



PROVIDING A
great
patient experience

Michelle Harvey, 26, from Rayleigh in Essex, describes how she battled through graduate job-seeking to become Sales and Marketing Manager/Treatment Coordinator at a forward-thinking orthodontic dental practice in London's Square Mile.

My first few weeks at The Brace were a steep learning curve as I adapted from working for a large organisation to a small clinical practice. There was a lot of ground work to be done on the marketing side of things to find out what worked and what didn't. I also spent a lot of time putting together lists of all the local dental practices to start communicating with them...

A degree in shopping

I decided from an early age that I wanted to work in advertising or marketing after an English assignment at school to design an advertising campaign. Knowing that I wanted to go into marketing I chose to study business and psychology as two of my A-levels which enabled me to study marketing at university. I chose to study retail marketing for my degree (or a degree in shopping as some people said!) at the University of Brighton as the course was taught in small workshop-style classes rather than huge lecture halls. I really enjoyed my time there.

What I learnt from the retail element of my degree was that I really didn't want to work in the retail sector; the industry wasn't doing very well when I graduated and jobs were few and far between. My first year after graduation was spent applying for many jobs and attending many interviews along with the thousands of other graduates desperate for a job.

Foot in the door

My first job after graduating was as an Admin and Marketing Assistant at a company delivering training to people setting up their own businesses. This was great experience and got my foot in the door of the world of work, but the admin side far outweighed the marketing element of the job and did not hold my interest for very long. At this time I still didn't really know what industry I would like to work in and again applied for many marketing positions including that of Marketing Officer at the British Dental Association (BDA).

The marketing role at the BDA attracted me because it was an opportunity to get stuck into marketing in an industry I had never thought of working in before.

I worked as Marketing Officer at the BDA

for almost two years. I really developed my marketing skills over this period as I assisted all members of the marketing team in various campaigns, online, mailings, attending exhibitions and events. I also learnt a lot about the dental industry which made me consider continuing my career in dentistry.

After almost two years I began to look for a new challenge, and it was at this point that I heard about a marketing position being advertised at The Brace Orthodontic Practice in the City of London. It wasn't until I went to the interview that I learnt of the treatment coordinator aspect of the job.

Climbing stairs

Having never worked in a dental practice before, the role of treatment coordinator wasn't something I was familiar with. However, it seemed to fit well with the marketing side of things as it would give me the chance to meet clients and find out more about them.

I had two interviews before being offered the position at The Brace. The practice is based in a four storey seventeenth century building and my interviews took place on the top floor, so my first impression of the practice was just of lots of stairs! At the second interview I was asked to put together a presentation with a marketing plan to attract new private patients. Preparing the presentation for my second interview really got me thinking about the role and all the possibilities and opportunities that it would offer me.

I was offered the treatment coordinator role straight away. I was sad to leave the BDA as I worked with some fantastic people there, but also excited about my new role.

My training in the treatment coordinator role was on the job. I started off by sitting in on the initial patient consultations with the orthodontists to learn about the products and services offered, different types of braces, retainers, payment plans, the appointment process ... there was a lot to pick up. I gradually started to deliver more of the consultation myself until I could operate efficiently as a treatment coordinator and do what that role is designed for: save the orthodontist time.

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I have since attended an orthodontic treatment coordinators training course with Lena Craven. This was about a year into my time with The Brace but I felt it really helped me to perfect my skills and affirm all the things I was already doing right. It was great to attend training that was focused on orthodontics rather than general dentistry. I know that the treatment coordinator role in a general or cosmetic dental practice is often very different as there are so many services provided – you have the opportunity to cross sell and up sell

different products to patients and aim to keep them coming back for the long term. With orthodontics retaining patients for further treatments is not possible; if we needed to see our patients again in the future it would be because we hadn't done a good enough job in the first place and we try not to let that happen!

My working week

An average week for me is probably split about 50/50 between being a treatment coordinator and a marketing manager although somewhere

in the middle the line definitely blurs. I believe that good customer service and great patient experience are the first and most important part of any dental practice's marketing strategy.

