Don’t be stationary over stationery

David Mills provides a quick guide to getting it right

In the competitive world of dentistry, it can be hard to keep up with the Joneses’ as practitioners offer an increasing array of options and treatments. With the extremely high standards set for dentists, by governing bodies and by the clinicians themselves, the quality of work is rarely called into question in any reputable practice, so how do you set yourself apart from the game? One of the best options is effective advertising, and this can be achieved even by small and cost effective means such as business cards and stationery.

High impact, quality stationery can help you to successfully convey your practice philosophy to both the public and the local business community. The image that you project to the public is of the utmost importance both with regards to finding new patients, and preserving your existing client base. Patients are only too pleased to give repeat business to a dentist whom they trust to offer them the best possible service, and their loyalty and ‘word of mouth’ advertising are essential to the maintenance of a thriving practice.

So what next?

In order to establish an effective range of stationery, your first port of call must be a reliable printer. This can be a confusing and daunting experience however, as the printing industry has, over the years, developed into such a complex trade that people outside the business are frequently baffled by its intricate and seemingly bizarre vocabulary. Reputable printing firms will provide you with an expert representative to help you overcome this unexpected language barrier, and specialist companies, dealing with the health sector, can cater to your specific needs as a dental practitioner.

You should also speak to other people regarding printing costs, as it is a good idea to have a budget in mind when speaking to a printer. The printing industry can be just as competitive as dentistry and so it is always in the printer’s best interests to offer you the optimal deal. If a printer in recalcitrant with regards to offering you a better, cheaper solution, it may be that you should take your business elsewhere.

Your vision of what you want from your stationery is what really matters and it is the job of the printer to take your ideas and requirements and turn them into a viable technical solution that suits your business and your budget. However, while your printer possesses the array of options and treatments not your ideas, the buck should never stop with them. It’s your job to see that everything is going to plan at every step of the way and to this end it is essential that you carefully proof everything before it is sent to print. Even specialist printers can be unfamiliar with some technical terminology but by submitting copy electronically, you can ensure that any necessary changes can be made quickly and easily.

Decisions, decisions

There are several factors to consider when ordering, for example, business cards. Firstly, if your logo is coloured, you will need to decide whether one, two, three or four colours are appropriate. Having four colours is the most expensive and can be used to create photo quality images, but simpler logos may require only one or two colours, saving you money.

The next step is to decide upon the finish of your cards. Finishes come in two types - coated or uncoated. Uncoated is basic card and tends not to wear as well as coated, but it is cheaper to produce and makes great appointments cards, as the surface can be written on with a pen. Coated card is not as good for writing on but is more durable and can look more ‘upmarket’. It also comes in matt or gloss finish and is most people’s preference for business cards, but your printer will be able to advise you on this.

The weight of the card (how thick it is) is also something to consider as, while heavier card can be more expensive, it is also generally better quality and can have a ‘classier’ feel. You may wish to think about postage costs in making this decision as well as whether you think your cards are likely to be used to convey information and immediately dispose of, or kept for long periods of time. Along with the weight of the card, you will need to decide upon a size. You can pick virtually any size for your cards but the most popular option is 85x54mm, the standard size of a credit card and therefore ideal for keeping in a purse or pocket. However appointment cards may need to be bigger, in order to fit in more information and complex or photo-quality graphics can look squashed on smaller media (artwork can also incur an extra charge so check with your printer).

When considering your budget and you will need to assess how many business cards you think you will need as the quantity or ‘print run’ is the main factor in fixing a price. Most businesses give discounts on large orders and, as the majority of the cost come from the initial set up of the design; it is economical to place the largest order you can. However, if you rarely give out business cards, or your information/contact details are liable to change, you run the risk of being left with unused stock that will then be wasted.

When your card is ready to go to print, you will be sent a proof, which you will need to sign off. This is the most important stage of the process, as any mistakes now will necessitate a reprint of the entire stock and, whilst most reliable companies will give you a reduction on reprints (accidents do happen) this kind of generosity cannot be relied upon, and can prove an expensive and time-consuming error.

It can be a good idea at this point to check the document, walk away, and then check it again with fresh eyes to make sure you haven’t missed anything. You can also get another member of staff to check it, or even ask a patient what they think of the design, as it is ultimately their opinion that counts.

Remember that high impact, quality stationery is, quite literally, your ‘calling card’ and the product that you present to the public will reflect your ethos as a practitioner. So, do your research before committing to buy, consider your design carefully before submitting it your printer, and check your proofs before printing to ensure that you have a company image that can really turn heads.

Quick Tips

• Speak to colleagues to get a ‘word-of-mouth’ recommended Printer with specialist knowledge of your industry.
• Remember, black still counts as one of your colours.
• Checking twice means printing once!

About the author

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