Do I, Don't I, I Don't know –

Whether to invest in dental technology now or never can be a perplexing question for many?

Do I *or don't I invest in CAD/CAM digital technology that can improve my current workflow now?* I'm asked this question many times over including by previous users of technology. Whether to invest at all, in my mind is a no-brainer - digital is the future of dental laboratories. Simple. Yet it's still a valid question for many. And do you invest now or do you wait for the next big thing - you will still have questions including motivation and emotions; the investment decision along with the adjustments to your workflow.

I had similar thoughts when I jumped into the home computer market back in the mid-90s - Windows 95 with 10Gb for a hard drive, 128kb modem and a 1.4 Mb floppy disk was a big decision. I wondered how this would change what and how I worked. In hindsight, it should have been a complete no-brainer as well, but when access to personal computer technology first became a reality, we all questioned its value and whether or not it was worth the investment. Today, we can't do without a device!

In my last article, I discussed the perceived accuracies offered by the latest technologies. This is a hit topic when I'm consulting to my clients and we're comparing the analogue and digital worlds. Let's look at the question above in relation to a couple of recent initial and ongoing consultancies. All of these labs and practices had dabbled in or outsourced their technology solutions with mixed results. This is where we explored what their expectations as to what could be achieved were by doing nothing or by buying everything in the marketplace and how they would cope? That, after all, is what my consultancy is about.

After a couple of deep and meaningful conversations, here are some of the thoughts from the labs and clinicians. All felt the results were far better if they did all taking and pouring of impressions, waxing up, pressing and casting restorations. They felt that if they had control of the process, the results would be better and they could still take an analogue approach where needed. There was also concern about what a competitor up the road might be doing and would this have a flow-on effect to their business. They were afraid of the investment cost and the benefit (real or perceived) as to how they work. These are regular dentistry questions with all of the time constraints and faults. This is the reality of what we do.

The labs and clinics wanted to be part of the digital evolution and a key reoccurring theme was having control over the outcomes. This was important and formed part of their game plan on why and how to be involved.

We also looked at the advantageous and limitations of the technology groups such as software only, 4- or 5-axes milling, through to 3D printing (big and small). Clinicians were wondering when they could start sending their digital files and how we would look at working remotely away from their normal workplace. I have an outdoor office and for those lucky enough to have been there, would know the benefits of this location.

When I recently walked unannounced through a laboratory's door after an extensive consultation and support process, the beaming smile (let's say from ear to ear) of a very happy owner and user of technology presented. I had heard from the supplier how happy they were but the proof was in the pudding.

I was aware of what had been invested, but they couldn't stop talking or showing me the results from their new system. The lab purchased separate manufacturing components (the same sup- plier) and will consider new equipment that would be tailored to how they work such as 3D printing (small scale) and buying another CAD software program to accept one of the leading I/O scanner's digital files to make it easier for their clients. They still do some old school but with new predictable technology.

Yes there was an evolution in their workflow and they were understanding the positive effect it was having on their production and results. There was a digital smile design thrust into my hand that had been milled in PMMA (4 to 4's) and characterised. The patient liked what they saw in form and function; the clinician was happy knowing the finished result would look the same as the try-in. So with the digital file converted to milled wax and the final restorations pressed with the technician simply adding the final touches. Implant prosthetics, which makes up a good proportion of the workload of the lab, was simplified as zirconia restorations just slipped onto Ti bases. Finally, after trial and error, there is a digital workflow that was predictable and accept- able in their eyes that works for them. The younger staff are also embracing the technology with vigour.

Sometimes you just need a helping hand to understand the basics in order to decide on the digital infrastructure best suited to your situation. That is why Digital Dentistry Consultancy (DDC) is here to help you with your big picture plan. DDC can engage with you at the level matching your needs when and where you require specific advice or support. I look forward to hearing from you or where possible, meeting with you to form that long-term relationship.

Cheers
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