

Millennials Want More From Their Dental Care

There are 77.5 million¹ millennials, and they're changing the way we do business. Dental care is no exception. This generation is bigger than the baby boomer generation. To gain and retain their business, dental practices must consider their needs and wants.

Lincoln Financial Group recently surveyed American consumers about their expectations in regard to dental care, looking specifically at generational preferences. Subsequently, Lincoln surveyed dental offices across the country, including dentists and dental professionals. The findings from these studies uncovered some interesting discrepancies in patient expectations versus dentist perceptions, particularly among millennials.

It's All About Digital

It sounds simple enough. Keeping up with current, user-friendly technology is critical to meeting millennials' needs. Patient expectations around dental care are being influenced by external factors—the fast-paced, easy, and always accessible consumer experiences provided by “born-digital” companies today.

Forty percent of millennials surveyed cite a dentist's website as “very important,” compared to just 14% of baby boomers. Also, a whopping 77% of millennials say that it's important for a dentist's website to be engaging and user-friendly when accessed from their mobile device, often referred to as mobile optimization. However, just about half of dentists say their website is optimized for mobile use today.

According to our research, once millennials access a dentist's website, they are looking for certain information:

- Accepted insurance: The top priority is a list of accepted insurance carriers, as 74% of millennials want to see this information on a dentist's website. The problem? Only 43% of dental offices say they offer this information online.

- Appointments: Next up, 71% of millennials want to be able to make or change appointments online. A quarter of young millennials (ages 18 to 29) say that the ability to make online appointments actually keeps them coming back to a dentist. Less than half of the dental offices we surveyed, though, say they currently offer an online appointment feature.

- Average costs: Sixty-five percent of millennials want to view average costs for dental procedures on a dentist's site. This is where we see the largest discrepancy when we look at reality, as a mere 18% of dental offices provide this information online.

The data shows that many dental offices are not meeting millennials' expectations when it comes to their digital offerings. Instead, most practices currently feature content like educational material on oral hygiene (59% of dental offices) or information about office staff members (70% of dental offices).

This poses an opportunity for dentists to differentiate with a well-designed and mobile-optimized website. About a quarter of consumers find dentists by browsing online, starting with a search from their insurance carrier's website. Offering up the information that consumers want, in the format they want, may just set your office apart from the rest.

Taking mobile technology to the next level, our research also found that 85% of millennials say they would find some value in a mobile application. And, 51% say they would “absolutely” find value in an app from their dentist. Approximately half of the dental offices we surveyed seem open to this idea, as 54% of dentists say they think an app with personalized information would be beneficial to patients.

Cost and Education

Dentists understand that cost often stops patients from coming in, as 70% of dental offices surveyed view cost of care as the top reason patients choose not to visit the dentist. And, they're right. One in



4 consumers and one in 5 millennials have not visited the dentist in the past year due to cost. And these are consumers with dental insurance coverage!

If patients knew a bit more about the cost of care, such as average price ranges for appointments and common procedures, perhaps they would be more likely to visit their dentist on a regular basis to get the care they need. With access to this information, consumers could be in a better position to budget for care appropriately and in advance, and many might be surprised about how low costs can be with insurance coverage, especially for preventive care.

Most consumers—75% of all generations and 73% of millennials—say they trust their dentist to be open and honest about the cost of treatments. But, they would like more guidance around what is and is not covered by dental insurance.

An overwhelming number of millennials—99%—say they would find it valuable if their dental office provided guidance or took the time to help them better understand their dental insurance plan. Sixty-eight percent of young millennials say this would be very valuable, more than any other cohort. Yet, only 34% of dental offices say they help guide patients on treatments with their insurance coverage in mind.

Other Key Factors

Millennials place high value on extended hours, both during the week and on the weekends. Nearly 40% say extended hours would keep them coming back to a dentist. Young millennials in particular want short wait times (under 10 minutes), and about half say it's a key factor for staying with a dentist. This cohort also wants to receive appointment confirmations and such via text message, with almost 30% saying this feature is important.

Meeting millennials' needs and expectations is important today, and it will only become more important in the future. Understanding their mindset is step one. Then it's time to adapt. Start with the small stuff. Work on your website, and be sure patients have the information they want at their fingertips.

About the Survey

All data is from Lincoln Financial's 2017 Dental Research Series, unless otherwise noted. Results of the 2017 Dental Research Series (Consumer Survey) are based on an online survey of 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older across the United States, conducted in 2017 by Lincoln Financial Group and PSB. The sample was targeted using quotas to reflect the proportion of adults 18 or older within the United States. The margin of error is +/- 3% at the 95% confidence level. Results of the 2017 Dental Research Series (Dental Professional Survey) are based on an online survey of 400 dental offices, including dentists and dental office staff across the United States, conducted in 2017 by Lincoln Financial Group and PSB. The sample was targeted using quotas to reflect the proportion of adults 18 or older within the United States. The margin of error is +/- 4.8% at the 95% confidence level. For more information, visit the Newsroom at LincolnFinancial.com.

Reference

1. Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2015. Surveys approximately 68,000 households nationwide.

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