



It's Easy to be Green: How 3 Chicago Dentists Built a New Practice in Uncertain Economic Times

Almost every dentist has an ideal practice that they daydream about from time-to-time. It's beautiful, it has all of the most up-to-date high-tech equipment, it runs efficiently, and it always exceeds patients' expectations. But that's where the practice stays...in their daydreams. Most dentists can't imagine how they would ever achieve this goal.

Meet the dentists at Ora Dental Studio in Chicago, IL: Goran Kralj, DDS, Mladen Kralj, DMD, and Steven Koos, DDS, MD (www.oradentalstudio.com). These 3 dentists took their dream and made it a reality. They have created a general/esthetic dentistry and oral surgery practice that is beautiful to look at, is environmentally friendly, and that provides state-of-the-art dental care. And they did it in the midst of a national financial crisis.

Research and Money

The dream for these 3 dentists was to create an eco-friendly practice that is green in both construction and delivery of care. The partners at Ora Dental Studios had always been environmentally conscious in their private lives and they had been practicing minimally invasive dentistry, so they decided to take it to the next level and create an entirely green dental practice. The project began with extensive research to ensure they worked with the right sources for building materials and equipment. And, of course, making this dream come true required a financial investment. The total cost for the project, including operatory equipment, came to \$1.6 million.

Construction on the new practice began in May of 2008. Half way through the project, the financial crisis hit, and financing was withdrawn by the practice's lender. As Dr. Koos described it, "the situation was dire. In fact, construction stopped for a month." However, Henry Schein Dental and other lenders came to the rescue. In mid-November of 2008, the practice opened its doors to patients.

What Makes this Practice Green

To ensure they built green and that they practice green, the Ora dentists followed Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and Green Guide for Health Care (GGHC) standards. LEED is a nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-efficiency green buildings. GGHS is a best practices guide for healthy and sustainable building design, construction, and operations.

To ensure they met LEED and GGHC standards in the building of the practice, they chose a sustainable site, used environmental quality construction material and resources (for example, aluminum framing and EcoRock drywall), and incorporated energy efficient appliances and lighting.

To off-set their carbon footprint, the practice makes annual contributions to reforestation campaigns, energy efficiency programs, and renewable natural energy sources.

The group has included many environmentally conscious operations into the daily activities of the practice. For example, the practice is paper-free, using digital charts and radiographs. To deal with hazardous waste, they use the Demolizer, a biohazard disposal system that turns this waste into completely safe trash. In the realm of minimally invasive dentistry, the practice uses the i-CAT 3D cone beam digital CT scanner, the DiagnoDent laser for early caries detection, the VELscope oral cancer screening system, and the Navigator soft-tissue laser for nonsurgical treatment of periodontal disease.

Reaping the Rewards

The investment the group has made into this practice is already beginning to show a return. Since opening their doors, they have experienced a 25% to 30% increase in new patients. And they have begun to reap the cost savings associated with using low-flow faucets, high-efficiency lighting, and reducing hazardous waste removal costs.

More importantly, says Dr. Koos, is making a commitment to doing what's right for patients, team members, and the community. The practice made an enormous investment of time and financial resources to make their dream come true, and they are reaping the rewards in terms of increased business and cost savings and in knowing they are doing the right thing.