

## **Beyond the Bench**

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### ***April Topic: How to Make Cents of Communication Technology***

Communication is at the heart of creating beautiful, accurate restorations. It's the soul of our business relationships. How we communicate—from thoroughness to timeliness to the methods we use to get our message across—says a lot about us as technicians, innovators and people to work with. Communication, in all its forms, can truly impact your reputation and that of your doctor clients.

A doctor's chairtime these days is roughly \$600 per hour. In the realm of indirect restorations, what do you think a doctor would pay to get a crown completed right the first time, every time? If laboratory technicians can save a doctor an hour's time by avoiding problems or remakes, then they've really saved them \$600 or more. Something as simple as communication technology can add tremendous value to your worth.

### ***Let's Go Shopping***

If you've got a little money to spend, then your shopping list starts with a quality digital camera, a laptop computer and a \$400 to \$500 printer. When purchasing a digital camera, a quality lens is an important aspect. My own recommendation is the Canon 20D digital camera. Anybody in the laboratory can use it, despite its complicated appearance. In fact, it's really quite easy to use.

Why would I suggest a laptop over an inexpensive PC? Well, you can take the laptop anywhere in the laboratory, and you can work with it right at your bench. From there, it will enable you to do several customer-benefiting and laboratory promoting

tasks. What's more, we're now in the wireless age, so you don't have to be tied down to just one location within the laboratory.

### ***It Happens Every Day***

At my laboratory, we use our digital cameras, laptops, printers, wireless e-mail connection—anything and everything that keeps us in touch with our clients—constantly. For example, even before we do a restoration, the first thing our technicians need to do is verify that the doctor has given us an adequate preparation for the case. If not, from wherever the technician is, he or she can snap a digital photo of the model, upload it to the laptop and e-mail it directly to the doctor to demonstrate what the concern is. The doctor can recall the patient, re-prepare the case and, with the patient still in the chair, take a photo and e-mail it to us to review. From there, we can move on with the case...no back and forth shipping (at an expense to the laboratory of about \$20 each way), and no time wasted in between when the model was sent back, when the patient was re-appointed and when the models were returned.

Now, with only the laptop, digital camera, and printer, consider this scenario. You're gearing up to work on a great all-ceramic case with the IPS Empress Esthetic (Ivoclar Vivadent, Amherst, New York) material. Well, because you've got your laptop next to you, you pop in the CD of images the doctor sent you of the case, review them closely, and realize that the prescription isn't going to work esthetically. The doctor said nothing about the fact that the underlying dentition is too dark. Maybe it has a post build-up that's metal.

Here's your opportunity to shine. With photos on-screen, call the doctor and discuss the case. Can IPS d.SIGN (Ivoclar Vivadent, Amherst, New York) be used

instead? Or, does the endodontic post require replacement with something metal-free and esthetic (FRC Postec, Ivoclar Vivadent, Amherst, New York). His or her respect for you has now escalated because you saved them a lot of potential trouble by identifying a problem, calling with possible solutions, and avoiding additional chairtime.

OK, sure, you could have printed out all 30 or 40 images of the case that were sent, but viewing them on-screen is more economical. Printing photo after photo gets to be very expensive in terms of ink and photo paper. As a general rule, only print out the photos you absolutely need to have in hardcopy.

### ***The Marketing Potential of Technology***

If you've got local clients, grab the laptop and printer, hop in your car, and go to town. You can discuss case specifics face-to-face—complete with visuals—and resolve any concerns. Better still, you can turn the road show into an opportunity to highlight your work by presenting examples of cases your laboratory has completed. With a digital library of treatments you've done, you're ready to show any doctor what your capabilities are.

For example, let's say a doctor calls and explains that they have a diastema case, but the patient doesn't know what it could look like. Sure, you could wax the case on a model, but that typically costs the doctor a lot of money. The easier and faster thing to do—as long as the patient has an imagination—is to e-mail before and after images of your most impressive diastema closure case. This will help the patient visualize what's going to happen, assist the dentist in gaining case acceptance (BINGO! You're valuable again!), and boost your reputation as the “go-to” laboratory.

### ***Conclusion***

The bottom line is this: whatever you do, and the way you do it, that demonstrates for your doctors that you're looking out for them is a worthwhile investment of your time and money. Through the use of a digital camera, a laptop and a printer, you'll find that you can communicate in a timelier manner with your doctors about cases and resolve issues more efficiently and cost-effectively. What's more, because you'll be using technology to visually demonstrate what you see and know, you'll prove yourself time and time again to be a valuable, knowledgeable expert that's an asset to the doctor's practice.