

## THE NEW ‘P’ IN DENTISTRY

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Guest columnist

In his landmark piece of research, “Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable,” author Seth Godin bluntly states that marketing as we know it is dead and those of us in the dental field need to heed his warning.

### The purple cow story

To illustrate his point, Godin uses the story of the purple cow. He describes how, after traveling through the French countryside, he and his family were fascinated by “the hundreds of storybook cows grazing on picturesque pastures right next to the road.” For miles and miles they peered out their car window amazed at how beautiful the scenery was and how amazing the cows were.

However, after a rather short period of time, he and his family began ignoring the cows because they were becoming common and uninteresting. They discovered that after you have looked at cows for a while, they become boring. They may be tall, they may be attractive, they may have great personalities and they may produce the most delicious milk – none-the-less, they are still boring.

Now a purple cow – that would be interesting. To some, a purple cow might even be remarkable. Godin uses the metaphor of the purple cow to describe the new rule of marketing, which is that the only successful marketing campaign is a truly remarkable product. My goal is to help you apply Godin’s message and methods to your dental practice.

### Marketing the old way

Marketers have told us for years about the five P’s of marketing: Product, Promotion, Positioning, Packaging and Price. The emphasis across all industries, including healthcare, has been largely on promotion.

Successful sales are credited to a successful advertising campaign – a clever slogan, attractive packaging, the right spokesperson. A dental office experiencing tremendous growth probably attributes their success to finally having found the right direct marketing tool or the right TV or newspaper ad. Companies spend big bucks taking old products, tweaking them and (most importantly) telling the whole world to buy them. Advertise enough and you will convince people to buy whatever you are selling – that’s the strategy that enabled companies like Proctor and Gamble (Dawn, Pampers, Pepto-Bismol), Prudential and Jeep to dominate their markets for decades. Stick with what works for the other guy or has worked for you in the past, and you’ll be safe.

### THE DENTAL COACH

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### Purple cow marketing

According to Godin, the old “P’s” don’t work anymore because consumers are no longer paying attention. By and large, they make buying decisions based on history (they’ve always used Tide, or ordered from Pizza Hut or used Dr. Davidson for dental work) or on recommendations from people they trust. They don’t have time to find the brand that’s a little bit cheaper or a little bit nicer. They don’t care about the full-page ad in their newspaper or the billboards they see on the way to work every morning. Gearing your marketing or product toward “most people” doesn’t work, because most people aren’t interested in either your marketing campaign or in trying a new product.

So, if most people aren’t willing to try a new product, who is? After all, even a remarkable product can’t succeed if no one’s willing to try it. According to Godin, the new rule of marketing is to “create remarkable products (purple cows) that the right people seek out.”

Who are those right people? Godin calls them the “sneezers,” those who want to be on the cutting edge and like to spread the word to their friends. They’re a small group, but they’re the only group that matters to the success of a new product or service.

What does the purple cow have to do with dentistry?

Many of Godin’s principles seem to be geared toward companies with a product to sell or a new service to introduce, but they can easily be applied to businesses in the service or healthcare industries. The purple cow you offer can be any (or many) aspects of the patient experience you create – from the patient’s initial scheduling call, to the dentist’s chair, to the post-appointment follow-up they receive.

Neither Godin nor I can offer a magic prescription for transforming good-enough marketing into remarkable marketing, but here are some ideas to get you headed in the right direction:

### Top 10 tips for becoming remarkable

1. Identify your “sneezers,” those patients with the most influence over the decisions of others. They eagerly send you referrals and readily voice their opinions to you and to others. They are well-respected among their peers and have an active social and/or business life. What do they complain or rave about to you and your staff? What characteristics do they share (age, income, interests)? Figure out how to make them happy and ignore everybody else.
2. Focus your advertising. Whatever advertising you do should target your sneezers: no one else. Think about who they are, what they do and where they go and align your advertising accordingly.

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3. Make a list of products and services, in any industry other than dentistry, that you find remarkable. Take one and transform it into something you can use in your practice.
4. Find a niche. Develop a specialty in serving a specific population (the elderly, the Hispanic population, young families, etc.) and create remarkable services for that population.
5. Get your employees involved. Not necessarily all of them, and not necessarily at every level of the decision-making process, but do seek out the opinions and ideas of the employees you know to be forward-thinking and creative.
6. Read dental publications. Be aware of industry trends and understand how they'll affect your practice. Develop a purple cow that will keep you ahead of the curve.
7. Get involved in your community. The more you know about your patients, your competition and your community, the better positioned you are to create something remarkable.
8. Focus on new and different, not on improvement. Don't attempt to make your office a little bit cheerier or your staff a little bit friendlier. No one will notice or if they do, no one will care. Focus on new and different ideas that will set you apart from your competition.
9. Be prepared for failure. There is no way to predict with absolute accuracy, which ideas will prove to be remarkable and which will fail. Make sure that your business and your ego are prepared for some trial and error.
10. Once you find your purple cow – milk it. You won't be able to come up with a new purple cow every week or even every year. Once you create something remarkable, milk it for all it's worth. You won't be able to ride the success of a purple cow forever, but you can try to make the most of it.

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*Dr. Arndt is a Dental Coach. He works with dentists and dental teams to be highly profitable and completely fulfilled in their personal and professional life. What that means for them is less stress, more time, more money and a healthier business. As a businessman and entrepreneur, he blends 20 years of clinical dental practice, five years of executive corporate experience in the financial planning and investment management industry with his graduate business training and hands-on experience. He delivers his highly personalized Coaching to doctors throughout the United States utilizing scheduled telephone calls, e-mail and fax. To learn more about his telephone Coaching techniques, his group TeleClasses or to subscribe to his newsletter, contact Coach Ron at:*

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