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2026 Dental Trends Report

6 TRENDS SHAPING
PATIENT ENGAGEMENT
AND PRACTICE GROWTH



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Each year, Intiveo's annual Trends Report shines a light on the most pivotal shifts shaping the dental industry. In 2026, this clarity is more important than ever. As the economic environment tightens and patient expectations evolve, dental practices are looking beyond reactive care. They are asking more strategic questions: Where is our revenue coming from? Where are we losing time or money? And how can we drive sustainable growth?

To answer these questions, practices are zeroing in on three essential pillars: acquisition, engagement, and fulfillment. These aren't just operational levers — they're strategic imperatives. Practices that build intentional strategies across each of these areas will be positioned to thrive in a rapidly shifting landscape.



Acquisition

Engagement

Fulfillment

"At Intiveo, we believe the future of dental care rests in a practice's ability to strategically attract new patients, foster trusted patient experiences, and deliver care efficiently at scale. **Acquisition**, **engagement**, and **fulfillment** aren't just tactics, they are the core pillars of both clinical success and long-term business sustainability. Our mission is to power this transformation through smarter, more human-centered patient engagement software."

- Josh DeVries, co-founder and CEO of Intiveo.

Dental teams embrace augmented intelligence over artificial intelligence

There's a lot of hype around artificial intelligence (AI), where the goal is to replicate or replace human capabilities, whereas augmented intelligence (Aul) uses the technology to enhance and support human decision making.

In 2026, dental practices are moving toward a human-centered approach, leveraging Aul.

This shift marks a strategic pivot — not toward replacing humans, but toward enhancing human judgment, efficiency, and empathy with intelligent tools.

Practices are recognizing that patients don't want to feel like just another data point. According to recent research, **72% of patients say that a lack of human interaction during treatment is their primary concern about AI in dentistry¹**. That statistic underscores a powerful truth: technology should support the human experience, not replace it.

Augmented intelligence bridges that gap by empowering staff, not automating them out. From AI-assisted note taking to predictive scheduling tools and automated follow-ups, dental teams are using smart systems to surface insights, save time, and spend more meaningful moments with patients.

Dentists, too, are embracing augmented intelligence as a clinical ally. Tools like AI-powered oral scanners, radiograph analyzers, and diagnostic assistants are being used to flag potential issues and surface data-driven recommendations. But these tools don't make decisions — the dentist does. Providers review the AI-generated insights and apply their professional expertise to make final diagnoses and build treatment plans that align with both clinical best practices and the patient's unique context.

AI VS. AUI

AI: Autonomous, pattern-driven, operates independently, great for handling repetitive tasks

Aul: Collaborative, insight-driven, and supports human decision-making



THE TAKEAWAY:

In 2026, it's not about AI vs. people. It's about people empowered by Aul. Dental practices that embrace augmented intelligence will elevate both patient experience and operational excellence — striking the balance between tech-forward and deeply human.

Practices diversify their offerings

Patient demographics are shifting fast. According to the American Dental Association, older adults (65+) are becoming a significant segment of the patient population. By 2030, the U.S. adult population aged 65 and older will reach 72 million — nearly 20% of the total population, and double the number from 2000².

This generational shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity. To grow and sustain their patient base, dental practices — especially general practitioners — are diversifying their offerings beyond cleanings and fillings.

In 2026, leading practices are expanding into high-demand, high-value services such as:

- **Cosmetic and aesthetic dentistry** (e.g., veneers, whitening, invisible aligners)
- **Botox and facial injectables**
- **Dental implants and specialized prosthodontics**
- **Teledentistry and virtual consults** for better accessibility and convenience

Teledentistry, in particular, is gaining traction³ as it allows providers to extend care beyond geographic boundaries and improve efficiency. For time-strapped or mobility-limited patients, it's not just a convenience, it's a game-changer.

At the same time, dental procedures are becoming increasingly commoditized. Patients are price-comparing, reading reviews, and seeking transparency like never before. In this environment, clinical excellence alone is not enough. **Practices must compete not just on services offered, but on how those services are delivered.** Differentiators like seamless digital experiences, personalized care and clear communication are becoming decisive factors in patient choice.



