

WEATHERING ANY STORM

The Complete Guide to a Recession-Resistant Dental Practice

Economic Uncertainty Is Inevitable

Economic downturns are inevitable, and no industry is spared—including dentistry. According to Bankrate, nearly 7 in 10 Americans are worried about the possibility of a recession before the end of next year, with 29% saying they're very worried and another 40% somewhat worried.

Dental practices need the right tools and information to weather any economic downturn effectively. This guide will help your practice do just that.

[READ ON TO LEARN MORE. →](#)

Defining a Recession

Investopedia says a **recession** is

"a significant decline in economic activity that lasts longer than a few months."



According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, there have been 12 recessions since 1945. That means an average of one recession every 6.5 years. Simply put, the reality here is that preparing for economic downturns is good business.

The Unique Challenges Dental Practices Face

Dental practices face unique challenges as the economy ebbs and flows. Discretionary spending typically tightens, leaving consumers reevaluating their personal care expenses. But interestingly enough, this doesn't mean dental services are automatically cut from the budget.



The Journal of the American Dental Association found in 2013 that during the 2008-2009 economic recession:

- One-third of adults didn't seek dental care due to cost
- Another one-third postponed dental treatments due to financial constraints

Simply put, patients postponed anything they felt was considered non-essential care.

And while no business is "recession-proof," dental practices fall into a unique "recession-resistant" category when they understand consumer behavior. The "lipstick effect" demonstrates that while recessions stop expansive spending, people oftentimes don't skimp on less expensive aesthetic treatments.

Think teeth whitening. This can appeal to people who are looking for a pick-me-up without breaking the bank.

The Reality: Teeth Don't Stop Having Problems

Lower-cost cosmetic options will be incredibly common as holdovers:



- Teeth whitening
- Sealants
- Tooth bonding to improve smile appearance

In times of economic uncertainty, the standard treatments will remain essential:



- Regular cleanings and exams
- Fillings
- Smaller tooth restorations (crowns and root canals)

These services serve as bridges while patients save money for larger-scale procedures.

2025 State of the Dental Economy

In Q3 2025 findings from the Health Policy Institute and American Dental Association, **economic confidence among U.S. dentists was stable but subdued**. Key findings include:

67.5%

of dentists are confident in their particular dental practice

44.5%

are confident in the dental care sector overall

33.4%

are confident in the U.S. economy

All measures of economic confidence remain down from the beginning of 2025.

Top reasons for skepticism about the dental sector:

1. Low insurance reimbursement rates
2. State of U.S. economy
3. Patient inability to pay for dental care
4. Lack of oral health prioritization among patients
5. Policy and legislative concerns

The good news? Consumer dental spending is up 4% so far this year and 10% since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenge? This modest growth is easily absorbed within dental practices, and busyness levels tell a concerning story:

- **35% of dentists** report they are not busy enough (up from 28% in Q3 2024)
- Appointment wait times for new patients are at their **lowest in over two years** (12.4 days)

So much so, that dental practices continue to experience a "fiscal squeeze":

- **Dental equipment and supplies prices:** Up 44% since 2015
- **Dental office staff wages:** Up 38% since 2015
- **Dental reimbursement rates (all payers):** Up only 29% since 2015

Two-thirds of dentists (65.8%) have increased their fees since the beginning of 2025, with an average increase of **6.7%** across all procedures.



Navigating Uncertainty

What Recession-Resistant Practices Do Differently

In the face of these economic headwinds and the "fiscal squeeze," it's more important than ever to be savvy about how your practice can effectively weather any economic storm. The dental practices that plan strategically and act smart now will not only survive but re-emerge stronger with a more significant market share.

So what separates practices that struggle during downturns from those that thrive? The answer lies in five key strategies that recession-resistant practices implement before, during, and after periods of economic uncertainty.

