

How to Select a Practice Location

By: *Laura Overcash*

Director of Marketing, Bentson Clark & Copple



There are few decisions more important than choosing a practice location, especially for a future orthodontic graduate. This is one of the most crucial choices one must make because it can significantly impact one's career. Choosing the correct location can maximize the return on investment, while selecting a less than desirable practice be a heavy burden. As you embark on the search for a practice location there are three main areas that should be addressed before making a final decision. For the sake of your present and future practice needs, examine these areas carefully: the professional growth opportunity, the personal growth opportunity and the practice facility.

Consider the actual demographic information of the area before considering any practice faculty. Is the population increasing or decreasing and what is the medium age of its residents? Recognize the job market in the area. Is employment around the area increasing or are many area jobs being terminated? Inquire about the cost of living. Knowing the general trends of the local economy can help to have a better overall understanding of your practice's potential for growth. Much of this information can be obtained from the city's chamber of commerce and the United States Census Bureau. Be cautious about a location if there are extreme demographic factors that the practice may have to overcome.



An important question to consider is, how much professional growth will the practice encounter in this location? Many factors can expose the expected amount of business. First, determine the potential growth of the area's patient base. Examine the proximity of competitors as well as other dental providers. Contact local dentists and make them aware you are looking to practice in the area and inquire about their current referral patterns. Investigate the school system and compare the distance of your practice to nearby schools. Will the practice location be convenient for its younger patients?

Will the area you are planning to practice hold personal opportunities for you, your spouse and family? Will the area include the following items:

- Will there be civic, social and cultural opportunities you will enjoy?
- Will the area have indoor and outdoor activities in which you will participate?
- Will you be able to hold a leadership position in the community?
- Are there ways you will be able to give back to the community as both an individual and a business professional?

Once a geographic location is determined, locating a practice faculty is the next step. When starting or purchasing an orthodontic practice, one must choose if he will rent, lease or purchase the practice facility. Below is a list of questions that can assist you in determining what is best for you.

- Can you secure a long term lease from the building's owner with an option to purchase in the future?
- How will your financial future be affected if you rent or purchase?

- Will you need to expand the practice in the foreseeable future?
- Over an extended period of time, how does the rental expense compare to the mortgage payments if the facility is purchased and financed?
- If the building is rented, what costs and expenses are included in the lease payments (i.e. utilities, taxes, repairs and maintenance, exterior maintenance)?
- How will rental rate be determined, particularly in future years (most leases have escalation clauses) and upon extensions and renewals?
- Are there any present or future tax burdens associated with renting or purchasing the facility practice?
- If building your own facility, what are local zoning and building restrictions?

The building itself can speak loudly about the practice, so determine the type of image the building will portray to your patients. Location is always crucial; decide if the practice should be within a shopping center, a professional center or in a free standing location. One will typically pay extra for a high traffic location, but determine if this is a premium you are willing to pay. What type of décor should set the mood of the practice? Should it be upscale, plush, professional, conservative or child friendly? If the practice location is built or purchased, there is more freedom to customize the location and make structural changes to make the location better suit one's needs.

There many other reasons why doctors choose one practice location over another, but learn as much as possible about the city and surrounding communities prior to signing any documents. Carefully weigh the personal and professional advantages and disadvantages of living there. What is learned within this process can ultimately help to prepare a marketing strategy for the practice. Take care to know the potential practice area inside and out for the sake of your practice, family and career. Spending a little time researching today will be well worth the benefits realized in the future.

Bentson Clark & Copple
InSight

Volume 7, Issue 4

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