THE TAKEAWAY:

As the market evolves, so must your services — and your patient experience. Practices that broaden their offerings and deliver stand-out care will not only attract new patient segments, but build lasting competitive advantage in an increasingly crowded field.

Operational alignment becomes a top priority

Despite best intentions, many dental practices are facing a silent challenge: misalignment between strategic goals and daily operations. Whether it's a solo practitioner juggling multiple roles or a DSO managing performance across locations, the disconnect is costly.

This gap becomes even more problematic amid ongoing staffing shortages. Many teams are stretched thin, and without clear direction, even the most talented staff struggle to stay focused on what matters most.

Dental practices can no longer ignore the reality of staffing constraints, they must adapt by aligning their teams around shared priorities, clear workflows, and purposeful communication.

In 2026, more practices are making operational alignment a non-negotiable. This means:

- **Clarifying production goals** and tying them to actionable daily tasks
- **Using digital tools to track team performance** and surface insights in real-time
- **Standardizing workflows** across multi-site practices to ensure consistency

OPERATIONAL ALIGNMENT TIPS:

1. **Clarify production goals**
2. **Track performance**
3. **Standardize workflows**

For DSOs, operational alignment is the engine that drives scalability. When each location is calibrated around shared objectives — and staff know how their work contributes — the organization can operate as a unified, efficient network.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Profitability hinges on performance. Practices that align their people, processes, and technology will see greater returns and reduced burnout.



Oral care becomes holistic care

Oral health is stepping into the spotlight — not as an isolated discipline, but as a cornerstone of whole-body wellness. In 2026, the dental profession will continue to evolve, driven by growing recognition that the health of the mouth is inseparable from the health of the body.

Emerging research continues to affirm what many providers have long known: oral health plays a critical role in systemic outcomes, from cardiovascular and metabolic conditions to pregnancy complications and immune response. As this understanding deepens, dental practices are becoming vital touchpoints in a more connected, patient-centered healthcare landscape.

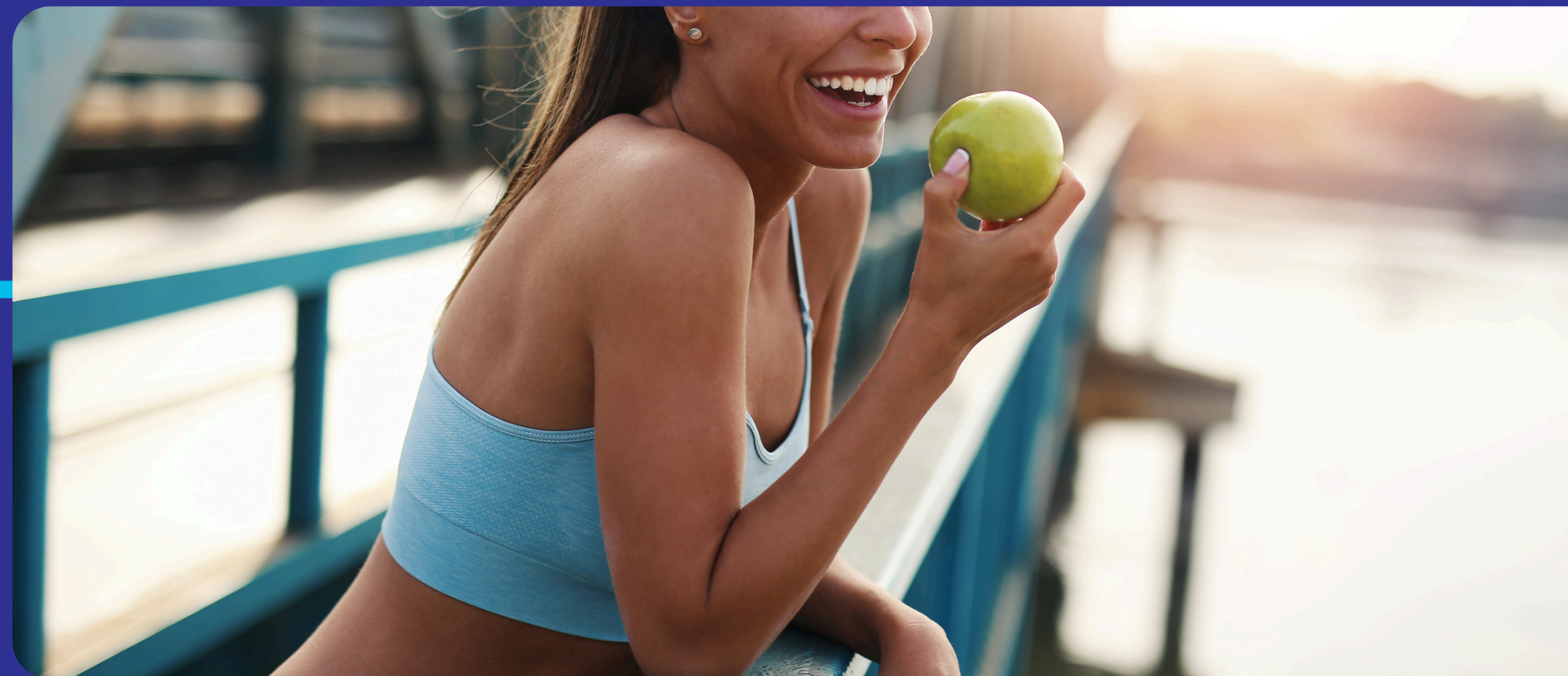
In response, progressive practices are offering comprehensive hygiene programs and early detection screenings, investing in patient education on the connections between oral and systemic health and collaborating with other health providers to deliver coordinated care.

