

Special Feature

Orthodontic journals and orthodontic meetings before, during, and after the pandemic

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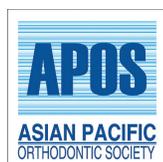
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ABSTRACT

Orthodontic journals and meetings are now at a crossroads. The manner that we communicate information to our readers and present education need to be examined. Factors impacting upon optimal readership of orthodontic publications before, during, and after the pandemic are explored. The caveat is to look forward and present innovative rather than derivative solutions to communicating and educating our colleagues. Some suggestions are offered to maintain readership interest are made

Keywords: Communications, Continuing Education, Readership interest

The amount of printed professional publications that you and I read is extraordinary. Newsletters, Journals, proprietary publications filled with orthodontic manufacturers' advertisements, and other information related and unrelated to the orthodontic specialty and dental profession at large fill our office and home mail boxes every day. It is doubtful that any of us read everything that we receive in our mail. In some instances, certain regularly received publications might be routinely tossed into the "circular file" with only, at best, a cursory glance. What determines which publications will receive our attention? In other words, which publications will we really want to begin reading as soon as we receive them? Answers to these questions will largely portend the fate of both printed and electronic orthodontic journals.

Competing media have been blamed for the perceived decreased interest in readership of dental journals in general. Information can be obtained directly from the internet. Such internet based information is becoming more sophisticated both in content, appearance, and technological features previously unimagined. Satellite courses that might reach orthodontists on a global level might very well become far more attractive alternatives to traditional journal reading or actual course attendance. In addition, continuing education as well as manufacturer advertising information has become very popular. Clearly, the reader of the traditional dental publication now has other choices. Editors of printed media dental publications question more than ever whether their publications are being read by their targeted readership. And whether or not the cost factors justify this time honored format.

However, blaming "media convergence" for all of the printed dental journalism woes would be wrong. Such was the case when Newspapers were declining in the U.S. Newspapers were disappearing long before the internet was all that advanced. Moreover, it was not that advertisers were not available to supply the much needed financial revenue to these newspapers. Newspapers,

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lost readers and no publication without readers can survive. Publications can do better with fewer advertisers than with fewer readers. Maintaining readership interest is paramount. And that is precisely the challenge that the printed and electronic media in dental journalism must meet in the next decade to retain communication prominence and importance in the orthodontic specialty and dental profession at large.

Dental professionals want information, but how do editors and publishers of orthodontic publications printed or otherwise know precisely what information is either wanted or needed? Meaningful readership surveys are both time and cost intensive. However, if carefully designed and implemented, such surveys might yield important and enlightening information to editors. Editors should not merely assume that they know the specific needs of their readership or for that matter, assume readership homogeneity, with respect to desired interests in orthodontics solely because their readership is comprised of orthodontists.

I believe that the printed media will always have a place in dentistry. However, the extent that the printed media will impact on information obtained by our colleagues in the future remains uncertain. Railroads went out of business because they lost sight of the fact that they were in the transportation business primarily, and the railroad industry secondarily. We, as editors, must realize that we are in the information dissemination business first and that the printed media that we use as our vehicle of communication may represent only a part of the way that we disseminate this information. Journals, as we know it, must evolve, integrate, and perfectly meld with other media options. Moreover, editors will need to advance their education far beyond the printed word. While substance will always prevail, “style” with respect to an attractiveness of a presentation coupled with information of importance will ultimately be better received by orthodontic colleagues. In this particular area, traditional dental publications are no match for creative, animated, audio-enhanced, and interactive computer generated and internet based formats.

Continuing education in dentistry has become a lucrative industry for major dental expositions, dental organizations, and academic institutions. CE requirements for relicensure vary regionally. Some states in the U.S. require a certain number of CE credits to be obtained in a “live” format while others permit all the required CE credits to be obtained from either printed, or internet based courses. No useful data are available to demonstrate the superiority of any one format over another. No doubt, the “live” course requirements serve the sponsoring continuing education entities. But are our dental colleagues or the public served any better by requiring our colleagues to attend courses given by these continuing education organizations? Would it not seem reasonable to encourage dentists to take more continuing education

courses by providing them with more convenient (from their homes or offices) venues and attractive formats? If so, then printed publications must be formatted to successfully compete as well as complement affiliated media entities within their own aegis.

Before the pandemic of COVID-19, this change of understanding has been leaning toward allowing offsite continuing education for any required dental licensure renewal. Certainly, during the pandemic continuing education entities are taking a far more generous attitude toward this imperative. The genie is out of the bottle and it is highly unlikely that it will ever want to return to the bottle.

