THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO IT OUTSOURCING FOR DENTISTS

Building Your Dental Practice Information System

INTEGRITY
systems & solutions

Introduction

The top priority for your dental practice is providing the utmost in patient care, but this is a complex goal -- one that must be supported by effective processes and systems, successful profitability strategies and smart organizational decisions. Even with a team of staff members performing daily responsibilities, the ongoing list of needs and obstacles can become overwhelming and hinder your ability to care for patients to the best of your ability.

Amid the shuffle of these challenges is the critical element of your technology and information systems. From installations, configurations and other technology projects to data management, security, compliance and troubleshooting, there is a wide range of IT requirements to control. These factors are fundamental to the success of your dental practice and the delivery of first-rate patient care. But because you simply don't have the time or expertise to manage this aspect of your business, it's highly advantageous to consider outsourcing your IT functions.

Of course, the prospect of researching, selecting and building a partnership with an IT services provider can be a daunting one. This comprehensive guide equips you with expert knowledge and insight to help you gain peace of mind as you think about when to outsource, how to select a provider, what to expect from them, how to manage the relationship and how to prepare properly. Leverage the valuable information provided here to address and ease any uncertainties you may have about IT outsourcing for your dental practice.

To get started, begin reading the full guide below.

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Chapter 1:
What are the Tangible Benefits of
Outsourced IT Services?

There are many practices that are too small or lean to hire an in-house IT employee or team. By investing in an outsourced IT provider, you empower yourself to focus on caring for patients and leading your organization, as opposed to wasting time and resources trying to configure your IT systems and keep them running optimally. Regardless of the size of your dental practice, the decision to outsource your IT functions to an experienced, dedicated provider has many advantages. Partnering with an IT company to streamline your technology operations and provide immense value to your business affords you the opportunity and capability to:

Minimize inadvertent errors and security breaches

You've spent years developing your strengths and acumen as a dental practitioner, which makes you the expert on treating and caring for your patients. An outsourced IT partner is wholly focused on the various aspects of technology, which makes them the expert in this area. Being the expert means having the knowledge, experience and insight to prevent consequential IT challenges like backup errors, firewall problems, warranty issues and security vulnerabilities.

A qualified IT provider has the resources and brainpower to anticipate your future needs and thwart potential threats or difficulties. They work to stay at the forefront of the IT industry and keep their IT systems and data ahead of the game. When you choose to outsource this component of your practice's operations, you gain the benefit of their combined efforts to optimize processes, data and internal systems.

Even better, IT service providers tend to approach their accountabilities with a proactive mindset. Whereas you may be reacting to and troubleshooting technology problems as they arise, a smart IT partner intuits and plans for these possibilities, designing infrastructure and maintaining efforts to preclude major errors and/or security issues from inhibiting your practice.

In fact, security is easily the most important reason to have a dedicated IT partner monitoring and managing your network and systems. Small businesses and dental practices have become a major target for cyber attackers because they house lots of critical data but don't always have the funds to implement intense internal security measures.

As your practice grows, so does the risk of experiencing a highly detrimental security breach. Many outsourced IT providers are heavily invested in security, spending a great deal of time researching security trends and instituting best practices. By proactively adapting and adjusting their security processes, they ensure that your data (and that of your patients) is protected.

Keep up with critical compliance obligations

Your dental practice and your team must know and comply with all federal, state and local regulations, which could leave you scrambling to secure patient information. An outsourced IT provider helps you navigate the compliance maze.

For starters, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires anyone that deals with Protected Health Information (PHI) to implement physical, network and process-based security measures. As a covered entity, your practice is legally required to comply with HIPAA regulations. Otherwise, you open up it up to noncompliance consequences and breaches that can incur up to $1.5 million in costs and/or the loss of your reputation. Even if you have administrative policies and procedures in place for HIPAA, your technology could impede these efforts.

