The Impact of New Technologies on Dental Practice  
Dr. RON WEINTRAUB

With the explosion of new technology, dental practitioners have the opportunity to expand their horizons. Patients expect practitioners to keep pace with technological advances, so developing strategies to cope with these new demands requires sound consideration. Understanding the needs, benefits, and barriers of incorporating technology helps practitioners in the decision-making process to incorporate new technologies into their practices.

According to University of New Mexico communication theorist, Everett M. Rogers (1930-1994), individuals tend to respond differently in adapting to a new paradigm. Rogers placed us in four categories: the Innovators, Early Adopters, Early and Late Majority and the Resisters. The Innovators are those who seek out and are first to incorporate technological solutions to clinical as well as administrative objectives. Within a slim cross-section of our profession are those who have a strong affinity for new incorporation of technology. As a result, they are convinced to adapt to the inclusion of technological advances that significantly contribute to more successful practices. The Early and Late Majority group makes up the largest percentage of dental practitioners. This group feels pressure to be more proactive in adapting to the technological explosion. The new norm is patient-driven and is now a reality. Patients question and request technologies such as one-hour tooth-whitening capabilities e.g., ZOOM™. Non-responsiveness to patient-driven demands can be costly to the practice not incorporating requested services. Patients may seek treatment elsewhere based on their perception that their dental provider is not current in supplying necessary care. Patient-driven demand, specifically in the cosmetic realm, is a major factor in the impetus to expand on elective dental procedures. The final group, the Resisters, drag their heels and needs assurance that a new idea will not fail before they can adopt it.

Benefits of adopting technological strategies are undeniable. The challenge is to determine the most efficacious way to incorporate them into practice. The ability to access expensive high-tech equipment is enhanced by sharing the costs, inherent in group practice. In many cases, the ROI - Return-On Investment - is directly proportional to the number of times the system is used. For example, the more units generated on a CEREC the less onerous the investment to acquire the hardware becomes. Single practitioners need to assess carefully and introduce slowly those technologies that would be most appreciated in their practice. Some dental supply companies are geared to provide support needed to integrate new systems into your operation. These companies are indispensable to the successful deployment and introduction of the newly acquired equipment and are worthwhile to seek them out.

Another commitment to include new technology is the learning curve associated with the training to develop competence in its use. Courses to reach proficiency are provided by manufacturers and seminars are presented by distributors and guest clinicians for professional staff and their team as an integral part of the investment.

A danger exists that the public may adhere to the misconception that technology is a substitute for competence. Clearly, we dentists have a responsibility to negate this thinking. Technology is a powerful adjunct to an established caring and committed practice.

Ron Weintraub is a founding partner with the Bayview Village & Downtown Dental Associates and brings to the Professional Advisory, over thirty years of knowledge and experience in the practice of general dentistry. Large companies such as Patterson Dental, Ash Temple Ltd. & the former Canadian Dental Co. have all sought his particular brand of expertise. Ron has been known to offer insight in the areas of practice enhancement. As a consultant to Innovative Practice Solutions, Ron can be found advising dentists on practice purchase, sales, location evaluations, association by-laws, and practice mergers. Dr. Weintraub can be contacted at (416) 224-1775 or admin@bvdental.com.