As treatment coordinator I deal with incoming enquiries from new patients, answering their questions and encouraging them to book a consultation. At the consultation I greet them at reception and show them up to my treatment coordinator's office near the surgeries. I then explain who

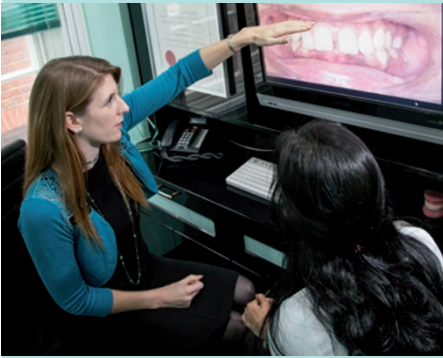


I am and what is going to happen at the consultation; I find this especially important to go through with nervous patients. This is my chance to find out a bit about the patient, how they found out about us, why they want braces, what they do for a living etc. I then introduce them to their orthodontist and hand over for the clinical section of the consultation. When the treatment plan is being explained I re-join the consultation and take over to answer questions, discuss types of braces, payment options and next steps. I then act as a point of contact for the patient throughout their treatment to answer any questions they may have.

When I am wearing my marketing hat I will be communicating with prospective patients and also with referring dentists. I try to visit all of our referring practices at least twice a year and keep in touch with them by mail and email regularly. This could be to let them know about any new services or special offers, or just to keep them informed of a patient they have referred to us.

My own office

There are many benefits of working for a small practice rather than a large organisation for me. I have my own office for one! I also like the feeling that everyone is a team and part of the business. We have regular team meetings and all put in suggestions on ways the business could grow, adapt and change to keep things working smoothly. It's nice to see your suggestions put into action and making a difference. I get to work with all members of the team at The Brace and we are very close. As



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a team we have lunch together each day and take the opportunity to discuss anything that may have come up that day and let each other know what is happening in the afternoon. For example our orthodontic therapist will often let me know if she is fitting retainers that day so I can pop in at the end of the appointment to speak to the patient about their experience with us and ask for feedback. We also try to have two team days out each year where we try out new activities, most recently archery.

I really enjoy meeting so many new people

as treatment coordinator. When I look at the diary and see a list of names I never know who is going to come through the door. We get such a variety of people coming in and it is great to chat to them about what they do and why straight teeth are important to them. We see a lot of ladies straightening their teeth in preparation for their wedding so it is always nice to talk dresses and flowers with them! I find out who the patient is, their background, what has attracted them to the practice and how they found out about us. This information

COVER STORY

is invaluable when trying to reach out to potential new patients.

I think the treatment coordinator role is great for anyone from a sales or marketing background who loves to talk to people – as well as being recommended for those wanting to develop their role within the dental practice. As I don't come from a clinical background it is easy to explain treatments to patients in



a way they understand without using technical jargon.

A fantastic tool

An extra element of my job at The Brace is being in charge of maintaining and updating the website and looking after our social media profiles. As marketing manager I manage the practice's Facebook and Twitter accounts. I really enjoy this as I have always had an interest in digital marketing and social media. I think it is a fantastic tool to enable patients to share their experience with their friends and also to connect with the dental industry. It is great to be able to put a comment or question out and get an instant response and I have made a lot of really useful contacts.

New challenges

As far as my future career is concerned, there are plenty of new challenges for me to tackle here at the practice. The owner of The Brace, Dr Murtuza Hasnaini, is keen on developing the business and branching out into new areas; we have recently started running training courses for GDPs interested in learning orthodontics; we have a training room which we hire out; and we have just taken on a periodontist to offer private services. I am looking forward to developing my career in the dental industry even further. In the future I would like to develop training courses of my own in dental marketing and for treatment coordinators.

Despite the fact that I have come to dentistry from a non-clinical background,

as treatment coordinator I do feel like an integrated part of the dental team and the industry. I think that in time the role of treatment coordinator will inevitably become an essential one in UK dentistry, especially in private practices as it frees up the practitioners' time and offers the opportunity for great customer service. Patients like that they have someone they can contact at any time who can answer their questions swiftly or that they can pop in and have a chat to face to face.



The Brace Orthodontic Practice

Based in London E1, The Brace Orthodontic Practice offers NHS services for Tower Hamlets and private adult orthodontics in the City of London. The Brace offers a range of discreet and invisible braces on a private basis and has recently started offering periodontal services too.

Principal Dr Murtuza Hasnaini also runs a training course for GDPs who are interested in adding orthodontics to their skills set. The course is a practical nine day programme in which dentists can treat their own patients under the supervision of an orthodontist.

The Brace's website has a dedicated Dentist Area containing information on the training course and how to refer patients to The Brace for both orthodontic and periodontal services.

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