Sending email that contains any PHI without encryption, for example, is considered a breach and exposes you to fines and a potential visit from the HIPAA police. In addition, how you dispose of old servers and workstations that may contain sensitive data is a vital consideration. Then there's the requirement for maintaining the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) if your practice intends to accept, store, process and/or transmit credit cardholder data. You need to ensure that your overall system infrastructure supports your compliance efforts.

The bottom line is you can never be too cautious when it comes to patient data. By outsourcing your IT security services, you have access to a team of experts who can help mitigate the risk of noncompliance.

Decrease costs without compromising quality

When dental practices try to manage their IT needs strictly in-house, any effort to achieve greater technology capabilities often translates to spending more time and more money. Not only can this kind of investment be highly inefficient, but it can also be quite expensive. And let's be honest, you need to be concerned about budget if you have any chance of maintaining profitability.

Outsourced IT providers specialize in key technology needs because they understand that they can offer better support and charge less than it would cost an individual business to accomplish the same tasks. Infrastructure alone is incredibly costly. IT trends are fervently changing all the time and can create a great deal of confusion for those who are unfamiliar. An in-house IT team simply doesn't have the means to manage a practice's systems and keep pace with changing best practices. Something has to give, and allowing subpar IT management to compromise the quality of care you provide is not an option.

Working with an outsourced IT provider gives you access to high-quality resources when you need them without making any substantial investments. When you disentangle yourself from the duties of IT operations, education and management, you have more time to invest in developing your competitive advantages, which lends itself to greater income and profitability.

Outsourcing can reap significant savings for your dental practice without sacrificing excellence in patient care. One of the main reasons an outsourced IT provider is less expensive than hiring your own internal staff is that they are completely focused on developing and managing the most efficient IT operations. They strategically ensure that you only pay for what your unique practice requires. As you and your practice grow, your IT needs are sure to change, and acquiring new IT staff to support you internal team expends valuable time and money. On the other hand, partnering with an outsourced IT provider with a wide range of skills and capabilities affords your practice the support it needs to navigate periods of change, growth and development.

Gain peace of mind and spend more time doing what you love

What happens when an IT problem unfolds in the middle of the night or over a weekend? Are you left stressing over how and when the issue will be fully resolved? The peace of mind that comes with outsourced IT is the result of combined reassurances, not the least of which is knowing your provider is staffed 24/7/365 and ready to jump on any problem as soon as it surfaces.

The truth is there are some issues that can't wait until Monday morning, and even if they could, you'd be losing valuable time and resources attempting to address these matters during business hours. Take, for instance, some of the following IT functions that demand attention:

- Continuous monitoring for security, stability and reliability in order to understand any underlying issues before they present as an emergency that causes business interruptions

- Initiating, planning, executing, controlling and carrying out the technology projects that bring your business vision to fruition

- Sourcing the right hardware, software, parts and equipment for your technology and dental practice needs, including comprehensive product warranties

- Liaising with vendor partners (e.g., contractors, electricians, practice management and imaging software providers) to ensure successful IT implementations

- Instituting reliable technology solutions for needs like practice management, digital imaging, patient entertainment and more

- Appropriating technology solutions that help you focus on your patients, manage your receivables, improve the delivery of your service and make better overall decisions

- Putting measures in place to plan for and remediate technology disasters such as fire, flood, theft or technology failure

All of these requirements have the potential to put a major strain on you and your team, which is why outsourcing them to a company with comprehensive, round-the-clock IT monitoring and support may be exactly what you need to safeguard your operations, promote efficiency and finally achieve peace of mind.

As a dental professional, there's no reason to spend time and energy on IT administration when you could be tending to your patients. After all, that's why you're in this field in the first place. By outsourcing with the right company, you gain the freedom to focus your efforts where they're most needed and spend your days doing fulfilling work.

Chapter 2:
What Industry-Specific Nuances Affect IT Outsourcing for Dental Practices?