Key Recession-Resistant Strategies

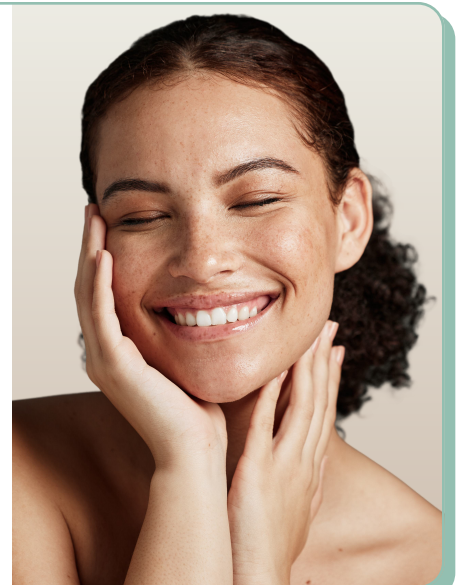
1 Marketing Investment: Don't Pull Back When Others Do

One of the most common and costly mistakes dental practices make during economic downturns is cutting marketing budgets. Research consistently shows this approach is counterproductive.

Practices that maintain or increase marketing during recessions typically gain market share from competitors who reduce their visibility. The work you do now matters more than ever.

Building your patient base during challenging times positions your practice for significant growth when economic conditions improve. It's integral to view marketing as an investment rather than another expense.

- **Emphasize value rather than discounting** – Focus on long-term oral health benefits
- **Focus on retention marketing to existing patients** (which costs 5-25% less than acquisition)
- **Highlight the importance of preventive care** to avoid costly downstream problems
- **Use data-driven marketing** to maximize ROI
- **Leverage social proof** through consistent review generation
- **Consider content marketing** for long-term SEO benefits
- **Educate patients** on the importance of maintaining dental care during economic uncertainty





Remember: While others in the space will pull back, this leaves you with a wide opportunity to effectively communicate your practice's value. Be sure that any marketing you're doing is:

1. With a great partner who has seen and done this before
2. Helps you meet your marketing goals in a way that's most advantageous to your practice

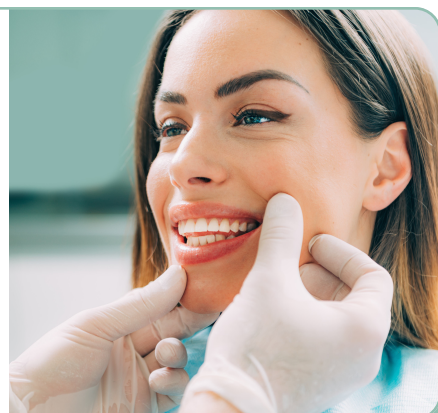
2 Service Offering Diversification

Strategic diversification creates multiple revenue pillars without necessarily requiring investment in new, depreciating equipment.

Create a portfolio that includes both essential and elective services to capture different patient segments and price sensitivities. This is especially important during economic uncertainty when patients prioritize differently.

Add offerings that enhance the value of your core treatments:

- Professional-grade oral care products for home use
- Night guards and protective appliances
- Virtual consultations for existing patients
- At-home whitening maintenance kits



Develop service promotions that align with natural patient behaviors:

- Back-to-school checkups and cleanings
- New Year wellness and smile refresh campaigns
- Summer confidence boosts with whitening specials



3 Building Your Business Model Around Essential + Elective Services

A well-structured dental practice revenue stratification model is central to building recession resistance. The key is balancing essential care with accessible cosmetic options.

Consider anchoring your revenue stratification model in a tiered approach:

Entry-Level Services

These are essential services that patients will prioritize even during economic uncertainty:

- Regular cleanings and exams (recurring every 6 months)
- Basic fillings and cavity treatments
- Emergency dental care
- Preventive care and fluoride treatments

Mid-Tier Services

These build on the foundation of essential care and offer value-conscious cosmetic improvements:

- Teeth whitening (lower-cost aesthetic appeal)
- Dental sealants
- Tooth bonding for minor cosmetic improvements
- Simple extractions
- Basic crowns and root canals

Premium Services

These services require significant investment but yield higher profits when patients are ready:

- Implants and implant-supported restorations
- Comprehensive smile makeovers
- Porcelain veneers
- Orthodontic treatments (Invisalign, braces)
- Complex full-mouth reconstructions

The key is creating a natural progression that moves patients through your service tiers over time. This journey should be intentionally designed, with each service creating trust and demonstrating value for more comprehensive treatments when patients are financially ready.

