

Straight Facts: New AAO Branding Campaign

An Interview with John Athorn, George Clark and Linda Gladden



It's no secret that the orthodontic market is in the middle of a sea of change. Changes in the economy, changes in the consumer, changes in who delivers orthodontic care (orthodontists, general dentists, pediatric dentists, corporations/clinics), changes in treatment modalities, changes in technology for diagnostic and treatment planning, changes in how to communicate with patients (social networking), etc. Collectively, dealing with the pace and enormity of all this change has many doctors out of breath and looking for some help.

We know that doctors are busy helping clients navigate this new terrain. That is expected and normal; however, the AAO has shown up with a hard hat and headlamp to help show the way forward. How will the AAO's engagement in this new branding initiative and consumer awareness program affect the orthodontic industry? We recently interviewed John Athorn and George Clark of Athorn, Clark & Partners, a Manhattan marketing communications firm, who created the AAO's new marketing campaign. We also spoke with Linda Gladden of American Association of Orthodontists regarding how AAO Members can access the marketing materials from this advertising campaign and use them in one's practice.

Q: Can you provide a general overview of the new AAO Campaign, *My Life, My Smile*.[®]?

George Clark: Beginning in January 2012, the AAO began fielding an advertising campaign utilizing cable TV, print ads, digital display and Google Search advertising in the US, Canada and Puerto Rico. The communications objectives of the program were to begin sending the message to consumers that the orthodontist is a "specialist" in straightening teeth and aligning bites, and to also direct consumers to an all - new AAO consumer website (www.mylifemysmile.org) where they would find easy access to the basic information adult prospects would need to better understand the teeth straightening options now available to them. The site also included an easy-to-use, interactive doctor locator for consumers to find the nearest AAO member orthodontist.

Q: What is new message the AAO is conveying with this campaign?

John Athorn: The soon-to-be-released new campaign builds upon the current campaign. Whereas the current campaign focuses on the *My Life, My Smile* portions of our themeline - *My Life, My Smile, My Orthodontist*.[®] - the new campaign will dial-up and reinforce the *My Orthodontist* portion of the equation.

The branding program continues the focus on informing consumers that orthodontists are specialists in straightening teeth and aligning bites. Whereas the current campaign has showcased testimonials from adult patients as to the very personal reasons why they sought treatment, the new campaign (beginning this summer) will celebrate the personal relationship - the partnership - built between the patient and his or her orthodontist. By featuring the patient and the orthodontist, the new campaign also allows us to recognize and celebrate the contemporary face and diversity found within the profession, whether that be gender diversity, ethnic diversity or age diversity.

Q: What types of marketing outlets are being used to educate and reach the consumer patient base?

Athorn: The advertising campaign will continue to use programming on cable TV, print ads, online display ads and videos. Google and YouTube searches targeted to women, roughly 25 to 54 years old. The outbound communications program will also be supported by the AAO's social media program. We are currently in the final stages of the planning process for the upcoming year.

Q: There have been campaigns for consumer awareness in the past; how is this different from previous efforts?

Clark: This effort is different - it is big, it is bold, it is professional, it is a commitment, and in our view, it is timely. If you examine Align Technology's marketing strategy, they have been phenomenally successful in speaking directly to consumers. Perhaps you will agree that the AAO can do the same, and to a similar positive effect.

Q: At the recent AAO Annual Session in Philadelphia, there were large display walls to bring awareness to the current campaign. Are orthodontists conscious of this campaign and are they receptive to its efforts?

Athorn: Yes! I am happy to say that the AAO members are very aware of the campaign, and many are deploying the material from the national campaign to support their local marketing efforts, from local advertising to how they promote the campaign within their own office. What is also exciting is that the brand identity is also being adopted throughout the AAO; this is not just an ad campaign - this has become an association-wide branding program.

Q: The campaign has been in place for approximately a year and a half. Can you provide any measurement of the marketing initiative?

Clark: The campaign is tracked year-round by the research firm Millward Brown. I am also happy to report here that the key indicators that we keep an eye on are trending positively (i.e. consumer recognition and identification of the orthodontist as "specialist").

Q: Are there any actions that the members of the orthodontic community are encouraged to take to make this nationwide campaign more successful?

Athorn: As I mentioned earlier, the campaign elements (TV spots, print ads, radio commercials, brochures, office posters, etc.) are all available to the members via the AAO member website. The campaign can then be customized to identify the local orthodontist. The ultimate goal of the marketing effort is to have the national marketing campaign link directly to the local orthodontist, so that the customer prospect begins the engagement with an orthodontist - becomes predisposed to seek out an orthodontist for treatment - by first seeing the national advertising program in a favorite magazine or a TV show or from a listing on an Internet search and following that message to his or her local orthodontist.

Q: If you could communicate only one thing about this marketing campaign to the orthodontic community, what would it be?

Clark: In the overall healthcare industry today, whether it be for pharmaceuticals or medical or professional services, consumers have been taught to shop for "brands." As such, the orthodontist today has to market him or herself to ensure that he or she captures consumer mindshare.

