



PRIME PRACTICE
the dental management specialists

Why Many Ads Under-Perform

Attracting Dental Assistants and Treatment Coordinators

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The usual employment ad for a role in a dental practice reads something like this: “Dental Assistant Wanted: Keen hard worker who likes dealing with people. High attention to detail and experience preferred. Knowledge of Denta-Chart Software an advantage. Please mail references to PO Box 123 NSW 2222 by 14 March 2007”

The writer of any employment ad needs to be aware of two types of content: Attractors and Filters. Attractors are the features of your job that would entice the applicant to want to join you. Filters are the requirements that they must meet to be employed by you.

What should the Attractor: Filter ratio (A:F) be?

Most advertisements concentrate heavily on what *we want* from the candidate. That is, there are many filters and few, or no, attractors. The writer of any employment ad needs to be aware of these two factors and should take them into consideration when writing an ad.

There are certain circumstances where it is desirable to have low A:F ratio. For example, in much of rural Australia there are high levels of unemployment and as a result there may be an abundance of applicants. When there is an over supply of labour like this we should structure an ad with a low A:F ratio, meaning we would have a fine filter to allow through only the most highly qualified candidates. We recently placed an ad for administration staff at one of our offices on the Great Ocean Road and had over 80 applicants. On reflection, we should definitely have used a lower Attractor: Filter ratio.

It is obviously a balancing act. Even in an area with high employment there is a chance that your ideal candidate will be someone who currently has a job and is looking to move. You need to ask yourself: ‘Will this advertisement *attract* someone away from their current job?’ Based on the example above, my answer would be “unlikely”, because there are no attractors in it whatsoever.

What should the A: F sequence be?

Most ads pay no regard to the A:F sequence. The typical ‘Wanted’ ad is written with a ‘Wanted’ mindset: it starts by listing all the things we want from the candidate. This is a poor approach when you consider that these first few words will often be the difference between someone reading your ad or not. It would be far more effective to begin with an opportunity or ‘opening hook’ mindset. Some opening ‘hook’ examples include: “Is it possible to really love your work?”, “Opportunity” or “Your ideal job”.

The last lines of your ad are equally important, as they usually motivate the candidate's "call to action"– or the opposite. Examples include "Life *is* meant to be enjoyed!" and "This exciting career opportunity needs to be filled ASAP, so give us a call right now!"

Before we rush into creating and placing an ad we need to go through a planning process.

Step 1. Planning Stage

What is the local employment climate like? Will we be inundated or struggling to get applicants?

a) Do we need a high or low A: F ratio?

b) What should our A: F sequence be?

A-A-A: Desperate

F-F-F: Inundated

A-F-A: Shortage of candidates expected

F-A-F: Excess of candidates expected

This kind of thinking helps us structure an ad which appropriately reflects our circumstances.

c) List the Attractors

Use your current employees to help you brainstorm and come up with the key enticements you can mention in the ad.

For example:

Location: Convenience to transport?

Practice Management Training: Our practice is being coached by the leader in dental practice management. This means we have clear systematised protocols. We have regular team meetings and we respect and value the input of all our team members. All our team members receive training on verbal skills so that we can deal with every situation.

Team building: We have a friendly culture that incorporates principles of team-building and we even get to go on training trips occasionally!

Low stress: We believe we should always operate with a slight excess of staff instead of being always under pressure due to lack of manpower.

Hours: Flexible? Convenient?

Pay: Bonus system? Above award?

Culture: Friendliness, Support, Open Communication.

d) List the Filters

Brainstorm the essential requirements your applicant *must have* and the requirements that you would prefer, but are *not essential*.

Be careful here. If there is a labour shortage in your area, you might want to play down these requirements. You can always sift through the candidates on application or during the interview stage. On the other hand, if you think you might be swamped with eager prospects, you can afford to emphasise your wish list. Some common considerations are: Prior experience, Languages spoken, Specific computer skills, Flexibility with hours, Training courses completed.

Keep in mind that sometimes it's better to hire someone with less than ideal experience, because it can be more difficult to unlearn bad habits than learn new ones.

Step 2: Write a draft that reflects all the planning decisions

While keeping the costs of the advertisement down is important, if you have valuable information to state, you should do so. People will read the copy if it is well written and offers an attractive proposition. The incremental costs of running more advertisements, added to the opportunity costs of running them inefficiently, will far out-weigh the single cost of a larger initial advertisement.

Step 3: Methods of response

Should they phone you or send in a CV? The answer depends on your perceived A:F ratio. If you anticipate a shortage of applicants, then get them to phone. However, if you are in a high unemployment area, you should ask the candidates to send in a CV with references.

Have a look at the ads out there and analyse them from an A:F perspective. It's amazing how much better your results will be when you apply these principles.

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