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Gazing into my crystal ball 2018



Digital and CAD/CAM technology continued to have an impact on practices, labs and ultimately the patient experience throughout 2017. There are a myriad of ways that digital dental technology and the new genre of “digital dentistry” is having a positive effect on the everyday workflow. The update of this technology is unlikely to abate and indeed, over a generation or two, few will remember any other way to operate.

The continual change can be DIFFICULT; in fact, it can be simply overwhelming at times and if anything, the availability of analogue alternatives and an unwillingness to evolve are the real hold backs for digital dentistry exploding.

Manufacturing or engineering solutions entered our vernacular in 2017. This was plainly seen with advent of 3D Printing (Additive manufacturing) and manufacturing centres as seen at IDS 2017 with my review from earlier this year.

We are continually reminded that there is a constant roll-out of new models, new applications and new claims (fastest, robust, best in class, etc.) in support of the digital evolution. Manufacturers are focused on developing technology with the next hottest and must have product in mind. The dental industry is no different to any other, although a year on, we’re still waiting on some of the hottest solutions presented at IDS 2017 to appear locally or at all.

Evolving distribution methods and manufacturer consolidation continued in 2017. Some examples of this included:

- 1 Straumann and their full acquisitions of Dental Wings (Intra Oral scanners, Laboratory scanners and more), Rapid Shape (3D printing) and ClearCorrect invisible orthodontics;
- 2 Dental Axxess distributing 3Shape, exocad, 3M, Carestream and going global (Europe and North America); and
- 3 Formlabs (3D Printer) has gone from one distributor (Pacific Dental Specialities) to four distributors in Australia;

Whereas Straumann is notable for its acquisition of high profile companies for some time, companies like Dentsply Sirona, Ivoclar Vivadent and others also continue to make acquisitions on a regular basis and not just dental companies. While some major players in digital dentistry are quite new to the industry and managed a head start first or early to market, the traditional players in the dental supply chain are catching up by acquiring technology from outside the industry. Keeping watching this space.

But enough of the 2017 year-view mirror let’s look forward to 2018 (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based). It’s possible to identify macro trends to what is happening in our industry. So when looking at your speciality are you prepared for the advances in digital technology and what is possible taking into account, ease of use and the resultant form, function, repeatability and aesthetics?

So this leads us to the predications for 2018;

- 1 Firstly the sun will continue to rise in the east and set in the west (my mantra) as the world rotates around the sun;
- 2 Digital technology solutions will continue to be part of dentistry (and life). Look out for Ultrasound technology to make a splash;
- 3 There will be further consolidation of distributors and manufacturers, new distribution methods (think Amazon) and our educational institutions will truly begin to incorporate the digital and CAD/CAM workflows into their curriculum to compete for the best and brightest students;
- 4 Dental laboratories will continue to lead the charge and implementation of digital technology (or they should!);
- 5 The role of the prosthetists will begin to evolve as we see the lexicon of the digital denture start to take hold. Look at how your workflow can evolve and maybe, just maybe there can be significant efficiencies as digital workflows improve;
- 6 Consider incorporating Smile Design with patient input into the workflow with fewer steps, fewer materials and increased productivity along with patient acceptance before you do anything;
- 7 Further standardisation of the .STL or an agreed format within systems and the advent of truly open systems. Just remember there is no clear standard of .STL files, but were getting there;
- 8 Bitcoin and crypto-currencies will... as various governments continue to outlaw trading and the mainstream finds new opportunities for huge and volatile gains;
- 9 3D metal printing options begin to open up. Whilst these options have been available for a long time, the workflow has evolved to consider this option;
- 10 The state of the dental economy will ebb and flow based on the discretionary spend of patients. Both large and small practices and laboratories will continue to grow. It's the medium size facility that will need to reflect on the *What, Why, How and When*;
- 11 Be careful in over capitalising and buying everything as you position yourself next year and beyond. Make sure any investment in new technologies that can deliver on your needs now!

Are all things are not possible in the digital world – yet - but by combining the strengths of the digital (that doesn't mean your fingers) and CAD/CAM world - reproducibility, consistency, ongoing monitoring - with strengths of the analogue process (now we use our fingers) aesthetics, knowledge and artistry the dental landscape can only grow.

Whatever happens in 2018 the world evolves and we adapt accordingly. Overall I'm very optimistic about the future of the profession, in spite of what we see happening in our industry. The important thing is have a plan and review those stages - which is how DDC can engage at the level matching your needs when and where you require specific advice or support. Stay safe and enjoy what 2018 has to offer. I would love to hear from you.

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