Q: John Athorn & George Clark clearly discussed the overall branding of this campaign and it was mentioned that marketing collateral from the nationwide campaign is available. Linda, what specific marketing materials from this advertising campaign are available to AAO Members?

Linda Gladden: All of the materials created for the Consumer Awareness Program (CAP) are made available to members. These include print ads, TV commercials and Web banner ads. Although not used in national advertising by the AAO, there are also *My Life. My Smile. My Orthodontist.*[®] - branded postcards and radio commercials for members who are doing direct mail or buying time on local radio stations. *My Life. My Smile. My Orthodontist.*[®] - branded posters can be downloaded from www.aaoinfo.org, along with *My Life. My Smile. My Orthodontist.*[®] - branded brochures, educational fliers and PowerPoint presentations.

Q: Who should doctors contact to access these marketing materials?

Gladden: The materials are posted for download on www.aaoinfo.org in the Market Your Practice subsection of the Practice Management section. If members have questions, they are welcome to contact Pam Paladin (ppaladin@aaortho.org) or myself (lgladden@aaortho.org) at the AAO.

Q: Are there any fees associated with using these resources in one's practice?

Gladden: The AAO does not charge members for the use of CAP materials - this is a benefit of AAO membership. If a member chooses to customize materials, it is done at his or her expense. If members have the necessary software, they or their staff will be able to do some customizations in-house. If members will be advertising on TV or radio, or in newspapers or magazines, the media outlets may be able to do the customizations. Members are asked to review the documents that govern customization of AAO materials: the AAO Logo Standards Manual and "Guidelines for AAO Members' Use of Marketing and Communications Materials by Constituents, Components, Groups of Members." Both can be accessed through www.aaoinfo.org/practice/marketing/market-your-practice/how-customize/aaoguidelines-and-logo-standards. If members have questions or need assistance, they should contact Pam Paladin (ppaladin@aaortho.org) or myself (lgladden@aaortho.org) at the AAO.

Q: How do you suggest AAO Members use these marketing materials and resources?

Gladden: Use the CAP materials for advertising to potential patients and for internal marketing purposes, which can help patients feel good about making the smart choice for orthodontic care. If a member were to use one of the nine *My Life. My Smile. My Orthodontist.*[®] print ad executions in a local publication, the same execution could be used in a direct mail postcard and on an in-office poster displayed in the waiting room. The same ad could be also posted on the member's Facebook page and the practice website. If the member has a booth at a local health fair or a speaking engagement, the customized ad could do double duty as a flier to give away. The continuity of messaging and images will help consumers connect the local orthodontist with the national AAO "brand." The brand is the orthodontist - the expert in orthodontic treatment.

Because the CAP materials have a similar look and feel, members can continue the campaign online and in the office with other CAP educational materials, supplementing paid outreach. These materials are free to members and include, but are not limited to, educational fliers, consumer/patient education brochures, PowerPoint presentations and videos.

AAO members in a given community or geographic area could band together to co-sponsor advertising and educate local consumers about orthodontists' unique educational qualifications - what makes an orthodontist an orthodontist. Paid advertising could be complemented by media relations outreach (arranging for interviews on TV and radio stations, placement of articles in newspapers and websites). Members can obtain materials and tips on media relations at www.aaoinfo.org/practice/marketing/public-relations or contact AAO staff.

Q: Are there any specific examples you can share to illustrate how doctors are already using the campaign materials?

Gladden: Two AAO members who have made extensive use of CAP materials were featured in the April 2013 issue of *The Bulletin*, AAO's print newsletter for members, www.aaoinfo.org/news/publications/bulletin. The article illustrates how members in established and start-up practices have used the CAP materials to market themselves and their practices. Further, the Utah Association of Orthodontists sponsors a state-wide campaign using the CAP materials, building awareness and educating consumers. Their paid advertising gets a boost from coordinated media relations efforts, resulting in articles and interviews that reach the target audience (women ages 25 to 54).

Q: Can these materials be customized?

Gladden: Yes, members may customize materials to promote themselves and their practices. Customization may include their name, the practice name (all doctors in the practice must be AAO members), office address(es), office phone(es), the website address, a practice logo, a QR code, brands of appliances used and services offered. Materials may not be used to suggest that someone who is not an AAO member is one. For details, members are encouraged to review the documents that govern customization of AAO materials: the AAO Logo Standards Manual and “Guidelines for AAO Members’ Use of Marketing and Communications Materials by Constituents, Components, Groups of Members.” Both can be accessed at www.aaoinfo.org/practice/marketing/market-your-practice/how-customize/aaoguidelines-and-logo-standards.

Q: Is there any additional information you would like to share with the orthodontic community regarding this marketing initiative?

Gladden: All of the paid and unpaid outreach drives consumers (potential patients) to the consumer website, www.mylifemysmile.org, where people can learn more about orthodontic care and find AAO members near them. Because consumers rely on the Internet for research purposes, AAO members are encouraged to be sure they have provided the AAO with up-to-date contact information, particularly their website address. When a member’s website appears with other contact information, it is easy for the interested consumer to jump to the member’s site from the AAO site.

Members may update their contact information through the “My AAO” link near the top of the www.aaoinfo.org home page, or they can contact AAO staff for assistance.

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