

Smile! You're on YouTube



The intraoral camera was an essential tool in every dentist's office even though many patients, if given the option, would rather see reruns of *I Love Lucy*.

→ Robert E. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION
BY CHARLIE O.
HAYWARD

"Eight thousand, nothing down, five years to pay," purred the salesman, his being suffused in the faux bonhomie requisite in such enterprises.

"Great! Where do I sign?" I exulted, my cheeks stimulated to a healthy glow. I couldn't believe it, at last, I was the owner — me and Users Fidelity — of an intraoral camera. Never was a dental toy mated with a penultimate pigeon so incontestably. From the moment I had witnessed a tooth 30 times life-size on the screen several years earlier and had imbibed heavily of the catnip dispensed by the demonstrator, I knew I had to have one.

Four years later, my intraoral camera had lost little of its luster, despite the fact that it was now patently obsolete and I still owed \$5,315 at 21 percent interest on it. Never mind, I was still smitten with the concept, determined that every patient be swept up in my belief that bigger is always better.

As I enthusiastically displayed Mrs. Grobnick's current dental tragedy on the screen for her education, she wavered

uncertainly between apathy and aversion.

"What in tarnation we looking at?" she asked with ill-concealed excitement verging on hysteria.

"That's your broken tooth. Isn't that terrific? Look at the fractured edges and the bleeding gum tissue," I pointed out with a gloved finger.

"Gaaack! You mind turning it off?" she shuddered as if she had just spied a roach in her parfait.

A few years later, the intraoral camera was an essential tool in every dentist's office even though many patients, if given the option, would rather see reruns of *I Love Lucy*. Apparently the Nielsen rating for tooth video is lower than initially thought.

Not to worry, coming up rapidly on the inside track was a new toy with a greater potential for patient acceptance. It was the dental Web site, offering an opportunity to extol the virtues of your practice with pictures and as much purple prose as you can legally generate. It was the Yellow Pages with color. Showcase your entire staff

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displaying their veneers in a buoyantly friendly manner above profiles delineating their education and experience. The office is shown in its best light with any threatening equipment in deep shadow.

There is a complete description of the practice location, MasterCard, Visa, and American Express logos tastefully displayed alongside other soothing statements to attract the most timid procrastinator. "We Care!" is the standard recommended slogan, one that immediately places you comfortably above all those callous dentists who won't commit to that extent.

Only one problem. At last count there were 619,474,716 Web sites on the Internet. Your site, no matter how cleverly and sincerely executed, would stand out like a midget at a major rock concert. Other than your family and maybe a couple of friends who can be cozened into visiting your Web site at least once out of obligation or curiosity, you are faced with handing out printed fliers and accosting total strangers to avail themselves of your expertise.

Again, don't worry. Most everybody whoever considered doing the Internet thing has already done it and is no longer waiting for massive hits. You can move on freely to the latest marketing ploy.

Founded in August 2003, a phenomenon known as MySpace burst on the Net, immediately attracted millions of twittering adolescents who shared pictures and vied with each other for new depths of human vacuity. The main activity seemed to be a race to claim as many "friends" as possible. A friend was defined as anybody living on the planet whether known to you or not. Interesting as it was, a dentist trying to promote his practice via this fevered activity would be playing to an empty house.

Dentistry's chance to make new friends didn't occur until early 2003 about the time of the MySpace debut when three guys named Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karims floated the domain name YouTube.com to a waiting world. It was an open invitation to everyone who owned a video camera to upload

their inane, boring, out-of-focus videos to share. Millions did and some of them were actually pretty good, but you had to click on a lot of frogs to find a prince.

Eventually dental marketing mavens claimed YouTube to be the newest and most riveting thing to attract patients since the discovery of local anesthesia. An enthusiastic promoter of the new medium is Dr. Jerry Gordon, a dentist in Bensalem, Penn. Gordon is the director and star of the video "Root Canal Demonstration," a title guaranteed to attract thousands of avid viewers to this popular genre. The production runs 10 minutes, cost a couple thousand to produce, and attracted more than 11,000 root canal fans during its first two months.

They are rewarded by a soothing voiceover by Dr. Gordon endeavoring to reverse the public's commonly held belief that

root canal therapy was an integral feature of the Spanish Inquisition. He describes each step minutely and the viewer is reassured by the remarkably calm patient. There will always be the odd Doubting Thomas who will insist this is actually a postmortem of some sort, but that's showbiz.

Predictably, the success of video root canal therapy for public viewing will be followed by gum surgery in high-definition color, impacted lower third molar extractions, and the heartwarming treatment of intractable children under the age of 4.

Aside from the obvious marketing value to the innovative dentist, a patient wishing to see himself star in his own operation may click on YouTube and enjoy what he missed while sedated. Can 3-D color with those little paper glasses be far behind? ■■■■