Building or Refreshing Your Dental Practice
A Guide to Dental Office Design

ADA American Dental Association®
America's leading advocate for oral health
Five Actions That Can Ruin Your Credit Score

While occasionally being a day late on a bill payment may not ruin your credit score, there are five specific credit actions that can definitely lower your credit rating. In some cases, dramatically. Do everything in your power to avoid these credit situations:

- **Maximized credit card.** A credit card that is “maxed out” — charged up to, or close to, the limit of the credit line assigned to the card — indicates to lenders that you are not in control of your debt.

- **30-day late payment.** While a payment that is a day or two late may be overlooked, a 30-day late payment is a red flag to lenders indicating you may be having difficulty repaying your loans.

- **Debt settlement.** Settling debt with a creditor is better than simply not repaying the loan, but still has a negative impact on your credit score.

- **Foreclosure.** Foreclosure on a personal or business mortgage will have a significant negative impact on your credit score.

- **Bankruptcy.** Bankruptcy is the worst case scenario and will significantly downgrade your credit rating for many years.

Clearly, mismanagement of your debt can result in a poor credit score and, consequently, result in serious damage to your overall financial profile. Based on the formula for granting loans, credit mismanagement is likely to lower the amount of credit available to you and require a higher interest rate on loan payments. This can significantly impact the amount you pay over the life of your loan, as shown in figure 2.2.

**FIGURE 2.2: HOW CREDIT AFFECTS INTEREST RATE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREDIT SCORE</th>
<th>SAMPLE RATE</th>
<th>SAMPLE PRACTICE LOAN MONTHLY PAYMENT*</th>
<th>TOTAL AMOUNT OF ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS OVER LIFE OF LOAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>766+</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
<td>$3,293.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>726-765</td>
<td>6.47%</td>
<td>$3,401.86</td>
<td>+$13,053.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>670-725</td>
<td>6.89%</td>
<td>$3,466.27</td>
<td>+$20,782.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>665-669</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>$3,529.82</td>
<td>+$28,408.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 665</td>
<td>Applicant may be turned down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Payments based on a 10 year, $300,000 practice loan

The good news is that you have control over building and maintaining your financial profile.

Ultimately, a poor financial profile can impact your ability to build a solid foundation for dental practice success, including:

- Less money to design your practice according to your vision
- Restrainted ability to develop a competitive operation
- Fewer funds for growth in salaries, marketing and overhead
- Less profit due to higher loan expenses
- Potentially a decreased opportunity for full practice success
The main entry faces the parking lot but provide a clear and welcoming access for patients through a central courtyard.

A central reception desk controls both entries. The street facing entry is just beyond the check-out desk behind the sculpture.
This sample design program is a list of questions to help you determine the type of dental office that will best fit your needs. The answers to these questions will give the architect the information to begin planning the dental office you desire. This design program form has been adapted with permission from an original form developed by the Unthank Design Group.

**Sample Design Program**

What are the major goals you wish to achieve with your new office?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

**YOUR DENTAL TEAM**

1. Projected number of staff in the new office:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>How Many?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygienists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab technicians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What is the maximum number of dentists in practice at any one time?

3. What is the maximum number of hygienists in practice at any one time?

4. How many dentists in the dental practice are right-handed? ______ How many are left-handed? ______

**Your Space**

1. Choose your project type:
   - [ ] New free-standing building for your practice only
   - [ ] New free-standing building with additional lease space
   - [ ] New lease space or condominium in:  [ ] Existing building  [ ] Building to be constructed
   - [ ] Existing building to be remodeled or expanded
   - [ ] Existing suite to be remodeled or expanded

2. What are the number of floors in the building?

3. On which floor will your office be located?

4. What is the estimated square footage of your new space?
The following project case studies each took a different path in drawing design inspiration:

**Case Study #1: Holistic Principles and Natural Materials**

This established general dentist was quickly outgrowing his small, outdated office. He required an office environment that was consistent with the level of service and that highlighted the importance of the holistic principles on which the practice was founded. The architect’s job was to reflect and reinforce these principles through interior design and the use of sustainable (green) materials and practices where possible. Clean, crisp colors were combined with natural materials, such as hickory wood veneer and Mexican beach pebbles, in an attempt to achieve this goal (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4). The dentist wanted the message to be clear, whether you are visiting the website or walking through the front door of the office for the first time: this practice has made every effort to make the patient safe, comfortable and informed.

