hours and occurs at times of the day and night that are convenient for them. For instance, they can log onto my web site at 10:00 PM to find out about their next appointment, or to pay their bills or sort out their insurance. I am now able to relate to new patients before they have committed to treatment in our office.

By visiting our web site after their exam and seeing materials expressly their own, prospective patients realize how much further we take the patient-doctor relationship beyond merely straightening their teeth. This type of customer service is part of what turns

our existing patients into loyal advocates for our practice. Using the Internet to communicate with new patients allows us to increase the chances that they will enter our practice. If we continue to do our job well, they, too, will advocate us as a practice that goes the extra mile for its patients. ■

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