

# Start Right with Electronic Business Tools

By Michael Egan, DDS, and Kelly Mattesen, RDH

## Don't wait to incorporate the software that can cut stress and increase profits.

Imagine if you could say goodbye to the stress, hassle and time spent making phone calls, printing claims and printing statements, and processing paperwork in your practice. Imagine if you could increase efficiency and maximize profitability while administering excellent patient care. In our practice, clinical and practice management software helps streamline clinical and image processing activities as well as the front office. Electronic business tools within the software are an integral part of our practice's success and create a stress-free reality our staff and patient enjoy.

In March of 1999, we took an exciting step forward in digitizing our practice and began utilizing practice management software. Since that time we have found the electronic business tools within our software provide the easiest and most effective way to send patient statements, process insurance claims, check status on outstanding claims, check patient benefits, submit attachments and process credit card payments. Using eBusiness provides dental professionals with additional time so they can focus more on patient care and identify additional revenue opportunities. eBusiness also helps improve payment time from insurance companies and patients. These are all systems that can assist any practice achieve efficient, profitable, professional practices.

## Choosing Software

The first step toward electronic business tools may be to select the practice management software package that is right for your practice. Choosing practice management software for your dental office is a difficult decision and many factors - unique to each office - should be taken into account. Patterson EagleSoft, Dentrrix and Practiceworks dominate the market, but there are many other packages available. When choosing your provider, consider: stability, commitment to customer service, software integration with digital radiography, patient education, and especially electronic business capabilities. Once your decision is made, you may find that you are not interested in utilizing all of the software package's features, but consider giving everything a try to maximize your office's full potential. This then gives your staff the ability to pick and choose the features that work best and reach an excellent level of comfort and trust.

## Transition/Adjustment

While transitioning from a paper to digital office may seem scary, the overall benefits of electronic business tools match the basic keys to success for any practice: efficiency, profitability and excellent patient care. Since it is sometimes more difficult to integrate digital technology bit by bit, practices should go digital from the start. Typically, one technology enhances another, so often complete integration just makes more sense. This also can save a lot of time and gives your practice the opportunity to increase total productivity and efficiency very quickly.

It does take some adjustment to go from a traditional practice to all digital, but once the transition period is complete efficient ways of accomplishing tasks will develop throughout the practice. Fewer keystrokes are used to look at images and files, patient notes are more thorough and require less time, more information can be gathered during each patient visit, and all information is available to the entire staff at the touch of a button.

## Features/Benefits

Once you are up and running with your practice management software, take the time to review your suite of electronic business tools. There are a number of features we employ within Patterson EagleSoft practice management software to support our eBusiness practice and maintain a successful practice. Integrating all of these tools has helped us to gain efficiency and profitability. Many practice management programs have similar features: Be sure to explore all the options before deciding on the program that's right for you. Tasks that previously required hours to complete, such as sending claims and statements, can now be done in just minutes.

- Patient Coordination: Utilizing the software further improves the patient experience by allowing our patients to experience appointments with excellent coordination of X-rays, intraoral and extraoral images. Also, the management of a patient's record allows us to make seamless patient presentations because all of the information we need is instantly accessible.
- eStatements: This very helpful tool alleviates the need to have one dedicated person writing and sending statements

to patients, and sending statements only to patients who should be getting them. eStatements lead to fewer hours processing statements, easy-to-read statements for our patients, no mailing mistakes, and the option for personalization of individual statements. eStatements also have really added an entirely new level of efficiency to our practice. eStatements are so easy to use that it is hard to imagine going back to paper statements.

- **Real-time Eligibility:** This feature saves hours of staff time contacting insurance companies over the phone, by allowing us to access insurance benefits immediately online with the patient standing right there. This means it is no longer necessary to neglect the phones or other patients while on the phone with an insurance company. This feature takes seconds to use and the response with benefit breakdown can be saved and printed.
- **eAttachments:** eAttachments is a key feature that greatly contributes to our practice's efficiency. Not only is the turnaround for claims much faster – within one to two weeks – but it is no longer necessary to worry about lost claims or X-rays. We find the electronic attachments to be the most useful feature of our practice management software. Working directly with the National Electronic Attachment, Inc. ensures that documentation is available whenever a claim is received, and the clearinghouse will follow up on the claims.
- **eReminders:** One of the key tools of eBusiness is eReminders. This tool allows you to send reminder e-mails, text messages and phone calls through an automated system. In addition, this feature allows for your patients to confirm or cancel an appointment after receiving an eReminder.
- **eCharge or Credit Card Processing:** eCharge eliminates clutter at the front desk by processing credit card payments on the computer using a small card reader. This tool allows users to store signatures on file, post a payment automatically to a patient's account with virtually no work involved. It's like eliminating an entire step!

### Continued Training/Utilization

Purchasing practice management software and utilizing electronic business tools is a big commitment, and there are a number of ways to continuously learn how to maximize your abilities. To ensure you are getting the most out of your software, it is a great idea to look for training opportunities for your staff. In addition to the standard software training, attend a training class or invite a trainer out to your office to facilitate a "graduate course."

You also may benefit from general training/support resources from your provider. Our practice receives a monthly newsletter, which we have found to be extremely useful. The newsletter includes suggestions for how to improve efficiency, common customer questions, and technical Q&A sections that address how to work smarter and more quickly. We also have utilized online Live Help, and have always experienced excellent customer service and an expert knowledge base. Most importantly, it has been beneficial working with a partner that is always willing to receive input from our practice on future enhancements.

Look for ways to make your eBusiness more effective every day. There are a number of ways to further explore the capabilities of your software. Patterson, for example offers its customers customized webinars for continuing education. In addition, at staff meetings our practice will always review staff members' questions about the capabilities of our software. Does it have a certain report? Does it have the capability to schedule appointments in a unique way? Then we ask our representative any questions that cannot be resolved by our own team which allows us to continually discover different tools to add to our efficiency and productivity.

### Conclusion

Electronic business tools have the ability to eliminate the stress, hassle, and time spent that is associated with traditional dental office business tools. Implementing these features into our practice has been more productive, decreased filing and paperwork, and most importantly increased time spent with patients. Taking the leap to electronic business tools can be one of the best decisions you ever make for your practice.

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