



# Implant Game Changers

***A Whitepaper Series By Roger P. Levin, DDS***

Implant Game Changers is a monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

# The Psychology of Implant Case Acceptance

We all look better as leaders in good economic times. Everything is easier, growth happens almost automatically, and as the saying goes: "life is good." Inevitably there will be economic downturns, and, at the moment, we are in a down economy. In a down cycle, your leadership, management, strategy, and referral marketing must all change. The degree to which they need to change depends on how far the economy slips. The psychological mindset of the implant patient depends heavily not only on how much they have in available funds, but how concerned and anxious they are about the news they are hearing.

## Why we have business cycles

There are countless articles, books, and commentaries on this topic by experts in economics. I don't pretend to be an expert, but after watching business cycles for 38 years, I am certain that psychology plays a major role in economic conditions. To make this very simple I'll explain it like this:

When times are good, everybody wants to jump in, participate, and reap the benefits of investing. When enough people jump in, everything becomes overvalued, and people start jumping back out. As people jump out of investments in larger and larger numbers, we move into a down economic cycle like the one we are in right now. The question is whether patients will accept implant treatment at the same rate during this period.

During down cycles, people start holding on to their money and that could decrease new patient consults and case acceptance. They become concerned about what might happen even if they aren't affected. In this era of 24-hour cable news, this scenario is exacerbated and happens faster. As people continuously hear about the economy, how bad it is, or how bad it may become (which might never happen) they start tightening up their spending and spend money differently. For example, some people would never consider giving up their daily five-dollar gourmet coffee, but they would consider skipping implant treatment or seeking less expensive care at least for now.

Will surgical practices be affected? Well, we already have evidence to answer that question. I went back and studied the Levin Group data from the 2008–2009 recession and we found that surgical practices declined in production by 10%. There is no reason to think that this won't happen again in the current economic downturn and data already indicates a slowdown.

## This is not gloom and doom

Many practices will still be fine if they take the right steps going forward. Even in past recessions a percentage of surgical practices were able to grow and increase production, but things will have to be done somewhat differently.

This article is not meant to be scary or to forecast impending gloom and doom. It is meant, as part of my personal mission, to bring the best practical education and opportunities to surgeons and to be a wakeup call that the same approach that built practices (before this economic downturn) will not necessarily keep them at the same level or allow them to continue to increase production, profit, and income. Remember, we all look and perform better in a good economy.

Surgical practices must strategize and re-strategize the approach they take to attract new implant patients in a more challenging time. Here are several key recommendations that should be implemented as soon as possible:

- **Intensify the referral marketing effort.** Surgeons have opportunities where they can achieve excellent referrals if the program is conducted properly. The opportunity areas are in categories such as education, relationship, referring practice staff, major annual events, fun, and social media. Each of these can have a major impact on referrals and all of these should be assessed based on a tougher economy. When the economy slows down, then all areas should be accessed for referral marketing.

For example, I spoke to a surgeon last week who expressed his belief that general dentists are now placing all their own

implants, but in a recent national survey by Levin Group, we compiled data that led to the mathematical conclusion that general dentists place less than 20% of the implants in the United States. Based on this data, leaving out a category means decreasing the implant revenue stream.

- **Review and revise the treatment coordinator process.**

Attracting new patients is challenging enough. Converting them into case acceptance can be equally challenging. The implant treatment coordinator (ITC) process begins with the first phone call even though it may not be the ITC who is handling the call. Script the call to be extremely value-based, build a starter relationship, impress the patient, and give them the impression that they will love coming to your practice. Then make sure that the entire ITC process is mapped out (including script by script) and addresses some of the more modern issues that we did not see in the last recession. For example, in a tougher economy, some parents or adults will seek out lower cost options that weren't available in the past.

- **Build your ITC process around value.** Explain the advanced education, knowledge, and experience of a surgeon. Explain the consequences if cases are not done properly such as bone loss, future periodontal issues, etc. Explain that the practice has treated thousands or tens of thousands of patients successfully, creating both beautiful smiles and excellent health to keep teeth for a lifetime.

- **Understand your financial options.** When I spoke at a recent national specialty meeting in 2022, I had lunch with several knowledgeable and interesting doctors. One doctor, who had been in practice for over 50 years, felt that not having the highest possible deposit could lead to having bad patients or payment default. This was a philosophy that existed heavily in the past, but may never have been about good or bad patients or financial default on the payment plan. It may have been more that the economic times simply allowed practices to ask for large deposits and patients had the capability of funding the deposit and the payment plan. One statistic indicates that 40% of Americans cannot produce \$400 in cash if they had an emergency. This would indicate that the same patients will have trouble coming up with large deposits and may seek other offices, explore financial options, or postpone treatment indefinitely. This is exacerbated in a slow economy where people are concerned about their economic future. Be sure that the practice has multiple options which may include varying deposits, payment plans, and patient financing.

## Summary

It is far easier to look good when the economy is good and more challenging to stay successful when it is not. In changing economic times, all businesses must be able to adjust their leadership, management, and strategies. By overhauling many of the practice systems, implant cases continue to grow. Even in the 2008–2009 recession, many surgical practices grew both of those years and continued to grow all the way back to a better economy.

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