4 Financial and Operational Considerations

Understanding your practice's financial landscape becomes even more critical during economic challenges. **Knowing the ins and outs of your finances right now is of the utmost importance.** Whether it be your operational day-to-day costs or your marketing costs, understanding every dollar coming in and every dollar going out can help you navigate uncertainty.

Areas to Review

EXPENSE ANALYSIS

Consider reviewing all expenses and categorizing them based on their impact on your practice operations. Some practices find it helpful to think about expenses as:

- **Essential** (cannot operate without)
- **Important** (significantly impacts operations)
- **Optional** (nice to have but not critical)

VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS

Many practices explore conversations with suppliers and vendors before financial pressure demands it. Areas to consider discussing:

- Volume discount opportunities
- Extended payment term options
- Price lock possibilities for longer commitments
- Group purchasing organization memberships

TECHNOLOGY OPTIMIZATION

Some practices look at systems that may help reduce administrative burden:

- Automated appointment reminders
- Client relationship management tool
- Online booking systems
- Electronic intake forms and digital paperwork
- Integrated practice management and billing software

INVENTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Poor inventory management can impact cash flow. Think about:

- **Supply Management.** Balancing inventory levels—keeping essential supplies on hand while minimizing excess sitting inventory.
- **Product Focus.** Evaluating your product mix through the lens of:
 - Margin considerations
 - Shelf life factors
 - Patient demand patterns
 - Multi-use applications across services
- **Retail Strategy.** Thinking about your retail selection in terms of:
 - How it complements your service menu
 - Price point variety
 - Products that create natural repurchase patterns
 - Items that reinforce your expertise and patient relationships

STAFFING LANDSCAPE

Your team represents both a significant expense and your greatest asset.

- **Current Hiring Environment (Q3 2025)**
 - **Nearly 1 in 3 dentists** (32.5%) recruited dental hygienists in the past three months
 - **37.5% recruited dental assistants**
 - **90.8% of recruiting dentists** rate hiring dental hygienists as "very" or "extremely challenging"
 - **69.2%** say the same about dental assistants
 - Among those who filled hygienist positions, **21.5%** report the position had been open for more than six months
- **Areas to Consider**
 - **Productivity Metrics:** Thinking about how labor costs align with revenue generation
 - **Compensation Models:** Exploring structures that align team incentives with practice health
 - **Cross-Training Opportunities:** Developing team members who can perform multiple functions
 - **Retention vs. Recruitment:** Understanding the cost differential between retaining team members and recruiting new ones
 - **Internal vs. External Resources:** Knowing what your staff can handle and where external expertise (like digital marketing) might be valuable

Building Patient Relationships in Uncertain Times

Recessions can be an opportunistic time to drive home patient value. With everyone feeling anxiety—patients, providers, and office staff alike—it's more important than ever to be transparent, honest, and trustworthy.

Once the economy recovers, there will be plenty of people who have downstream problems as a result of putting off dental treatments. **That means it's a good time to start building your patient base now.**

While plenty of dental care will be postponed, many people will continue seeing their dentist. Don't account for the outliers. These are your opportunities today.