The market is reflecting this shift. The global dental insurance market is projected to grow from \$228.32 billion in 2024 to over \$542.99 billion by 2034⁴, fueled in part by increased insurer interest in preventive care as a cost-saving strategy.

Additionally, multi-disciplinary wellness centers are on the rise. These centers offer **dental, medical, and wellness services** — such as massage, skincare, and nutritional counseling — under one roof. Some dental practices are even partnering with physicians or opening adjacent clinics.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Oral health is no longer a silo. Dental practices that embrace their role in systemic health — and meet patients at the intersection of prevention, education, and collaboration — are poised to lead the next era of healthcare.



Practices find more ways to acquire patients

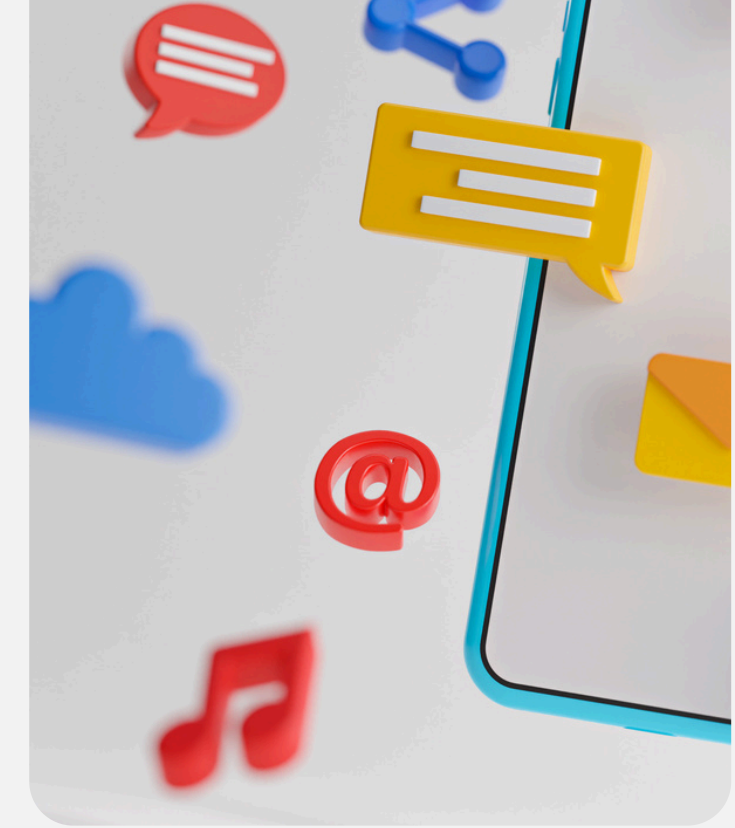
THE TAKEAWAY:

Winning new patients in 2026 requires meeting your patients where they're at. Practices that adopt in-person and digital marketing strategies, and automate where possible, will stay ahead of the curve.

