

Baber Khan and Semina Younis, co- principals of Crook Log Dental Practice in Bexleyheath, explain why a real understanding of dentistry is vital when you need a practice designer

We like to enjoy the dentistry we do and we like to work with people who share our values.

You're probably thinking something along the lines of 'well we all feel like that', but some recent events in made us appreciate that we need to be careful when it comes to assessing people's real abilities and the part they may play in our lives. When we're in 'buying mode', we're a soft target and sales people can take advantage of our vulnerability. Promises are easy to make but fulfilling them can often prove a challenge too far.

We tell you this because we were (unknowingly) vulnerable when we met Gavin Willis at Dental Showcase back in 2013. We had taken over a dental practice in Bexleyheath in 2009 and were in the process of refurbishing, extending and modernising. We chatted to a few people at Showcase, but it was not until we met Gavin that we really began to understand how much we needed expert help and how much better equipped Gavin was to give it to me than any we had spoken to. We very quickly came to terms with the fact that we could waste huge amounts of money and far from improving our practice, we could be simply creating problems for ourselves, our associates, our staff and our patients.

Moving on

Without question, Gavin knows what makes a dental practice tick. No one we had spoken to before or have spoken to since is in the same league. And his understanding goes way beyond dental practice design. He really gets the importance of practice workflow and its impact on profitability. He has an ability to assess the way you like to work and, as a result, designs your surgery so that you're always giving of your best. He has an almost instinctive feel for where one is trying to position one's practice in the overall market place. And his enthusiasm and positivity are infectious and affirming.

We made the decision that we wanted to work with Gavin and his team at Paradigm. Having said that we were put under no pressure. What convinced us was not sales patter but the fact that our aspirations for the practice could genuinely be realised. We asked a lot of questions of Paradigm and difficult issues were addressed full on. The main problem, as with many practices, was that the building was not custom built for dentistry and certainly never anticipated the need to meet such requirements as HTM01-05 and disability access. Nevertheless we knew every problem could be overcome. To move on, we just needed some creative thinking.....

What a practice designer *really* needs to know

It quickly became apparent to us our practice appearance was not really representing the type of dentistry we were doing. In effect, it was giving out mixed messages. On one hand we were aiming to give the ultimate dental experience; on the other hand the décor and layout were tired and dated. We discussed this with the Paradigm team and they worked with us to put a coherent plan in place that would clearly position the practice and give it a

strong and memorable brand identity. Only with this agreed did we move forward with designing.

We had to jump through a lot of hoops with the leaseholder before we could commence the work planned. We won't bore you with the details but suffice it to say that Gavin's experience and knowledge proved invaluable. Such was his commitment that he even travelled up from Somerset to attend meetings with local resident committees. This level of support really brought home to us the importance of working with a team of people who can deal with the unexpected. The truth is, of course, that they CAN deal with it because it's not unexpected to them! We had an example of this with noise levels from air conditioning dispensers. Not necessarily a designer's area of expertise but Paradigm had people on hand to sort the problem.

As the work progressed we increasingly appreciated the wide ranging list of things that need to be taken into account and considered early on in the planning process and the exceptional wealth of talent at Paradigm. The list includes parking, signing, branding, space planning, storage, decontamination, decluttering, workflow, access, dealing with legal and regulatory issues, future proofing, lighting, staff training, co-ordinating suppliers.....the list is almost endless,. To any dentist contemplating doing their own project management we would pose one question. How are you going to fit in your dentistry alongside a full time job?

We have now completed the extension that increases our capacity from three to four surgeries. Along with a dazzling new reception, a breathtaking staircase and conveniently placed waiting areas, we have a practice that is a joy to work in. As we said at the start, we like to enjoy our dentistry and we've never enjoyed it as much as we do now.

Unquestionably the investment has been worthwhile. It has given our practice a distinct competitive edge, our staff an environment they adore and our patients an experience they really value.

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