Installing, configuring and supporting technology in your dental practice is far better achieved through an outsourced provider with specific experience in defining the overall visions of dental practices, understanding their nuanced technology needs and delivering the most efficient, effective solutions for operating a successful business in your field. If you want to maintain a competitive advantage in today's reality, your practice must evolve in accordance with modern-day operational needs and patient expectations. Your IT provider should have the specialized knowledge and skill to:

- Set up, update and maintain solutions for managing dental patient files and information

- Ensure safety, redundancy, availability and recovery for critical dentistry data like patient charts, billing and payments

- Understand, source and provide training on specialized IT equipment and programs for dental offices

- Thwart hacking attempts, theft of dental practice information and other security breaches via optimized firewall strategies, encryption measures and virus protection

- Deliver IT service and support with respect to ensuring maximum uptime and usability for your dental practice technology

- Recommend and implement appropriate cloud solutions when necessary to create time and cost efficiencies

- Facilitate compliance with rules and regulations governing the dental field, especially with regard to managing personal health information

Chapter 3:
What Does My Particular Practice Need From an Outsourced IT Company?
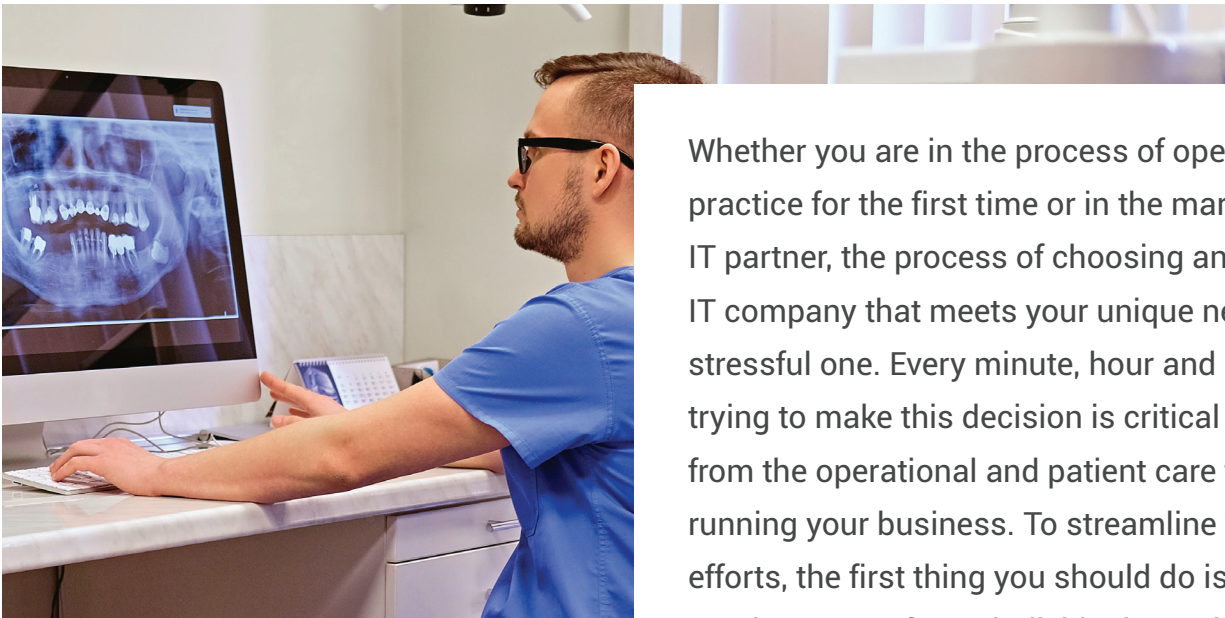
Whether you are in the process of opening up a practice for the first time or in the market for a new IT partner, the process of choosing an outsourced IT company that meets your unique needs can be a stressful one. Every minute, hour and day you spend trying to make this decision is critical time away from the operational and patient care functions of running your business. To streamline your selection efforts, the first thing you should do is inventory the IT requirements of your individual practice:

- Determine which services you feel comfortable maintaining in-house and which ones you need help with

- Evaluate the level of support you require

- Assess the degree of access you expect to have from your provider, including considerations for your own office hours and potential need for 24/7 monitoring and/or helpdesk support

- Decide whether your preference is to work with an entire team or a single consultant

- Decipher whether location accessibility is important to you or if a remote partnership suits your practice

Chapter 4:
What Questions Should I Ask Prospective Companies in Order to Find the Right Fit?