**FIGURE 6.3**

Clean, crisp colors were combined with natural materials, such as hickory wood veneer and Mexican beach pebbles.
Chapter 7:
Cost-Effective Design

By David Ahearn, D.D.S.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• Become familiar with several standard measurement criteria used to assess design value

• Recognize the importance of patient perception in operatory design and how to enhance it

• Understand how office design can capitalize on changing the work-flow of a practice to add value and reduce cost

There are many aspects to successfully completing a dental office design and construction project. However, for both the young dentist launching his or her first practice and the seasoned veteran seeking increased capacity, none are more important than doing so cost effectively. While the renovation and outfitting of a small office in an existing commercial shell can often be accomplished inexpensively, the typical construction costs on a new free standing dental office can easily approach one million dollars, with larger multi-doctor practices reaching two, three or even four times that amount. For most doctors, this is the single largest investment you will ever make — so you need to be very conscious of spending and how it will benefit you in the long run. “Cost effective” doesn’t necessarily mean inexpensive, but rather, not wasteful. Ultimately, the actual objective is not simply reducing cost in and of itself, but instead increasing value — maximizing the return on your investment both financially and through improved quality of practice life.

For our purposes, “cost effective” will mean one (or both) of the following statements:

1. The item or design decision minimizes cost through effective use of space or materials.

2. The item or design decision maximizes value by enhancing productivity and system flow within the practice.
The incorporation of a natural wood wall with two-by-fours that undulate in and out is reminiscent of the rustic wood that makes up The Green Barn. That will then act as a backdrop for the unique logo of Carnes Crossroads Dental and when backlit, will be a primary focal point upon entry. Green accents in the furniture and lighting add pops of color but do not overwhelm the senses. One request that Dr. Walker had regarding interiors was the incorporation of beautiful finishes, particularly in the waiting area, that would make a lasting impression. A plush carpet with a large scale pattern that mimics an area rug was used in combination with a stunning quartz transaction top and unique 3Form details. Sliding barn-style doors that open into treatment along with abstract but natural artwork will also add to the Carnes Crossroads brand experience. Carnes Crossroads Dental is scheduled for completion in 2017.

FIGURE 8.21

The interior décor of your office should function as a visual extension of your practice brand, further engraining it in the minds of your patients. A successful brand projects emphasis, repetition, variety, transition, pacing, and proportion, all of which can be seen in the finish selections for Carnes Crossroads Dental.
Chapter 12:
Legal Issues Affecting Dental Office Design
By the ADA Division of Legal Affairs

Constructing an all-new dental building, remodeling an existing practice, or even building out a space not previously used as a dental office requires patience, planning, commitment, investment dollars, and a great deal of vision. An important part of that process involves anticipating and addressing legal considerations. A broad range of legal concerns may be involved, such as civil rights laws, zoning and building codes, privacy and data security, contracts with architects and contractors, and much more.

The point of this chapter is not to turn dentists into lawyers, but simply to alert you to examples of legal considerations that may affect a dental office design project. This information can help educate you as you prepare to discuss the proposed project with your attorney and negotiate contracts. The goal is to help you be proactive about such matters, rather than wind up in a costly reactive process after the fact, when you may be facing a crisis that could have been averted in the first place. Being proactive can include properly shifting the burden of legal compliance to others who will bear responsibility if they take you down an improper path. For example, if someone is going to require you to make extensive alternations to a new dental building because it isn’t “legal,” it certainly makes sense for the person who caused the non-compliance (whether the architect or otherwise) to bear the cost, doesn’t it?

It is important for your design planning to take into account that there is a wide variety of federal, state, and local laws that affect office design.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Become familiar with various laws that can affect dental office design
- Understand the importance of working with qualified legal counsel
- Consider the Americans with Disabilities Act from the start of your design plan
- Understand how HIPAA, state data security laws, and the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) can affect dental office design
- Become familiar with legal issues involving matters such as ergonomics and waste management