Many publications rely on the dental manufacturers to supply the necessary revenue to help defray publication and distribution costs. As manufacturers continue to assess their market exposure and effectiveness at the dental publication level, they might indeed opt for other venues that promise to increase their visibility on a more global level. Purchasing booth space at major dental meetings, constructing, and maintaining such facilities during these meetings, and costs associated with staffing of these exhibitor booths during dental meetings are becoming increasingly expensive. Similarly, advertising in dental journals that are only distributed regionally might cause dental manufacturers to rethink their advertising options. A decrease in dental manufacturing advertisement in dental journals would seriously and very negatively impact on the continued viability of many dental publications. Organizational publications printed or otherwise have the benefit of utilizing a portion of the annual dues paid to supplement their publications. Subscription publications do not have this luxury.

What can orthodontic dental editors do to ensure the viability of their respective journals? First, editors must remain “in touch” with their readership. Organizations will frequently position their editors in visible and often ubiquitous positions within their leadership infrastructure. Frequently, “without a vote,” the editor of a dental organization is privy to any and all executive decision and policy making. Such a position places editors in rather unique and sometimes precarious political positions. It is for this reason that editors should remain “outside” or “above” the political process as much as possible or feasible. It is another reason that Editors should have “term” limits in dental organizations that are neither too short nor too long. In my opinion, terms of 5–10 years should be sufficient for any editor to come to a publication, make his or her contribution, and then exit to create an opportunity for fresh editorial leadership and direction for their respective publications. I believe that there is a tendency for editors to become stagnant and complacent with their role over a period of time. Term limits also encourage a sense of urgency and immediacy if the initial purported vision or mission statements of all incoming editors are to be realized.

Editors must also appreciate that their writings should be geared to their readers and not themselves. Content and style must conform to a perceived readership preference if editorial messages are to have their intended impact. In short, if our readers need dictionaries or a thesaurus when they read our editorials, something is terribly wrong.

Orthodontic journal publications (electronic or printed) should include, whenever feasible, the opportunity to earn continuing education credits when available. For those publications that publish scientific or clinical articles, relatively uncomplicated reading, scoring of associated CE exams, and recording of these CE credits for relicensure should be streamlined and effortless for the individual orthodontist reading dental publications.

Editors should consider some of the time honored formats for their publications and develop new features to their journals or newsletter publications. One of the more potentially interesting and often neglected formats includes the interview. There are noted clinicians, researchers, teachers, and administrators that have important information to share with other members of the dental profession. Carefully conceived interview questions and interview implementation that do not necessarily require a “face to face” or “live” meeting between the interviewer and interviewee may still have the net result of producing any interview that appears interactive and spontaneous. Naturally, photographs of the person being interviewed as well as the person doing the interview may add to the seemingly spontaneous quality of such an interview.

Editors should learn the art of soliciting articles of interest for their readers. For example, if an editor of an orthodontic publication knows intuitively that an article on minimizing or eliminating failures in certain types of cases, then a list of potential authors should be formulated. These authors should be contacted and informed that the particular publication is interested in an article on this particular subject. Guidelines should be clearly given to such potential authors (I am assuming that most publications have a guide for contributors, etc.) as well as realistic deadlines. Credible and reliable authors should be selected or “commissioned.” Such solicitation should not interfere with the peer review process. Guest editorials and “perspective” articles may be notable exceptions. Publications that are finding it difficult to find excellent clinical articles for their readers should develop a network among their editorial colleagues to obtain such articles. For example, there are numerous specialty publications that reject a significant number of manuscripts

for one reason or another. Many of these manuscripts might be suitable for other publications. Editors should be able to direct authors to other publications that might consider publishing their rejected manuscripts. And editors should be able to communicate with each other as to how we may help each other’s efforts. Worldwide organizational publications such as the Journal of the World Federation of Orthodontists might be in the best position to accomplish this goal.

Orthodontic meetings worldwide have enjoyed a healthy attendance and enthusiasm among individual attendees before the current pandemic. In addition to numerous restrictions and deterrents for these meetings to actually take place; at this time, orthodontists will need to become accustomed to securing scientific, clinical, and manufacturer content from other sources. Once organizations, individual orthodontists, and orthodontic manufacturers become comfortable with the rapidly changing internet capabilities and possibilities, the number of live orthodontic meetings may decrease even after the pandemic is over. Organizations may find it useful to combine several orthodontic organizational meetings (organizational collaboration), thereby creating a more inclusive and feasible live formatted meeting.

The future of orthodontic journalism is very bright and will reflect the flexibility and capability of the orthodontic specialty in providing information and communication in such a manner that our orthodontic readership finds most useful and most accessible.

It might be a useful caveat to look far forward than looking to the past in orthodontic journalism.

Declaration of patient consent

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Conflicts of interest

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