Optional services are generally regarded as those that are non-essential to the health and welfare of individuals. The extent to which consumers regard dental services as essential or non-essential will greatly impact the viability, or at least the profitability, of the dental industry. Since consumers have a limited disposable income, they must make decisions regarding where to spend their money. This puts the dentist in a rat race not only against other dentists, but also against other businesses competing for the consumer's dollar.

Successful companies such as McDonalds, IKEA, and Microsoft have one thing in common: They are all pundits when it comes to the marketing of their products and services. What is marketing? Marketing is anything that connects the buyer and seller to a product or service. Marketing has the power to increase consumer interest, demand, product value, and market share. Once consumers perceive particular products or services as more valuable than others, they will place a higher priority on the purchase of those particular goods or services.

In order to survive in the marketplace, dentists have increasingly been making use of various marketing techniques such as advertisements (e.g. yellow pages, newspapers), promotional items (e.g. company-labeled toothbrushes), mail-outs (e.g. postcards, information bulletins), one-on-one marketing tactics, and websites.

Since the Canada Health Act (2) has promoted the existence of a publicly financed health care system, there are many areas in the health care industry that have enjoyed the benefit of full coverage under the Act and have not yet felt the necessity to enter the world of marketing. However, it is probable that with the growing trend towards the de-listing of services covered under Medicare, marketing will play an expanded role in the delivery of many health care services in the future.

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REFERENCES