



# DENTAL INDUSTRY TRENDS

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in 2020 &  
Beyond -A  
Deeper Look

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# Dental Industry Trends in 2019 and Beyond – A Deeper Look

Innovative dental technologies are changing the way dentists interact with and care for patients. Sophisticated equipment and changes in office layout may allow dental professionals to offer a wider range of services while improving efficiency and the patient experience.

Many changes are being driven by the growing importance of exceptional customer service across industries. Between 9% and 20% of people avoid dental appointments due to anxiety or fear, and as many as 60% suffer from general anxiety about going to the dentist. A more comfortable, inviting office atmosphere and fewer delays can help put these patients at ease.

Dental professionals looking to invest in the top dental industry trends of 2019 should evaluate the options to determine which tools and upgrades can offer the greatest benefits to their patients and practices.

# 01

## Dental 3D Printers

Currently, patients in need of dentures or orthodontics have to wait days or weeks to receive their hardware. Specifications must be sent to an offsite lab, where the final product is created before being shipped back to the office.

A 3D printer makes it possible to create finished hardware the same day by keeping the entire process in house. With help from someone who specializes in 3D resin printing, dentists can provide patients with crowns, bridges, veneers, new teeth and more on the spot. Dentists need to evaluate printers and materials to find the highest-quality options so that dental hardware can be produced without extensive adjustments or polishing.

Some dentists are already using 3D printing, and continued improvements in both technology and resins should continue to drive adoption. Faster turnaround times give patients the results they want sooner, and make it possible to expand a dental practice to meet a wider range of needs.





## 02

# Digital Impressions

Taking impressions for dental hardware typically involves having patients bite down on a soft impression material or paste, which then hardens and is used to make a cast of the mouth. A technician uses the cast to create the necessary hardware before performing a final trim and polish to ensure the right look and fit.

Digital technology in dentistry is starting to make this process unnecessary. Thanks to optical intraoral scanners, dentists can take “digital impressions” and use the resulting three-dimensional replication of a patient’s mouth to create more accurate custom-made dentures and orthodontics. These images take less time to produce than traditional impressions. They can easily be shared between dental professionals as needed during the course of patient treatment.

Computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) are already in use in some practices to design and manufacture dental hardware as part of specialized treatments. However, because the technology requires a significant level of care and knowledge, it may be some time before it goes mainstream.



## 03

# Natural Dental Products

According to one study examining the populations of the U.S., UK, Sweden and Australia, almost 20% of people suffer from chemical sensitivities. Among those with asthma and similar respiratory conditions, the number is nearly 43%. These people experience a range of uncomfortable symptoms when exposed to chemicals and artificial ingredients, which can make medical care a challenge in some cases.

Dentists are starting to move away from products containing chemicals to which their patients may be sensitive, some going beyond what's used in procedures to reduce chemical use throughout their practices. This includes adopting eco-friendly materials, such as low-VOC paints, and longer-lasting natural options that cut back on waste.

Natural dental products also benefit patients by reducing abrasive effects on the teeth and minimizing the potentially negative impacts of dental amalgams. Sending patients home with high-quality natural dental care items encourages wider adoption of products that are healthier for all ages.



## 04

# Laser Dentistry

The use of lasers in dentistry dates back to the 1960s and has been gaining popularity in modern practices since the early 1990s. Laser procedures use the energy of a concentrated beam of light to remove or reshape tissues within the mouth, and is FDA-approved for multiple use cases. Dentists may use lasers to treat:

- ✓ Benign tumors
- ✓ Cold sores
- ✓ Discoloration
- ✓ Gum disease
- ✓ Hypersensitivity
- ✓ Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD)
- ✓ Tissue damage
- ✓ Tooth decay

By reducing the invasiveness of the dental procedures associated with these and other common conditions, lasers minimize collateral damage to healthy tissues and reduce the overall risk of infection. Lasers can also be used to detect cavities and kill the bacteria causing the problem so that less anesthetic and drilling are needed when fillings are placed.

It's important to note that, although both hard- and soft-tissue lasers are available, the American Dental Association (ADA) hasn't yet approved their use for any dental procedures.



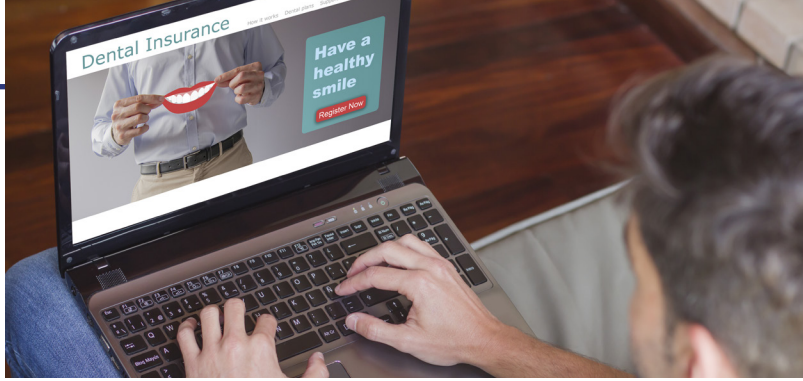
## 05

# Dental Group Practices

Graduating dental students face big expenses when seeking to establish practices. Average startup costs hover around \$500,000, and this is on top of the average \$287,331 in debt students already carry. Group practices can significantly reduce expenses and improve the patient experience at the same time. In addition, students get the benefit of working with established practitioners to improve their skills while building a network of contacts and starting a client list.