Interviewing prospective partners that provide IT services is an essential part of finding the best fit for your dental practice. It enables you to garner important information about services, capabilities and expectations. Nonetheless, you aren't an expert in IT, so you may not know the best questions to ask. Here are some of the most helpful suggestions to get you started.

How long have you been in business?

The longer an IT provider has been in business, the more established they're likely to be in the industry. If you're looking for a round number, 10+ years is a good standard. But this is not to say you shouldn't go with a company that has less time under their belt. It's just good to be aware of the potential for experiencing bumps in the road as they navigate their company's infancy.

Some additional points of reference for determining experience and expertise include:

- A viable list of references and/or testimonials from the company's past and current clients (that are similar to your practice's size and industry)
- Accreditations and certifications verifying level of skill in relevant areas
- Partnerships with well-known, reliable IT product brands

How big is your company? What about the team working with my practice?

The size of a company can influence the amount of attention your dental practice receives. Typically, a company with approximately 20-30 people should be able to respond to your issues promptly, whereas a company that has only a few team members might be spread too thin. Essentially, this is a question of having the manpower and bandwidth to provide a high level of IT service and support to your practice. Be sure to inquire about how many team members will be dedicated to your practice, what their growth history and projections look like and how available they are to sufficiently address your needs.

You should also consider how many clients the company is supporting. If you are working with a large company that caters to a long list of clients, you may be treated like just another number rather than a valued customer. It really comes down to what you are looking for out of the relationship and whether it is transactional or more relationship-focused.

What is your geographical location? Will proximity impact the service my practice receives?

This is dependent on whether it's important for you to have your outsourced IT provider nearby. If location isn't a priority, this shouldn't hold as much weight, as remote access is often a veritable option. Even so, partnering with a local company has its benefits, like the team's familiarity with regional factors and influences. It also makes it easy for them to make on-site appearances when it's necessary or helpful to do so.

What will the relationship look like?

It's paramount to feel confident that you will have a positive working relationship with your outsourced IT provider. This requires realistic, unambiguous expectations for how the partnership will unfold. Will you communicate with one dedicated representative, a designated team or whichever employee happens to answer the phone when you call? Will you be directed to a support center? What should you expect in terms of typical response time?
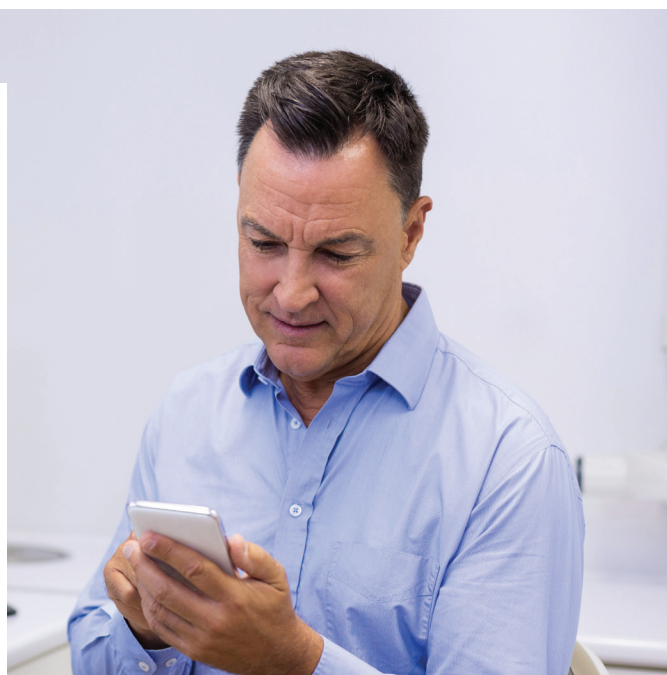
Whether you'll be interacting with one person or several, it's important to know there's a protocol and process in place for keeping everyone abreast of your practice's business and history. Some companies assign an account manager or team with a solid understanding of your business so you don't have to explain it each time you call. Regardless, a partner's representative should be able to supply clear and consistent information. All staff should be able to discuss or address your issues, and if they are unable, they should escalate as needed.

