

Saving Time and Reducing Stress with Edge

We have worked with more than 3,000 orthodontists at Levin Group during the last 26 years, and one thing they all had in common was an intense interest in maximizing their time.

I've said jokingly that many orthodontists could introduce themselves to one another by saying, "Hello, my name is Mark and I practice three days per week." This is a shorthand way of saying that measuring time efficiency is a deeply ingrained part of orthodontic culture.

There is a very good reason why orthodontists pay so much attention to how time is spent in their practice, and that is "volume." Orthodontic practices see more patients per day than any other dentist or specialist. In some cases, a single orthodontist may see 100 or more patients. While the norm is below that number, the fact remains that orthodontists must use their time efficiently or they will quickly fall behind. And, of course, that would be a grave mistake since more than 66% of orthodontic patients are seen in the early morning and late afternoon. Once an orthodontic practice falls behind 10 minutes at 4:15 P.M., it is extremely difficult to catch up.

Our data shows that "unanticipated wait time" is one of the key areas of dissatisfaction among orthodontic patients and their parents. Americans are "time-starved" and have little tolerance for service businesses that make them wait unnecessarily. The frustration with wait times in orthodontic offices has a ripple effect, and the most serious one is that patients and parents will vent their dissatisfaction in subtle or even overt ways with staff and the orthodontist.

The good news is that there is a tool available that can make a major difference in maximizing time efficiencies in the orthodontic practice. I recently "toured" Ortho2's new practice management software, Edge™, and was incredibly impressed with how much it can contribute to time savings for orthodontists and their staff. While time savings is only one advantage among many that Edge

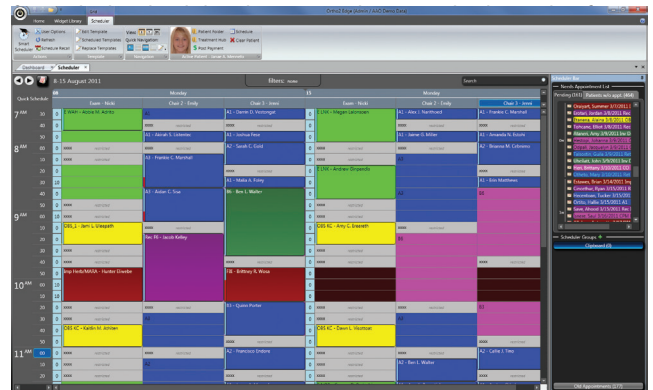
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offers, this is the aspect that I believe will appeal to most orthodontists.

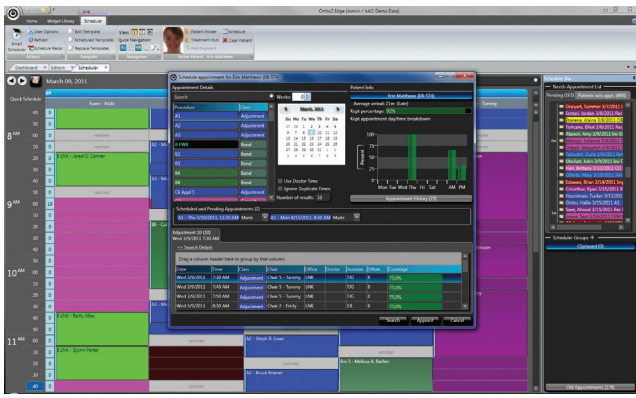
There are 3–4 key interactions between staff and orthodontic patients that can make or break a practice as it tries to run on time. Chief among these is the discussion between a new or existing patient and the front desk staff regarding setting an appointment. Very often, the staff plays a sort of guessing game with patients and parents to see which openings in the office schedule match up with their preferences. This back-and-forth between a front desk scheduler and a patient (or parent) can easily go on for 2–3 minutes, and many times will run longer.

Some of the blame for this awkward routine lies with the practice management software an orthodontic practice uses to schedule patients. Looking at a clumsy interface that only allows users to see one day at a time or consecutive days, the scheduler finds herself hunting about and unable to view all of the needed information at once. It's a bit like trying to read a page while looking through a straw—you just can't see enough to make sense of things.

The scheduling experience is completely different with Edge. In a word, Edge is elegant. When a patient tells a



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me,” the scheduler can drag any three Mondays from a month view of the calendar, drop them into a box, and see all of the available appointments for those three days right beside each other. It’s really fun and easy.

Edge even allows the scheduler to anticipate the patient’s needs. The Smart Scheduler will show the patient’s preferences in past appointments (e.g., morning/afternoon, day of the week), average arrival time, and kept appointment percentage. The scheduler is then able to say, “I see you prefer Tuesday or Thursday morning appointments...” or to not offer busy times to a patient who is chronically late.

What’s more, when the scheduler drags an appointment time across the screen to an opening in the schedule, the schedule becomes gray if the type of appointment does not fit the “ideal template” set for the day. This makes it nearly impossible for a front desk scheduler to mistakenly put a lengthy procedure into a slot that will not accommodate it due to competing time demands in other columns.

The Edge dashboard offers additional time savings. Rather than the minutes you would otherwise spend running a report or looking things up, your most commonly needed information is visible at a glance.

The dashboard with real-time statistics can be customized by individual or by role in the office. The orthodontist may monitor the health of the practice by including widgets to show this week’s new starts or current cash flow data. The financial coordinator may want to include a list of past due patients with appointments this week and her task list.

Our team of consultants shares the view that efficiencies in orthodontic practices do not come from “great leaps forward” but instead from an accumulation of many small gains here and there that add up to large gains over the course of a year. There are few tools that I can confidently say will create large gains in time savings for orthodontic practices as well as Edge. It is a remarkable productivity enhancer and, for the orthodontist, it just may change how you introduce yourself to colleagues. ☺

About the Author



Dr. Roger P. Levin is Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc. Levin Group provides premier, comprehensive consulting services that deliver Total Ortho Success™ to orthodontists in the U.S. and around the world.