

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: A NECESSITY FOR INCREASED CASE ACCEPTANCE AND PATIENT SATISFACTION



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Many of my patients walk into the office unsure of what they want, insecure about their dental appearance, and definitely unaware of the possibilities available to them. My philosophy—regardless of a patient's confidence level—is, "People forget what you say; people forget what you do; but people never forget the way that you make them feel." In addition to surrounding patients with a caring and compassionate staff, upgrading the technology in my office has increased case acceptance (and, most importantly, patient satisfaction) by expanding patients' understanding of their own dentition through the amazing capabilities of my digital radiography system.

Although some people worry that the cost of initiating a digital system might put a strain on the budget, studies have shown that the initial costs of setting up a digital system are probably less than those of a standard film-based system. In addition, the ongoing costs are far greater with film than with digital radiography.¹

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Regardless of the initial costs, switching to a non-film-based system will actually improve the budget over time. In a *Dentaltown* survey, 94% of practices found that digital radiography had improved their profitability, and increased case acceptance is a big part of that picture.²

ADVANTAGES OF A DIGITAL SYSTEM

The following are just some of the things that digital radiography can help you do to increase case acceptance and patient satisfaction.

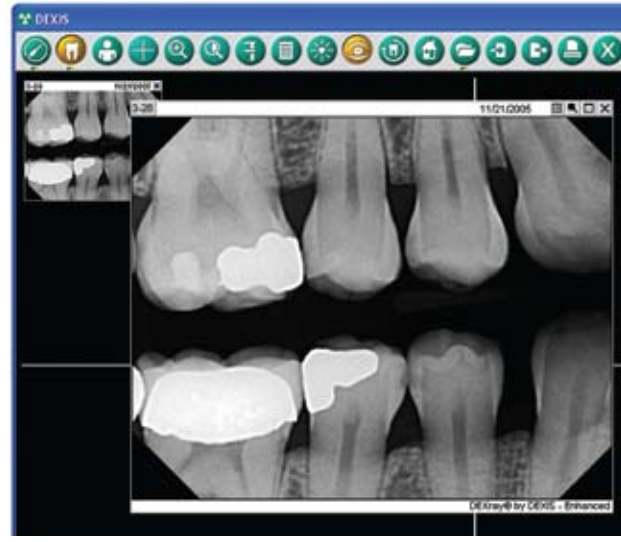


Figure 1: Enhanced and enlarged images make for better diagnosis.

“SHINE A SPOTLIGHT”

Image enhancement functions such as magnification, brightness control, and heightened contrast shine a spotlight on tiny fractures and imperfections that can be missed on the much smaller traditional x-ray film (Fig 1). This is especially important to cosmetic dentists, who rely on great attention to detail to plan the best treatment for patients.

GIVE THEM THE “BIG PICTURE”

Digital images on a large computer screen give patients a view of their teeth that is impossible to see on a postage stamp-sized film x-ray. With computer technology, you can zoom in on trouble spots or provide extra contrast to improve understanding of possible treatments (Fig 2). Patients can actually see their teeth as others will.

E-MAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

Digital images and imaging programs allow the dentist to provide

cosmetically enhanced “before” images, allowing patients to “try on” a smile so that they can visualize the possibilities (Fig 3) and gain confidence in you. The old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” rings so true here. No matter how eloquent or detailed your words, the patient will understand far better what you can do for them as a result of this digital feature.

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KEEP IN TOUCH

When your imaging is stored on a computer, it is easy to keep your proposed treatment fresh in patients’ minds. After the consultation visit, send them an e-mail with their “before” photograph and their “trial smile,” so that they—and their friends—can see how much bet-

ter they will look after treatment (Fig 4). (Helpful hint: Sent as PDF files, these images are easily opened. Also be sure to send them in a small file size so that they will not clog e-mail inboxes. Another option: Images sent in medium-sized JPEG format can be opened in most standard software programs.)

GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO TAKE HOME

Print photographs in a digital template and give patients a copy when they leave the office. This will make it easier for them to continue to consider the proposed treatment, as well as the smile you give them (Fig 5).

COMMUNICATE (WITH REFERRING DENTISTS)

Using a digital system that incorporates a “hub” saves money, avoids frustration, and shows the patient that you can be in touch instantly with their referring doctors (Fig 6). Being able to combine x-rays, photographs, and the treatment plan on one file makes life easier for both



Figure 2: Large images make for a big impression.

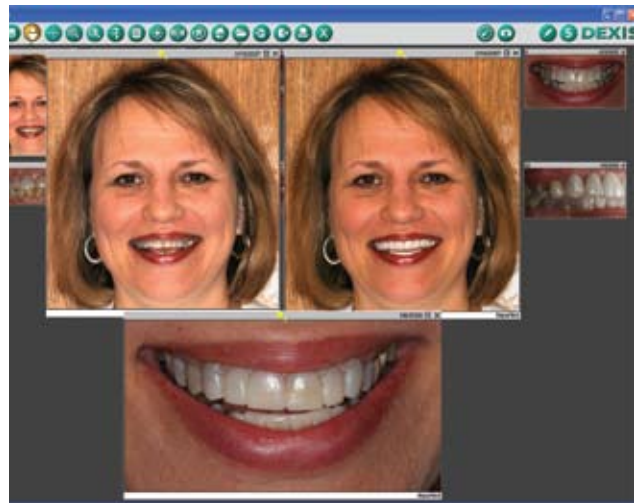


Figure 3: Make it easy for patients to visualize the possibilities.

