

Orthodontic Offices 2009: Grow, Thrive and Be Exceptional!

by Mark Dusek, DDS

I asked Joyce Matlack, an orthodontic office design consultant who works out of Santa Cruz, California, to write a brief article about redesigning or building an office during these financial times. If you would like to reach Mrs. Matlack with any questions she can be reached at www.matlack-vaneverdysign.com.

The challenging economy has definitely been a topic of concern in the world of orthodontics. Graduating residents as well as those doctors who have been in practice for years are aware that remodeling, expanding or building a new office seems to be a daunting endeavor. However, there are many reasons that make this a great time to move forward with your project. Land prices have gone down; contractors and sub-contractors fees have greatly decreased. Building material costs continue to significantly decrease. Landlords are anxious to have a great tenant and are offering more assistance and incentives to help with the “build out” of new offices. Financing is also available through orthodontic supported companies.

Building or designing an office is an important step in an orthodontist's career. Instead of “reinventing the wheel,” an orthodontist should utilize professionals who work in

orthodontics. Professionals can help select a location, put the design/construction team together, define a budget, select equipment, and help oversee the project. You will likely spend the same amount of money for great design and function, as you will for an office that looks great but has poor function. Professionals should be selected because of their successes at creating highly functional as well as aesthetically pleasing offices. Contractors should have dental office construction experience.

Location of the office, building size, parking, and accessibility are a very important part of your “diagnosis and treatment planning.” Current HIPAA, OSHA, and ADA compliance must be met. Each topic will have many ramifications.

Ultimately your office needs optimal function and flow for the patients, doctor and staff. The physical size and shape of the building dictates the initial parameters, but good design will make the best of any situation. The smaller the office size, the greater the expertise in design that is needed. The following principles delineate the office design process. The more you are able to incorporate these elements in your design, the more ideally your office will function.

- Provide an entry with a computer check-in with a smiling, greeting team member in view.
- Set up a paperless office with computer check-in, plasma screens strategically placed, imaging, digital radiography, a Smart Board, a laser and treatment card. Minimally, prepare for future technology.
- Create a circular flow around the office with new patients going one direction and exiting patients the other. Exiting can be from either side.
- Evaluate the pros and cons of different patient chair arrangements: lineal, L configuration, semi circle, rear delivery.
- Create a central location for a high-tech, state-of-the-art sterilization room.
- Provide privacy by semi-private dividers between some or all of your treatment chairs at 4-5' high.



Reception Before



Reception Area After

- Plan for a stand-up consult alcove in the hall for short discussions with parents and patients.
- Consider incorporating LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) into your remodel or new construction. This is great for the environment and your community marketing.

Orthodontic practices and patients are not going to disappear. This is the time to be optimistic, proactive, and aggressive in your commitment to thrive and have an exceptional orthodontic practice. Creating an office to functionally and aesthetically reflect the quality of care that you give will make a statement to patients and community and will definitely help in marketing, practice growth, and success.

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