



PRACTICE PROFILE

Innovative Orthodontics

Location: Sicklerville, NJ

Office square footage: 3,100

Number of chairs:
five clinical chairs; plus one
chair in the consultation room

Years in practice: 9

Education: DMD, Harvard University;
MS and Certificate in Orthodontics,
University of Illinois

Staff size: 8

Average patients per day: 60

Days worked per week: 4

Starts per year: 375

Top products used: Practice Genius' Patient
Rewards Hub; American Orthodontics'
Empower Self-Ligating Brackets; Dolphin
Management and Imaging Software;
professional practice videos from VisionTrust
Communication; digital signage from Digital
Sign ID; and Civitas Architects

Website: iortho.com

CONNECT WITH THE NET-GENERATION



TING RATION

Daniel A. Bills, DMD, MS, has wired his practice to best connect with today's patients

BY KAREN APPOLD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CINDY PATRICK

DANIEL A. BILLS, DMD, MS, considers himself a “late bloomer” when it comes to technology. As a kid, he was much more interested in playing outside with friends than he was in entertaining himself with computers and video games. “I didn’t even get my first cell phone until dental school,” says Bills, now 38. “And I was one of the last people I know to join Facebook.”

But his views on the importance of technology have certainly changed with the times. When Bills opened his private practice, Innovative Orthodontics, in Sicklerville, NJ, in 2007, he decided to incorporate computers and technology in every way possible. “Every step of the patient process—from check-in, to diagnosis, to patient education, to treatment planning and delivery—is aided by the use of computers,” he says.

Originally, Bills embraced these 21st-century staples because he believed they would allow him to run his practice in the most efficient and effective ways possible. However, about 2 years ago, he started to realize just how much Net-Generation patients—ie, those born after 1982—appreciated and related to technology.

“While they weren’t aware of the practice-management benefits that these innovations provided, they were very much in tune with how we used these technologies to connect and communicate,” Bills recalls. At that point, he became fascinated with reading up on generational psychology and how the youngest generation uses technology instinctively to connect with the world.

In fact, the Gen Xer became such a proponent of incorporating technology into his orthodontic practice, that he began speaking on the topic at various orthodontic meetings as well as at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is a faculty member.

The development of the Net-Generation—the largest generation in history (surpassing 80 million people)—has been tremendously impacted by the Internet and technology. Since childhood, they have used cell phones and computers to keep in constant contact with others. “They are wired for the next moment’s activities, and view the world through a prism of their own interests,” Bills says. “This worldview is extremely different from that of previous generations, and this difference affects their learning significantly.”

As a result, he believes that change is necessary when striving to connect with this generation. “Technology is not going away,” Bills says. “Integrating new technology in my practice to better connect with our patients has been an expensive, and sometimes frightening, endeavor, but the return on investment has been well worth it.”



In Bills' practice, every step of the patient process—from check-in, to diagnosis, to patient education, to treatment planning and delivery—is aided by the use of the latest technology.

Five Areas of Focus

While creating a website and Facebook page was a good start, it was not enough. "I needed to learn to actually use these powerful tools to connect with patients and their parents," Bills says. To accomplish that, he focused on the following five areas.

Area 1: Connect-worthy content. Bills invested in a professional photo shoot to acquire high-definition (HD) images for his website and social media pages. "Most of our patients have been exposed to HD content their entire lives," Bills says. "How can I expect them to connect with our content if I show them anything less?"

He also invested in professional videos to showcase his practice's philosophy, patient testimonials, referring doctor testimonials, practice technology, doctor bio, office tour, and so forth. "Video is becoming more important to all businesses," Bills says. "In fact, more viewers are now watching video online than on television, and more than half of consumer Web traffic is now video." We feature these videos in the office (for consultations and in the reception area), on our website, and on social media pages.

"We also take office videos of debonds and practice events for a more personal touch," he says. "Our office produces a 'Smile Transformations' video each month that highlights all of the beautiful smiles we created during that time. It has become a huge hit with our patients, their families, and my referral base." It is also very important to Bills that these videos are formatted and presented in such a way that they are viewable on every type of device (eg, smartphone, tablet, Mac, PC).

Area 2: Website as a connection portal. Bills designed his website from the ground

up to be attractive, uniquely branded to his practice, informative, and easy to navigate. Most importantly, he planned it to require little to no maintenance once complete.

"It bothers me when I look at the 'Current Events' section of a website and see that the most recent update was done in 2008," he says. He also made sure that his site had a "call to action" for important items such as the office's phone number and information on scheduling a complimentary consult, as well as clickable links to the practice's social media pages.

Area 3: Effective and interactive social media pages. Social media is here to stay, and it's getting bigger and more important every day. "A few years ago, we realized that the time had come for our practice to ride the social

media trend or get hit by the wave," Bills maintains. "The current social media landscape can seem overwhelming. I have seen many orthodontic offices attempt to gain a presence on so many social media outlets, that they fail to effectively use any to their full potential. I decided to only focus on a select few (ie, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Blogger)."

Area 4: Patient rewards program. The Net-Generation is used to being rewarded for simply participating in an activity. "It would be great to think that a beautiful, healthy smile would be incentive enough to properly follow our instructions," Bills says. "Unfortunately, that is simply not the case for many of our patients. Net-Gen patients like (or expect) to be rewarded for good behavior, such as not breaking appliances and arriving to appointments on time."