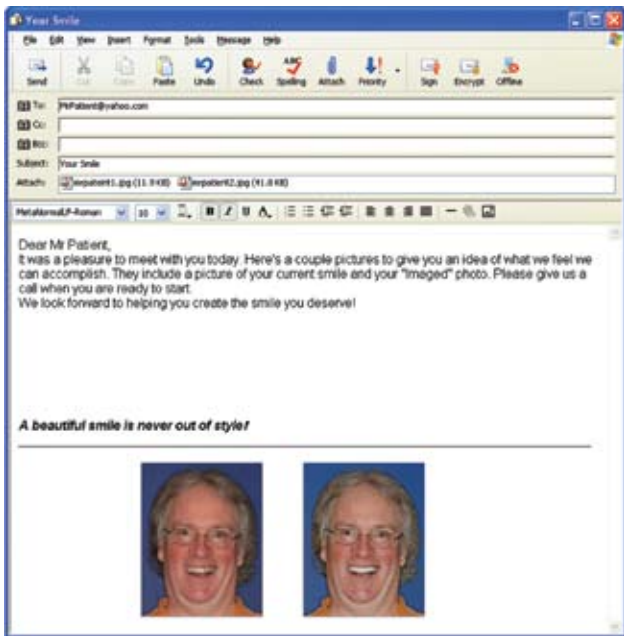


Figure 4: Keep patients focused on your treatment plan.

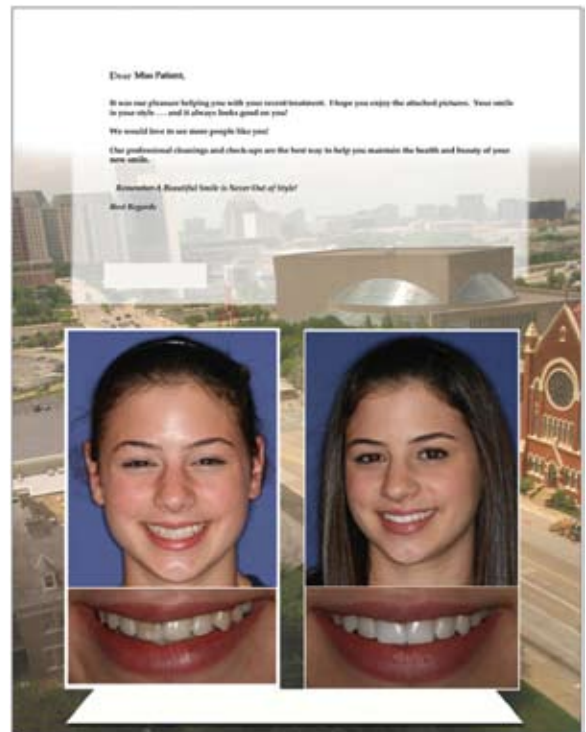


Figure 5: Make sure patients have something to take home.

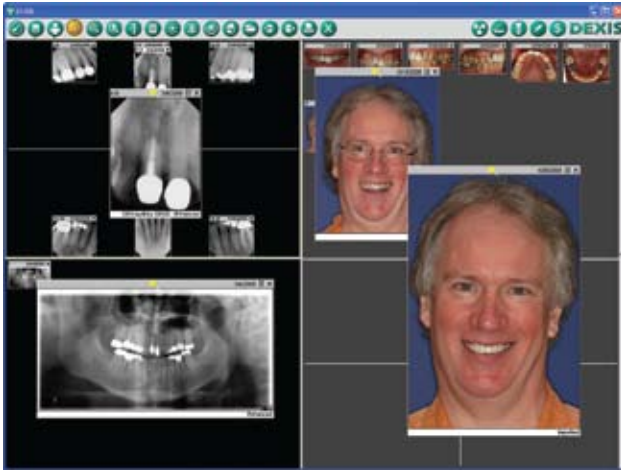


Figure 6: Keep all images in one place and readily available.

Dear Ms. Patient,

You look great! Thank you for choosing us to help you maintain the health and beauty of your smile. It was an honor and a pleasure!



A Beautiful Smile Is Never Out of Style!

Figure 7: More and more people will see your work.

you and your colleagues. Film x-rays can be misplaced in the office or lost in the mail. Even if everything is perfect, time is still lost. The information from your hub, however, is received immediately, filed in their computer, and ready for viewing at the click of a mouse. The patient will not experience the waiting or hassles that are involved with traditional x-rays.

HANDLE INSURANCE ISSUES EASILY

When all of their information is sent on a secure connection over the Web, patients will not have to spend their time on the phone fighting with the insurance company.

LET PATIENTS HELP YOU SPREAD THE WORD

After treatment, be sure to e-mail "before," "in-treatment," and "after" photographs, along with the mes-

sage that you and your staff appreciate their business (Fig 7). In this format, patients can feel free to forward the e-mail to their friends and relatives, who may then want to embark on their own cosmetic dental improvements with you.

SUMMARY

Besides lowering your everyday operating costs and streamlining your imaging needs, going digital will increase case acceptance by introducing the "Wow!" factor into your practice. In today's economy, convincing patients to choose one practice over another is complicated enough. With digital technology, your patients will be busy and happy deciding amongst the many choices for their treatment, and not spending time thinking about going to a more technology-savvy dentist.

References

1. Miles DA, Langlais RP, Parks, ET. Digital x-rays are here, why aren't you using them? *J Calif Dent Assoc* 27(12):926-934, 1999.
2. *Digital radiography and case acceptance*. Accessed August 27, 2008, at http://www.thedigitaldentist.com/index/use_lang/EN/page/152/cnt_id/197.html.

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