

Internet-Based Marketing and PR Campaign Gives Cosmetic Dentist Helaine Smith Something to Smile About

When she first established her Boston practice in 1994, cosmetic dentist Dr. Helaine Smith, like most of her colleagues, focused her marketing efforts on television and print advertising. A savvy businesswoman – her credentials include an MBA in addition to several degrees in dentistry – she frequently joined forces with other area dentists to defray the costs of costly television spots or full-page ads in the local newspaper’s Sunday magazine.

The advertising campaign proved to be expensive. Even worse, it was ineffective.

Dr. Smith sums up the reasons for the campaign’s failure succinctly. “In New England, people tend to be very loyal to their dentists. And advertising prices are generally higher here than elsewhere in the country, so it’s a real challenge to get a return on investment. In addition, cosmetic dentistry is utilized less in New England than elsewhere. There is still a strong Puritan streak in our culture that frowns upon anything that might be seen as vain.”

Dr. Smith also realized the limitations of a short television spot or print ad to convey her message. As she explains, “It’s very hard to get a complex message about the benefits of cosmetic dentistry across in a 30-second T.V. spot. I wanted to be able to share my expertise with people, to educate them. I also wanted to give them an opportunity to get to know me as an expert in the field and as someone with integrity. It’s very difficult to get that across in an ad.”

Dr. Smith looks to the Web and DH Communications

Dr. Smith knew she needed a new marketing strategy. She hired a branding expert, and together they worked to ensure that every aspect of Dr. Smith’s practice, from the office décor to the Website, consistently conveyed the benefits of cosmetic dentistry, Dr. Smith’s expertise, and her commitment to provide a soothing environment for her patients. She also hired a public relations consultant, who pitched stories about Dr. Smith to local television stations and newspapers.

In spite of all their efforts, Dr. Smith saw no increase in business.

Dr. Smith turned her attention to her Website. At the time, the Website was essentially an online brochure for prospective clients to reference as they considered their cosmetic dentistry options. Most of Dr. Smith’s patients found her through referrals from friends and co-workers.

Dr. Smith knew that the Website had the potential to be much more than a passive marketing tool. She wanted people to find her Website, but didn’t know where to begin. She had heard about Dianna Huff, President of DH Communications, Inc., through an online network of associates from business school, and decided to contact her.

As Dr. Smith puts it, “I really feel like I lucked out when I called Dianna. I went into this only knowing

that I wanted to improve my Website. I knew nothing about search engine optimization – I just knew that my marketing efforts weren't working for me. Dianna has opened up a whole new world for me.”

When Dr. Smith and Huff teamed up, Huff had established a reputation as an expert in business-to-business marketing communications. She had worked for a variety of organizations, from small businesses to major corporations, including Cabot Corporation, Microsoft Business Solutions, SAP, Thermo Electron, and Constant Contact.

Instead of a single Services page with generic copy, Huff created five new pages, each specifically matched to key phrases prospective clients were using to find cosmetic dental services in Boston.

Dr. Smith was impressed by the results Huff had achieved for these companies – and by the way she had established her own reputation as an authority in B2B marketing. She wanted Huff to help her achieve the same measure of success in her own field, giving her recognition as an expert in cosmetic dentistry.

They both knew that it was a bit of a gamble. Neither was certain that an Internet-based marketing and public relations campaign would be effective for a dentist, or that the B2B marketing tactics Huff had used with such success for her

other clients would yield the same results for Dr. Smith.

First Step: Optimize the Website

Huff began by optimizing Dr. Smith's Website, restructuring it so that prospective clients looking for a cosmetic dentist in the Boston area would be able to find the site easily via search engines. The project was challenging due to fierce competition on search engines for terms such as “boston cosmetic dentists” and “cosmetic dentists boston.” Huff focused her changes on the following:

- The home page for Dr. Smith's Website was a graphic – so search engines couldn't read it. Huff created a new home page that clearly explained Dr. Smith's services, addressed prospective clients' concerns about cosmetic dentistry, and included a clear call to action.
- Instead of a single Services page with generic copy, Huff created five new pages, each specifically matched to key phrases prospective clients were using to find cosmetic dental services in Boston. Each new page featured information about the service, along with a call to action.
- Huff and Dr. Smith began systematically adding content to the site, both to boost search engine rankings and to advance prospective clients through the sales cycle. For example, Huff created Dr. Smith's new semi-monthly newsletter, “Successful

Smiles,” which addressed important consumer concerns such as dental tourism and screening for oral cancer. DH Communications began adding press releases about Dr. Smith’s new products and achievements to the site.