Effective Patient Education Strategies

Educate patients on the importance of maintaining dental care:

- The cost of postponing treatment (how small problems become expensive ones)
- Preventive care as an investment, not an expense
- Flexible payment options available
- The connection between oral health and overall health

Parlay essential care into longer value-add propositions:

- Use the trust built through routine care to discuss future cosmetic options
- Show before-and-after examples of transformations you've created
- Explain how phased treatment plans can make comprehensive care more accessible
- Position yourself as a partner in their long-term oral health journey

Communication is key:

- **Be transparent** about costs and realistic about treatment timelines
- **Be empathetic** to financial concerns and offer solutions
- **Be proactive** in reaching out to existing patients who haven't been in recently
- **Be present** on the channels where your patients spend time (social media, email, text)

Your Near-and Medium-Term Action Plan

✦ **PRIORITY ACTIONS:** *Next 30 Days*

- Conduct a complete financial analysis, including cash flow projections
- Review and optimize your service menu pricing and profitability
- Audit your digital marketing strategy and messaging
- Evaluate your patient retention metrics and identify at-risk patients
- Assess your current patient base: Who hasn't been in recently? Who has postponed treatment?

✦ **MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGIES:** *Next 90 Days*

- Find a trusted digital marketing partner to leverage (if you don't already have one)
- Implement a formal patient journey mapping process
- Develop or refine your staff training program with emphasis on patient communication
- Create contingency plans for various economic scenarios
- Establish vendor partnerships that can withstand market fluctuations



Go From Surviving to Thriving

Harness the Power of Marketing During Economic Uncertainty

One of the most critical insights is that **marketing isn't just a business expense—it's your practice's primary growth engine, especially during economic downturns.**

Practices that maintain or increase marketing spending during economic uncertainty consistently outperform those that cut back. When competitors retreat, your visibility expands.

The "lipstick effect" demonstrates consumers' continued investment in affordable aesthetic treatments during economic downturns. With the right marketing strategy, dental practices can capture this persistent demand for services like teeth whitening, bonding, and other more affordable cosmetic dentistry.

Keep in mind that patients research more thoroughly during uncertain times before committing to services. A robust digital presence ensures you're visible exactly when and where potential patients are searching.

That's why your marketing messaging during economic uncertainty should emphasize value, not just price:

- Highlight long-term benefits and cost savings of preventive care
- Showcase the health advantages beyond aesthetics
- Emphasize the well-being and confidence that quality dental care provides
- Position your practice as a trusted partner, not just a service provider

The Opportunity Mindset

Smart dental practices use recessions as a time of opportunity. Economic uncertainty creates challenges but also presents rare opportunities for prepared practices to act strategically.

- ✓ **Market Share Acceleration:** When competitors pull back on marketing and lose visibility, practices that maintain a strong presence can capture dramatically more market share, often at lower acquisition costs
- ✓ **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Leveraging technology and analytics helps identify which strategies deliver the highest ROI during evolving economic conditions
- ✓ **Patient Relationship Deepening:** Challenging economic periods create opportunities to demonstrate value and build deep loyalty with existing patients, who then become advocates driving referral business

The Bottom Line

Economic uncertainty creates challenges and presents rare opportunities for prepared dental practices to act strategically. Practices that view marketing as an essential investment rather than an optional expense consistently emerge from downturns stronger, with larger patient bases and increased market share.

The consistent need for dental care—both essential treatments and aesthetic options—means your practice can not only survive economic fluctuations but thrive with the right approach.

By implementing the strategies outlined in this guide and maintaining a strong presence through trusted partners like Growth99, you're building a practice designed not just for stability but poised for accelerated growth regardless of economic conditions.



Remember: While recessions are temporary, the market position your dental practice establishes during challenging times becomes a permanent competitive advantage.

The question isn't whether you can afford to invest in strategic growth during uncertain times. It's whether you can afford not to.

Ready to Build Your Recession-Resistant Dental Practice?

Growth99 makes investing in powerful digital marketing more straightforward than ever. Discover how your practice can acquire, engage, and retain more patients than ever, even in economic uncertainty.

[CONTACT US TODAY →](#)

This guide, created and developed by Growth99, provides general information and is not financial or legal advice. Please consult qualified professionals regarding specific decisions for your dental practice.