

An Innovative Trend in Orthodontic Practice Branding

An Interview with Dr. Paul McAllister

About two months ago an email was delivered into my inbox from a former Bentson Clark & Copple client, with the subject line "I need your help". Any email from a client, current or former, is treated with high importance; however, based on the subject line, I thought it may be spam, requesting me to send money to a Nigerian bank account. To my surprise, it was a sincere email from Dr. Paul McAllister, which read:

I am in the process of having a professional logo designed for an orthodontic practice. I am hosting a contest among professional designers through a website called 99designs.com. Attached to this email are links to a poll of what I consider the top eight designs from the competition at this point. I would be honored if you would vote in my poll and give me any feedback you may have about the designs. I am especially interested in critiques of how they could be improved or what you don't like about the designs. My goals in a logo are clarity (easy to read and immediately understand whether from a T-shirt, a website or a moving car), simplicity (this goes to clarity and branding), and memorable style. I really appreciate your help!

As the Director of Marketing at Bentson Clark & Copple, this quickly caught my eye. What an innovative and modern way to approach a practice logo design! I voted for my favorite design, provided some general feedback of why some of the logos appeared attractive and why others did not quite hit the mark for branding an orthodontic practice.

This process intrigued me, raised my curiosity level, and I had to learn more. The more I spoke with Dr. McAllister, the more I wanted to share this information with our *reSource* readers. Dr. Paul McAllister was gracious enough to allow me to interview him regarding the overall design process, the company used and the general voting/selection process.

Q: To begin with, please tell us a bit about yourself and your orthodontic practice?

A: Like many of my colleagues, my world revolves around my family. In my opinion my most important role in life is as a husband and father. I am grateful for my remarkable wife and my five young and energetic children. I am a solo practitioner in private orthodontic practice, with offices in Omaha and Fremont, Nebraska. I worked as a contractor and associate for four years after graduating from residency, while I constantly searched for the right practice ownership opportunity. I am extremely grateful to the outstanding professionals at Bentson Clark & Copple who helped me identify and analyze potential practice opportunities for several years!

Q: Creating a logo can be quite a daunting task. Why did you choose this design route?

A: I was really unsure where to go or how to start to develop a logo, so I asked everyone I could think of for advice. I was concurrently working on several other aspects of purchasing and transitioning an existing practice, so I asked the different people with whom I was working on financing, web design, marketing, insurance, etc. for referrals to a good logo designer. I gathered as many ideas and testimonials about the options as I could from family, friends, colleagues and people working in the orthodontic industry. 99designs kept coming up in those conversations, and those who mentioned it were enthusiastic about the cost effectiveness and customer satisfaction, so I decided to check out their website.

Q: Can you walk us through the overall process from beginning to end? How much time was involved in the process and was the cost reasonable?

A: The concept of the 99designs is to match a customer with a graphic design need to an international community of freelance graphic designers who compete with each other to meet the customer's need. A portion of the fee charged by the site is offered as a reward for the winning designer to create an incentive for participation.

The process starts with the customer writing a design brief. This brief provides a basic outline of who you are, what your business does, who your target audience is, what type of design service you want (e.g. logo, business card, stationery, merchandise, web design, etc.) and what design principles (e.g. logo style, colors, values, etc.) are important to you. Planning what symbol will represent you and your business for potentially the next 30-40 years can be a daunting task, and is not done quickly. I spent a few hours writing and revising the design brief until I was satisfied that it clearly represented what I wanted. The more decisive and specific you are in your directions to the designers, the more likely the results will meet your expectations.

"I spent a few hours writing and revising the design brief until I was satisfied that it clearly represented what I wanted."

The next step is choosing what design package you want. Bronze, silver, gold and platinum options are offered with a corresponding escalating price tag. Each upgrade purports to offer increased benefits in terms of the number of designs and quality of designers you can expect to participate in your contest. I chose to do a Logo and Business Card competition. In that type of competition, those who select the Bronze package are told to expect about 30 designs by "good" designers for \$449, whereas those who choose the

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Platinum package should expect about "40 premium designs, hand-picked exceptional designers, and a dedicated account manager" for \$1,349.

If you are only interested in having a logo designed, the fees vary from \$299 to \$1,199. In choosing your design package, you are also given options with corresponding additional fees to upgrade your contest by making it private and by shortening the competition from the standard seven day length to as short as 24 hours.

After you have chosen your design package, you are prompted to write a unique title for your competition that will attract designers. Mine was "Help the Heartland

"Once the competition was underway...I was encouraged to give feedback through a 5-star rating system..."

Smile!" You are also given the option of inviting specific designers to participate in your competition based on their portfolios and resumes on the site. I spent several hours reviewing different designers' portfolios and inviting designers that had designs that I liked. I didn't realize there was a limit to the invitations I could extend, so I was not as discriminating in my invitations as I would have been had I known. I believe the limit was 50 invitations.

Once the competition was under way, my customer page started to receive design submissions, and I was encouraged to give feedback through a 5-star rating system and comments. The website explained that the more prompt and specific a customer is in giving feedback to the designers, the more designers will participate and the better the result will be. I gave feedback for each design, and as I refined my own understanding of what I wanted, I posted specific directions for all the designers to read in the forum.

