

# Sesame Communications gives dentists a web check up

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For dentists looking to grow their practices, the web is where it's at, and a Renton company is helping them to maximize that opportunity.

The company is Sesame Communications, and it offers dentists an innovative and constantly evolving array of services, from marketing-tested websites to search engine experts who can bring a laser-like focus to drawing new patients in. It's a strategy that seems to be working.

"We've grown revenue 40 to 50 percent over last three years, even in the midst of the (economic) downturn,"

said Fritch Maier, founder and CEO. "The clear picture is doctors understand more than ever that they want to stay close with patients, and to do so in a cost effective way.

"It's really very simple: we help doctors get found, get chosen and stay connected," she added.

Sesame Communications offers dentists online patient email management, scheduling and automatic reminders, online account information, practice newsletters and online X-rays and images. The company also manages online ad campaigns for dentists.

Sesame's services have clearly struck a chord: it now has a network connecting 3 million patients with their doctors, Maier said. The company has grown from 25 employees in 2006 to 63 in 2008. Sesame has enjoyed a three-year growth percentage of 104 percent.



Maier

Sesame constantly surveys patients, and incorporates what staff learns into the products it offers, such as helping schedule and remind patients of appointments through the internet and email, Maier said.

With more than 5,000 surveys conducted each month, Sesame's research

gives insight to patient preferences.

"We have found over 98 percent of patients would rather click than call a dentist," Maier said. "It's more convenient to go to doctor's website and access the answers they need, like payment history or scheduling. They don't want to be interrupted by a phone call or answering machine message."

Maier said part of Sesame's success is that it creates websites differently than many web designers. Rather than survey the dentists about likes, dislikes, hobbies or such, Sesame uses marketing to determine what patients like and what makes them choose one doctor over another, Maier said.

"We look at what people look for in a site, instead of guessing," she said. "We partner with a market research firm to identify what the criteria are" for selecting a dentist.

Maier has no intention of broadening her clients beyond the dental world.

"For years we've gotten requests (for services) from plastic surgeons, dermatologists, even the pet people," she said. "But I determined early on about being clear about who we are, being focused on it and being the very best. To go deep rather than going horizontal and shallow...We don't try to be all things to all people.

"I want only happy people." And that's working, she said.

"We have a 96 percent (client) retention rate."

In her company's 10 years, perhaps the most important lesson she's learned is that of listening. One important group she listens to is what she calls her "30 and under advisory council," people who understand that way people are interacting with technology and what that means for the future.

But they're of course not the only ones Maier listens to.

"The interchange of ideas — that's what I find really great about coming to work. As the company has grown and we have been able to add talent at increasingly higher levels, the discourse becomes so fascinating."

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SESAME COMMUNICATIONS

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Ranking

Web design and search marketing services for dental professionals

Fiscal year	Net operating revenue	No. of employees
2006	\$2.25M	25
2007	\$3.13M	32
2008	\$4.59M	63

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