Innovative Orthodontics used a coin-based "Bills Bucks" program effectively for years. However, 2 years ago Bills started to notice the mystique (and therefore, the effectiveness) of the coins wearing off. "I attribute this dynamic shift to the fact that kids today are exposed much more to their parents swiping a debit or credit card than they are to them using other forms of currency—especially coins," he says. "As a result, I transitioned the Bills Bucks program into the digital age with the Patient Rewards Hub from Practice Genius, with amazing results." Patients earn points on their cards and can later cash them in online for a variety of prizes.

Area 5: Patient and parent education. When he opened his practice, informative



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brochures were placed throughout the office. However, Bills noticed that over time they weren't getting as much attention. Rather, younger patients were either texting their friends, surfing the Internet on one of the public iMacs, or playing a game on one of the built-in Xbox game stations. Meanwhile, most parents and adult patients were emailing or using the complimentary in-office WiFi.

As a result, he invested in custom digital signage in the reception area. "Now, a custom-designed and ever-changing HD digital display is showcased on two large, flat-screen televisions," he says. "The screens show a combination of practice videos, local sports and weather, live feeds from our social media pages, and educational and entertaining programming," he says. "Almost immediately, I noticed the smartphones and iPads going away, as the eye-catching and entertaining programming on the screens captured the attention of people in the waiting area."

This paradigm shift also occurred in Innovative Orthodontics' approach to clinical education. "Historically, we educated patients chairside using a combination of typodonts, handouts, diagrams, and so forth," Bills says. However, since there



Bills traded typodonts, handouts, and diagrams used at the chairside for flat-screen monitors and patient education software to transition clinical education in his practice to the digital world.

were already at least two flat-screen monitors showing patient images, television, or live feeds to the practice's social media pages at each patient chair, he realized that patients were not paying attention to these traditional educational tools. He therefore invested in Dolphin's Aquarium patient education software and transitioned all patient education into the digital world.

Bills encourages patients to communicate with him electronically. "During the initial consultation I give them my business card, which contains my personal email address," he says. "I tell them to feel free to email me with any questions." This is an effective use of everyone's time—rather than having a receptionist pass along a phone message and playing phone tag.

Adults comprise more than 30% of Bills' practice. Those same patients have also embraced his practice's technology. "It is just as important to connect and communicate with the adults in our practice (both patients and parents) as it is with our child and adolescent ones," he says, noting that the adults respond even better than the kids to online and social media systems.

Combining His Passions

While Bills' zest for technology turned out to be somewhat of a surprise, so did his passion for orthodontics. "I went to college not knowing exactly what I wanted to do with my life," Bills admits. "There weren't any dentists in my family, so dentistry and orthodontics were not on my radar."

While taking a diverse college course load, he toyed with the idea of following in his parents' footsteps and becoming an educator.



The practice takes a modern approach to patient rewards with a debit card-like program.

In particular, he considered earning a PhD and becoming a college professor.

"However, during my junior year in college, one of my teaching assistants got accepted into dental school," he recalls. Intrigued, he started asking him questions about his career choice. "I became extremely interested with how dentistry could allow me to merge my interests in science, art, business, and scholarly activity," he says.

While in dental school he thoroughly enjoyed every specialty, but in the end it was clear that spending his days merging the art and science of orthodontics was the best choice for him.

But he didn't forsake his desire to be an educator. Throughout college and his residency program, Bills was a teaching assistant. Then, upon starting his private practice, he joined the dental staff at Virtua Hospital and began teaching orthodontics to dental residents.

In 2010, Bills became a clinical associate at Penn, where he now works with residents every week treating patients and lecturing on clinical and practice-management topics.

"Sharing my knowledge and experience



Since childhood, the Net-Generation has used cell phones and computers to keep in constant contact with others. "They are wired for the next moment's activities," Bills says.

with the next generation of orthodontists is incredibly rewarding,” he admits. “It allows me to give back to the profession that has given me so much. In addition, spending time with intelligent and inquisitive orthodontic residents pushes me to constantly stay on the cutting edge of the orthodontic specialty.” His efforts earned him Penn’s “Outstanding Teacher” award in 2011.

Bills has also been honored to lecture at various orthodontic meetings, including the 2012 and 2013 Southern Association of Orthodontists Annual Meeting, the 2013 OrthoVOICE meeting, and the March 2014 Dolphin Meeting in Chicago.

Returning to His Roots

After completing his orthodontic residency, Bills returned to the Philadelphia area to practice. After associating for a year and a half, he decided to open his own start-up practice. “Ironically, demographic studies showed that the area of my childhood home appeared to be the best fit for my new office,” he says. “This has been extremely rewarding for me, both personally and professionally.”

Of course, along with incorporating computers and technology in every way possible, the practice building itself had to be modern. “I believe wholeheartedly that the design

and feel of an office is a direct reflection of a doctor’s practice philosophy,” Bills says.

He hired Civitas Architects, a Philadelphia firm that specializes in orthodontic and dental offices, to custom design the new office. “I was extremely specific about what I wanted—clean, open, high-tech, and comfortable.”

Bills says each member of his practice’s team is on board with his vision of providing state-of-the-art orthodontic care in a warm, friendly environment. He relies heavily on his patients to keep him on his toes regarding the latest and greatest technological advances. In addition, he regularly reads the technology section of *The New York Times* and subscribes to several computer and technology journals. “I also spend way too much time in the Apple Store,” he admits.

Bills and his wife, Emily, a pediatric dentist, are looking forward to a new venture this spring as they are expecting their first child in May. **OP**

Karen Appold is a freelance writer for Orthodontic Products. She can be reached at awerner@allied360.com.

➔ *To learn more about Bills and his practice, check out our extended slide show, available with our interactive edition.*



Each member of Bills’ practice team has embraced his vision of providing state-of-the-art orthodontic care in a warm, friendly environment.

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