Expanding your service offerings is only one part of patient acquisition. The other is visibility, or making sure the right patients can find you.

In 2026, dental practices are taking a more sophisticated approach to marketing. No longer relying solely on word-of-mouth, they are investing in⁵:

- **Search engine optimization (SEO)** to improve website visibility
- **Paid advertising** across social media, Google, and even traditional media like radio
- **Online reviews** and reputation management to build trust



In an increasingly digital-first world, online presence matters. Yet maintaining that presence is time-consuming, especially for small teams. That's why many practices are turning to automation tools to streamline their efforts — from auto-responding to patient inquiries to prompting satisfied patients for reviews.

But it's not just digital that's making an impact, in-person experiences are on the rise too. Forward-thinking practices are hosting open houses, community meetups, and new procedure launch events to create buzz and drive organic referrals. A popular format is a patient appreciation event where current patients are encouraged to bring a friend to learn about new offerings. Practices may offer preferred time slots or promotional pricing for attendees to book services. These experiences not only build local awareness but also provide a chance to build trust with current and prospective patients.

Patient trust becomes a requirement for case acceptance

THE TAKEAWAY:

In a patient's mind, trust is the foundation of care. Practices that prioritize education, communication, and transparency will see higher case acceptance rates and deeper patient loyalty.

In 2026, patient trust is no longer optional — it's essential for case acceptance, completion, and ultimately, revenue growth. With more access to information, reviews, and alternative providers than ever before, patients are arriving at practices with higher expectations and lower tolerance for impersonal care.

Practices that want to improve case acceptance rates must focus on trust-building at every step of the journey. That starts with patient education. Dentists and staff must take the time to explain diagnoses, outline treatment options, and build treatment plans collaboratively with patients, not just for them.



EXAMPLES OF TRUST-BUILDING IN ACTION INCLUDE:

- Using visual aids or digital scans to walk patients through their oral health conditions
- Sending personalized pre-visit information to set expectations
- Offering financial transparency and phased options for long-term care

Technology also plays a pivotal role in reinforcing trust. Practices can use automated education touchpoints throughout the journey — from post-consult summaries and video explainers to ongoing care tips and reminders. These tools ensure that patients remain informed, engaged, and confident in their decisions.

From acquisition to fulfillment, trust must be earned and reinforced:

- At acquisition: Transparent websites, new patient protocols, and real patient testimonials
- At engagement: Timely communication, personalized messaging, and shared decision-making
- At fulfillment: Follow-through on promises, streamlined experiences, and genuine post-care support

Make 2026 the year of profound progress

As 2026 approaches, one truth is becoming clear: Dental practices must think holistically. Growth is no longer driven by isolated wins or short-term gains. It's about understanding the entire patient journey — from the first point of contact, to the moment they walk into your clinic, to the follow-up that keeps them coming back.

By building intentional strategies around acquisition, engagement, and fulfillment, practices are not just adapting to the future, they're shaping it.

The dental industry is evolving. Patients are changing. Expectations are rising. But with the right mindset, the right tools, and the right focus, 2026 can be a year of profound progress.

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About Intiveo

Intiveo is a patient engagement software, designed to empower dental practices to enhance the patient experience. Our platform improves patient engagement and outcomes through two-way chat, recall reminders, quality improvement surveys, and online review management tools. With comprehensive integrations across 70+ PMS systems, Intiveo streamlines front office workflows, centralizing patient engagement and communication management. Intiveo serves over 3,000 dental practices across North America, helping them improve their patients' experience, streamline operations, and drive revenue growth while improving staff morale. For more information, please visit intiveo.com.

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