For everyone in the practice, the perks of taking on recently graduated dental students include saving on administrative staff, opportunities to collaborate and the ability to serve more patients at a single location. Collaborative marketing and reputation management support positive outcomes for patients and practitioners. Every dental professional in a group practice shares in the brand reputation of the practice as a whole, meaning consistency in patient care is of paramount importance.



## 06

# Automated Patient Tracking & Management Software

Business owners know the value of automating administrative tasks and repetitive workflows, and dentists can realize the same benefits with practice management software (PMS). A solid PMS solution puts all patient information in one place, making it easily accessible to dentists and office staff to facilitate better communication between practices and patients.

Drawing on patient data, a PMS system saves time by:

- ✔ Allowing patients to book appointments online
- ✔ Sending automated appointment confirmations via text or pre-recorded voice messages
- ✔ Simplifying billing and payments

New patients can fill out paperwork online or on a tablet at the practice, which speeds up check-ins and minimizes wait times. Should complex treatment plans be necessary, dental professionals can use PMS to map out the necessary steps and walk patients through upcoming treatments and address any questions or concerns.

PMS solutions can integrate with other software, such as programs used for imaging or accounting, to create a cohesive system that supports all aspects of a dental practice. Reporting features reveal any problems causing delays or negatively impacting workflows, which allows for strategic changes to improve efficiency.

When implementing PMS solutions, it's essential for dental professionals to seek software with strong data security to ensure compliance with HIPAA laws and protect patient information against data breaches.



# 07

## Robot Dentists & Artificial Intelligence



In 2017, a robot performed a tooth implant on a patient volunteer in China without any help from a human dentist. The successful and highly accurate procedure points to a future in which robotics start to play a bigger role in the dental industry.

Dental professionals can already get a glimpse into this future with systems like Yomi from the Florida-based robotics company Neocis. Yomi assists with dental surgeries by drawing on information from a patient's customized treatment plan to direct surgeons in the proper placement of implants. While Yomi can't perform surgery on its own, it does reduce the potential for errors and therefore supports safer, more accurate procedures.

Complementary dental technology trends include artificial intelligence (AI) systems with the ability to aid in detecting cavities on X-rays, automate communication between dentists and patients and enable voice commands to speed up common procedures. Whether used alone or in tandem, AI and robotics can make it easier for dental professionals to diagnose and treat a range of conditions.



## 08

# Augmented Reality (AR)

The same technology game designers and marketers use to combine digital experiences with physical reality have powerful potential for dentistry. With AR, dentists can use digital impressions and scans to show patients what they can expect during a procedure, which could be a boon for those suffering from anxiety. Sharing AR models with other professionals could allow for real-time collaboration in difficult situations, thus improving outcomes and patient satisfaction.

For dental students, AR provides a flexible tool to create and execute a variety of educational scenarios. Using cases commonly encountered in an actual dental practice, instructors can walk students through realistic procedures controlled through an AR interface. This highly adaptable solution provides valuable training opportunities with minimal risk.



## 09

# Improving the Patient Experience

Some dental practices are going all out to make patients feel more comfortable by introducing luxuries like aromatherapy and massage. Others are focusing on building long-term relationships that provide more than routine cleanings or procedures by giving patients more time to speak with dentists and improving overall engagement between office staff and patients.

**While it's not necessary to go overboard with amenities, taking steps to improve the patient experience can boost the reputation of a dental practice. Cost-effective methods include:**

- Changing décor to promote relaxation
- Giving small gifts to new patients
- Accepting more forms of payment
- Offering simple payment plans
- Allowing new patients to fill out paperwork prior to their first appointment

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# A Look into 2020: What's Coming for Dentistry?

The future of dentistry technology may look even more “sci-fi” if trends continue on the same trajectory. Some dental practices are already sending patients to their “happy places” via virtual reality (VR) when performing both routine cleanings and complex procedures. With VR, the 5% to 10% of people who experience severe dental phobia and those who feel anxious about dental visits can pick a calming scene or locale and “go” there while the dentist works on their mouths.

VR also has the potential to improve training for dental students by allowing for a more immersive experience into real-life situations. Combining VR with haptic technology makes it possible to practice without the risk of making a mistake on a real patient. Such virtual “hands-on” training takes AR to the next level and helps students become more prepared for working in an actual practice.

Beyond the virtual realm, it may become possible to combine 3D printing with medical technologies to produce living tooth replacements or even regrow dentin in damaged teeth. Manufacturing teeth with the proper structures for blood vessels and nerves and exposing them to dental pulp cells could allow patients to avoid the potential complications of crowns and root canals. Using medications to stimulate stem cells within tooth pulp may allow teeth to heal themselves, which could eventually eliminate the need for fillings.

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# Equipping Your Dental Practice for the Future

Investing in the future of dental technology can be expensive, but the cost of equipment doesn't have to be a barrier to growing your practice. [Equipment financing](#) makes it possible to get the upgrades you need to deliver the best possible experience to your patients and stay ahead of competitors as technology continues to advance. By spreading payments out over time, you can afford to purchase equipment and start seeing the benefits now.

When it's time to expand or change the layout of your office to accommodate new equipment and services, a [small business loan](#) can provide funding for the renovation. Make space for a 3D printer or robotic dental assistant, turn the waiting room into a spa experience or get ready to partner with other dental professionals to provide better service, all without straining your budget.

As you grow and make changes, it's a good idea to have some cash in reserve to cover other purchases like an upgrade to your practice management software. A [business line of credit](#) is easy to qualify for and makes it possible to take advantage of new trends as they develop. Using financing to pursue these trends can pay off in big ways, and National Business Capital & Services is ready to help you find the right loan to [grow your dental practice](#).

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