There's also the question of regular maintenance. Will all communication be through phone and email, or will your provider visit your practice regularly to handle ongoing maintenance needs? What steps will they take to get to know your business and its IT realities intimately? Will they help you gain a better understanding of your own IT environment? Do they have a reporting process in place for tracking and communicating metrics?

The answers to these types of questions will help you distinguish which companies are best suited to fulfill your priorities and preferences.

Do you provide RMM service?

A technology provider should be familiar with the term "RMM," or remote monitoring and management. RMM toolsets allow partners to best support your business in an efficient, non-intrusive way. If the term RMM is foreign to a company you are considering and they can't speak to how they will remotely monitor and support your office, you should think about moving on to the next candidate.

Does your company specialize in specific industries?

Every industry has its own set of IT needs and challenges. Your dental practice deserves to be supported by an IT provider with relevant industry experience and specialized skills. From compliance obligations to strategic considerations and operational distinctions, it's important to determine whether prospective providers will approach your practice's IT infrastructure and services with a keen eye toward the nuances of dental offices. They should be more than willing to furnish references and/or case studies illustrating their competency in your industry.

Do you have comprehensive knowledge of HIPAA compliance?

You know all too well the risk of noncompliance with HIPAA law, which is why your technology should never be an afterthought in your practice's efforts to comply. It's integral to choose an IT provider that requires all staff to be regularly trained in HIPAA regulations and that will work with you to implement HIPAA-compliant technology solutions.

How would our engagement commence?

You want to have a good idea of where your partnership begins. Will there be an initial consultation to evaluate your entire practice, not just the technology in it? Will they take the time to see how you and your staff practice your craft? Will they look at your space and how you work within it? Compare your existing technology against your needs and wants to create a path that leads to success?

Find out whether the engagement will involve an initial meeting to help you understand the current state of your technology. Much like a physical exam, a network assessment is a comprehensive review of the existing technology in your office. An outsourced IT provider should review your network to understand the current technology infrastructure and hardware, network design, applications, data locations, backup methodology and effectiveness, security, peripherals and more, pinpointing any issues with performance and identifying opportunities for improvement. Then they can sit down with you to review the results, tell you what's working and what's not, make recommendations and develop a plan to address your technology needs.

What is your pricing structure, and are there any hidden costs?

Not all IT providers charge for their services the same way, so it will be necessary for you to find out upfront whether you'll be billed for individual calls, support tickets, setup fees and/or monthly surcharges. Will there be a long-term, binding contract? Don't be caught off guard by the costs associated with each provider's services. Instead, get all the answers to these questions before making your decision.

Chapter 5:
What Can I Expect From the Partnership in the First 90 Days?

The first three months of partnership with an outsourced IT company usually serve as an opportunity to perform audits and/or conduct consultations. The goal is to identify specific objectives and lay a solid foundation for forging a successful relationship over the long term. Your partner should be able to communicate their timeframe for getting any new systems up and running, which elements they'll be tackling and in what order, and exactly what they'll need from you to ensure a smooth transition.

During this time, it would be wise for you to review your current processes and prepare your team for the onboarding of outsourced support. Discuss with them the positive effects of this decision on the success of the practice, and provide insight on how it will impact current operations. Invite them to ask questions and get support during the transition.

Request a Consultation

Would you like to have a complimentary consultation with one of our advisors to discuss your technology vision for your office?

REQUEST ONE NOW