

GET THE BOSS TO BUY INTO

DIGITAL RADIOGRAPHY

The dental hygienist's point of view may be what's needed to introduce digital radiography into your practice.

by Tricia Osuna, RDH, BS

Many dental office team members view advising the dentist about new equipment he or she should consider acquiring to be a delicate topic. This is particularly true for digital radiography equipment. But I feel very strongly that this technology should be a part of every dental practice.

I'll take a straightforward, no-nonsense approach. I'll present facts that you can use to convince your employer that he or she needs to purchase digital radiography and have it up and running ASAP.

There are several reasons your office should be digital. The first involves your patients. Simply put, patients will be impressed and more satisfied with the service you provide through digital radiography, and their physical comfort will improve as well.

The second reason involves the dental team. You will be free to devote more time to the services that use the skills in which you were trained, and this will translate into improved morale and job performance. The third reason involves the impact on the practice's profitability. Installing digital radiography will, in less than a week, have a positive impact on your overhead expenses.

Let's begin with the positive impact on patients. Digital radiography is a remarkably effective marketing tool. As you show patients around the office, you'll find that attention focuses on the new X-ray system. You can explain that digital radiography reduces exposure to radiation by as much as 90 percent compared to film X-rays. Patients appreciate that you have their safety and best interests at heart by choosing this technology.

When they're in the chair, patients notice other advantages of digital radiography, starting with patient comfort. DEXIS, the system with which I'm most familiar, designed its sensor with rounded edges. There are no sharp corners such as with film. In addition, the sensor is small and fits in the patient's mouth easily.

When patients view their first digital X-ray in less than two seconds



Digital Radiography

on a computer monitor in the operatory, they appreciate yet another benefit — no waiting for film to be developed. They will also appreciate the fact that they can see details in the large, clear X-ray image on the computer screen. They will feel much more a part of the diagnostic process, and you will develop a level of trust with patients that you

simply didn't have with film X-rays. Digital radiography makes what you're explaining very clear, aiding your efforts to attain a better acceptance rate with treatment plans.

Digital radiography influences the dental team as much as the patients. First, there's diagnostics. You

are licensed and qualified to gather assessment information and make an initial recommendation for possible treatment options. Digital radiography is a much more powerful diagnostic tool. The large, clear images on the computer screen can be enhanced and manipulated to reveal problems that are not visible on film. Digital radiography will increase your effectiveness and accuracy in making diagnoses with your employer and the dental team.

Now ask yourself: How many hours a week are spent developing film X-rays? If you're like most dental team members, the answer will surprise you. It might well be that you spend up to 15 percent, nearly five hours, of a typical four-day, 32-hour work week in the darkroom. Is this what you had in mind when you chose this career? If you're like most of us, the answer is no. You prefer to spend your time performing the procedures you were trained to do, whether providing therapeutic and preventive services to patients, counseling patients on proper dental care and nutrition, or assisting a dentist with hands on dental procedures. The installation of a digital radiography system will enable you to more fully perform your professional duties, something critically important to dedicated dental team members.

The capability of digital X-Rays to be electronically stored and transmitted for filing insurance claims and supporting other dentists' diagnoses also means improved administrative efficiency.

I've supplied you with three arguments to convince even the most skeptical employer that he or she should begin to equip your office with the latest and best digital radiography technology.

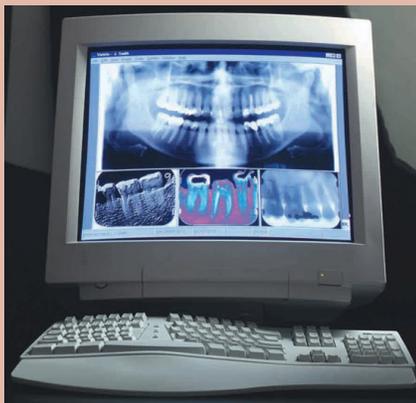
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The show-me-the-money argument

Another point to call to your employer's attention is return on investment (ROI). Often, since we are not the business owners and do not have all the numbers for the business side of the practice, we fail to investigate the financial aspect of the equipment. ROI is what makes the business world go 'round. Approach your employer and ask, "Would you be interested in an investment that would give you a positive return in less than two weeks?" If the answer is no, you have a difficult case on your hands. If your employer is like most dentists, however, he or she will express an interest.

The ROI presentation is very convincing. You explain that your practice is spending a great deal of money on consumable supplies to support its film-based X-ray operation. Add that there is absolutely no ROI on these expenses because they're just that, expenses. As long as you take film X-rays, you have to pay for them. Every day you put off digital radiography, you pay for consumable supplies that you do not need with the high tech equipment.

Take a look at how these expenses add up. If your office takes 100 X-rays per day, the cost for consumable supplies is about \$50 per day. In a typical month of 16 workdays, you spend \$800 on film, chemicals, and mounting. The figure for your practice depends on the number of X-rays taken, but you can do the math.



The expense of film radiography does not stop there. The time team members spend in the darkroom can range from six to eight minutes for a single film X-ray, to 12 to 15 minutes to develop and mount a full-mouth series. The total staff time spent in the darkroom for 30 sessions a week can add up to five hours every day. At \$20 per hour, in an office open four days a week that processes 100 film x-rays per day, \$600 a week is spent on film supplies and processing time.

The typical lease/purchase price of the system that I am familiar with in my practice, the DEXIS digital radiography system, is about \$400 a month. If your office takes 100 X-rays a day, it will realize a positive return on investment in just three days. Since digital radiography equipment is typically leased, your practice can expense the lease cost. If your monthly lease payment is \$400, the office realizes a positive return each month after approximately 275 X-rays.