Although I was initially uncertain if I was missing out by not upgrading, I chose the basic Bronze package without any additional upgrades. By the end of my ten day competition, I had reviewed 576 designs from 42 designers with varying degrees of experience and skill, including several who were designated as *platinum designers*. I requested and received a three day extension on my competition because it ran through the holidays, which interfered with some designers' participation. If I could change one thing, I may have made the competition private, because the better designers were savvy and didn't want their designs seen and copied by designers with less experience.

Overall, for the amount of time the designers spent, it was a real bargain. My sister put me in contact with a graphic design professional and he told me that his minimum fee was

\$2,500 to create a logo design and that it could take several weeks to months. He also told me that most professionals in his industry charged higher fees than his for that service. I got the effort and creativity, not to mention hundreds of hours of work from 42 individuals for 20% of that professional designer's fee with a finished product in less than two weeks. Reviewing the designs and responding to each one became kind of addictive, and over the ten day process, I probably spent more than 50 hours on the project myself, although I am not convinced that I would have spent less time scrutinizing the work of a single designer to make sure I got what I wanted.

"...hundreds of hours of work from 42 individuals for 20% of that professional designer's fee..."

Q: How much interaction did you have with the designers?

A: Interaction with the designers varied. I had quite a bit of interaction with some designers, and less with others. All of it was through the website or email, although I had one platinum designer from Western Canada who wanted to communicate with me directly through Skype, but I declined. The most experienced designers required the most interaction to make sure they were understanding my individual design goals.

Q: You received quite a few entries; how did you go about narrowing down all the entries from the beginning?

A: Each time I would log in and review the new entries, I would give a star rating based on my initial reactions to each design. I would then give comments on specific things I liked about each design and specific things I would like to have changed. Every few days I would go through and eliminate the entries that I didn't like.

Q: Tell us about the voting process once the entries were narrowed down? Who voted? How many responses did you receive during the voting process?

A: The website has a feature that allows you to create a poll to compare up to six designs at a time, and receive feedback in the form of star rating and comments from the general public or hand-selected individuals. There are options, for additional fees, to promote your polls through social media to potentially get feedback from a larger audience than your own circle of friends and colleagues. I created three different polls, selecting my favorite designs for which I wanted feedback, and then I promoted my polls through email and Facebook. I sent my initial poll to close friends and family, but I presented the subsequent polls to industry representatives and colleagues as well. I had a fairly good response, with as many as 90 people participating in one of my polls. If I could do it again, I would probably start polling earlier in the competition, perhaps as soon as the first or second day. Polling really helped me see

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things that were outside my paradigm, and helped me identify what my target audience liked in a design.

Q: Can you share the winning design and tell us why this one was specifically chosen? Do you own full rights the winning design?

A: Yes. I really liked the style of the winning design from the first time I saw it. My stated goal was to develop a logo that would be universally acceptable regardless of age or gender. I wanted something that could be branded and used for all marketing pieces. It was important to me that the same logo be usable on professional written communications to colleagues, but be fun and attractive enough to be worn on a t-shirt by a teenager or an adult. It was also important to me that the design be memorable and easily recognizable from my external signage, representing the field of orthodontics by passing drivers at a glance.

Dr. McAllister's Winning Logo Design



After the competition, there is a design handover in which the rights to the design are yielded by the designer to the customer. There are some legal limitations to the ability to fully trademark the design, because the designer retains the ability to use some elements of the design in future designs. Off-hand I don't know the extent of the limits.

Q: How long does it take to finalize the process after a winning design is selected?

A: This depends on the designer and the customer. I was very pleased with my designer. I requested the working files from Adobe Illustrator and the final JPEG files for the logo, a business card design and a stationery design. I also requested individual files of the icon separated from the practice name and different variations of color. In all, my designer provided me with more than 20 files. I wanted to be able to be versatile in how I presented the logo, and I wanted to have the files immediately available to send to a production company or

to have modified if necessary. I think my designer was from Indonesia, so the time difference also played a role in the finalization process. All told, I think it took two or three days after the competition for me to be satisfied and release the prize to the designer.

Q: Is there anything that prevents you from a taking a logo received during the submitted entry 'bidding process' and using on your website or marketing materials without finishing the process?

A: I don't know what legal barriers exist to such an action, but there are certainly moral and ethical barriers. Also, I think that most of the designers maintain the resolution quality of the design files at a lower level for the submissions to keep this from happening.

As I have submitted the logo artwork for use in marketing over the past few months, I have learned how crucial it is to have vector files (i.e. file extensions like .ai or .pdf or .eps rather than .jpg) for any logo artwork. Vector files are scalable to any size while maintaining smooth unpixelated borders.

Q: Would you recommend using this service to other orthodontists seeking a new logo?

A: I would absolutely recommend 99designs to other orthodontists! I was very satisfied with the results of my contest, especially for the price. If someone is willing to put the time and effort into identifying exactly what they want and communicating that vision to the designers they will be very pleased with the results.

This is certainly an idea for anyone to consider if a new logo is needed for his/her practice. Is this going to be a new trend for the orthodontic community? Only time will tell; but as we have seen from years past, in our industry thinking outside of the box can provide an edge. 

Dr. Paul McAllister earned his Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) from Oregon Health and Science University in 2007, and completed his orthodontic specialty training at University of Nebraska Medical Center in 2009. After four years working as an independent contractor and associate, Dr. McAllister recently acquired a private orthodontic practice with locations in Omaha and Fremont, Nebraska. Those with additional questions may contact Dr. McAllister at pdmcallister.dmd@gmail.com or (402) 392-1516.

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