

Embarking on a digital journey

Linda Greenwall explains how to improve your practice with digital technology.

When embarking on the digital journey it can feel overwhelming, and many dentists wonder where to begin and who is able to help them introduce a fully digital workflow into their practice. When I am going to embark on a new journey, I hold a practice meeting to discuss the plans with the entire team – each team member is asked for their input as all team members can assist with the digital journey. A new plan begins with the questions: Why? How? When? What? Who? What are the timeline considerations? What are the financial implications, and is there finance available? Together we formulate an action plan incorporating these questions that need to be answered. A business plan is written with the goals and vision of the digital journey, also delegating the responsibilities of each team member. The practice manager is integral in discussing the lease finance plans that are available and the breakeven point on how many items of dentistry need to be produced to cover the monthly costs of production. This article will highlight the steps that need to be in place to embark on your digital journey.

Decisions, Decisions

Many decisions need to be made about which scanner and printer to purchase, and about who will be assisting you on this quest. It is best to contact your dental dealer so that you



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can discuss your requirements with them. Whether your needs are to take digital scans for aligner treatment, make retainers for your orthodontic retention or implants stents to integrate with your CT scan and your software – all of this can be discussed. It is important that there is a friendly support technician on line to guide you gently along the way.

Who will be undertaking the training and what form of training is

required? For my journey, we had numerous training sessions and in-house sessions, which are the most valuable. Do not be afraid to ask for help and ensure that you have the contact details of the technical support team as well as the suppliers.

What are your digital requirements?
What you need from your digital workflow needs to be decided. How many times are you going to use

the scanner? Will it be used for every patient? And what skills are needed to integrate the digital workflow into your practice? The dentists and the team members need to be ready to address the steep learning curve of a new skill.

Some of the skills and requirements for the team to begin the digital journey are:

- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- The ability to learn as you go
- Learning new scanning skills
- Address the 10,000 hour rule (how much practice is required to become proficient in a new skill)
- Basic and practical skills such as how to hold the scanner in the different parts of the mouth
- Problem solving abilities
- Knowing what happens when things go wrong (who will give back up support)

Back up

This is essential not only for the data back up – there also needs to be good technical back up, support and training. The data from the scanner needs to be stored on an additional hard drive, and this will also need backing up. The scans are your clinical record and with all records these need to be retrievable for medico-legal purposes. This means that you might need to speak to your computer management company for the hardware to ensure that you have additional storage capabilities. Initially there may need to be an additional cost in all these extra back up requirements, but what is exciting is that there will be more space for physical storage as study models can be scanned and digitally saved.

Clinical skills

Not only are the clinical skills of preparing a crown or inlay essential, but this improves your prepping skills as well. Once you have taken a scan of your prep it will show you where your crown margins are and you can quickly see if there are errors that need to be corrected. Once the scan has been done the question is who will design the crown or the inlay?

The design software

This is where it is important to

undertake training, as many dentists and their dental teams may not be used to designing a crown, inlay or bite plate online. Ensure that you have plenty of training and dental assistance from your dental dealer so that they can be part of the journey with you. The question to be considered is are you an architect or an engineer? Both these skills are handy when using the software to create the restoration or appliance digitally. If you're an 'engineer', you're content to scan, design and process the digital print/mill from scan through to finished product, taking complete control of the outcome, and thinking the procedure through from start to finish yourself. Most dentists like to be 'architects' as they enjoy the creative process. As an architect you devolve the building side and even the design side of the device to others. You may choose to delegate the technical design to the experienced technician and email this scan to get the digital design, or you may choose to design this yourself with the appropriate help.

Patient marketing

Produce a practice newsletter to explain that you have invested in the new digital technology. Pre-Covid we would have invited our patients to view the printing machines for themselves. Patients are excited by 3D printing and the possibilities of the new technology. They are excited to hear that their appliance will be printed in 3D and want to be part of the digital journey. Patients have taken photos of their appliances being made and are excited to tell their friends and family about their experience of the digital journey.

Create a patient centric practice by discussing the advantages and benefits of the digital technology.

Educate your patients about what is possible. Over lockdown we sent our patients monthly updates on the situation and they found these newsletters beneficial. A digital newsletter would be an excellent idea to get started – demonstrating the exciting possibilities that integrated digital equipment, software and printers bring to the dental practice is useful. What's

exciting for a patient is that they do not have to have temporaries and their inlay can be printed while they relax and wait and they do not need a second visit. To them that is progress!

Integrating the digital workflow with the dental technician

The dental technician has an integral part to play in helping to design and prepare the inlays on the software. The digital workflow requires excellent communication between the technician and the dentist.

How can dental team members help?

We ask our dental nurses to scan our old models for safekeeping and storage as the medico-legal teams advise us to keep all plaster models for 15 years. Storage of these can be a problem, so we have taught our dental nurses to scan our models so that the plaster models can be disposed of.

Each member of the dental team can assist in the digital workflow through their individual roles. There are administrative roles and clinical roles in the journey. Team members are excited to learn and integrate the digital workflow, and this leads to a great feeling of positivity for the entire team. After the learning curve, the journey becomes fun and the huge possibilities become evident and enjoyable for all. Team members can scan models and they can scan patients as well under the supervision of the dentist. This will save time and help with integrating the patient journey so all are involved in the patients' care.

Conclusion

Implementing such a monumental workflow change into any dental lab or dental practice, introducing digital scanning and overcoming processing issues, will invariably bring a new level of profit and efficiency to you, but unless the patient experiences that efficiency, saving or speed themselves, it's meaningless to them. Making digital processes 'patient centric' is therefore arguably the key to introducing digitalisation into your practice.