Dr. Smith Moves into Social Media and Viral Campaigns

With the Website up and running, ranking well in the search engines and consistently attracting more traffic than before, Huff began to explore other ways to help Dr. Smith establish a presence on the Internet. Dr. Smith often sent Huff opinions about the news she was reading, so Huff set up a blog where Dr. Smith could post her views about industry trends and news events. Dr. Smith also asked Huff to begin developing podcasts, while she undertook to develop a series of videos on YouTube, both covering many of the same topics in the newsletter.

Huff also recommended that Dr. Smith revamp her Website design to give it a more professional look and feel – and to accommodate all the new content being generated. Sonora DesignWorks, of Amesbury, MA, worked with Huff and Dr. Smith to develop the new site, which incorporates a press room, a virtual tour, and an expanded “Before and After” section.

Dr. Smith’s most recent undertaking? An e-book, distributed free online, titled *Healthy Mouth, Healthy Sex!*, explaining how important oral health is to one’s sex life. In the space of six weeks, the e-book had over 2,700 downloads – a significant

number for a small business – thanks to a number of blog posts about the book and rave reviews from Dr. Smith’s colleagues.

Real Results: Increased Business... and a New Practice

The impact of all of this activity on Dr. Smith’s practice has been significant.

Dr. Smith estimates that the Website is generating \$20,000 a month in additional business. The increased business volume enabled her to open a second dental practice.

“This story clearly illustrates the importance of perseverance,” Dr. Smith says. “The initial results were disappointing. It took time for us to see an increase in traffic to the Website, and even more time to see an increase in business. Dianna never gave up and never stopped trying. Now we can look back and know that it was all worth it, that all our hard work paid off.”

The evidence?

- Dr. Smith climbed towards the top for important search phrases on Google: #1 for “boston dental veneers,” #3 for the highly competitive “cosmetic dentists boston,” and #3 for “pain free dentists boston.” Dr. Smith, who asks all of her patients how they found her, began booking several new

appointments every week with people who had learned about her via the Internet.

- The number of visitors to Dr. Smith's Website increased by seven times over a three-year period – from 500 visitors in March of 2005 to 3500 in March of 2008. The number of visitors continues to climb.
- Dr. Smith also noticed a significant change in the types of prospective patients she sees. She explains, "Back when I was advertising on television or in the newspaper, people would come in to see me 'off the street.' They really didn't understand the benefits – and costs – of cosmetic dentistry. Now, much of my marketing involves educating the public, so when people call me, they've read my newsletter and they've been on my Website. They're educated consumers who have already given serious thought to cosmetic dentistry by the time they call for an appointment. It has saved me a tremendous amount of time."
- The volume of business generated by the

Website increased. Dr. Smith estimates that the Website is generating \$20,000 a month in additional business. The increased business volume enabled her to open a second dental practice.

Dr. Smith was also happy about some of the less tangible benefits of her marketing campaign with DH Communications.

Her colleagues in the dental profession have frequently mentioned to her that they've seen her name pop up on the Internet. And she has routinely received requests from professional journals to be interviewed as an expert, most recently by Dental Economics to share her expertise in the use of new technology for marketing.

"Now I don't have to go out looking for the press. They come to me. It's been great not having to go out and pitch stories. Having DH Communications take care of my marketing campaign has meant that I can concentrate my energies on my dental practice. Now I can focus on my strength, which is dentistry."

And that makes Dr. Helaine Smith smile.

About Dianna Huff

Dianna Huff specializes in B-to-B marketing communications consulting and copywriting for companies such as Constant Contact, Cabot Corporation, Microsoft Business Solutions, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Coldwell Banker, and a host of small to mid-size companies and agencies.



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