



2026 Dental Industry Outlook

Discover the trends, technology, and insights driving DSO and dental group growth.

Thank you
to these
contributors



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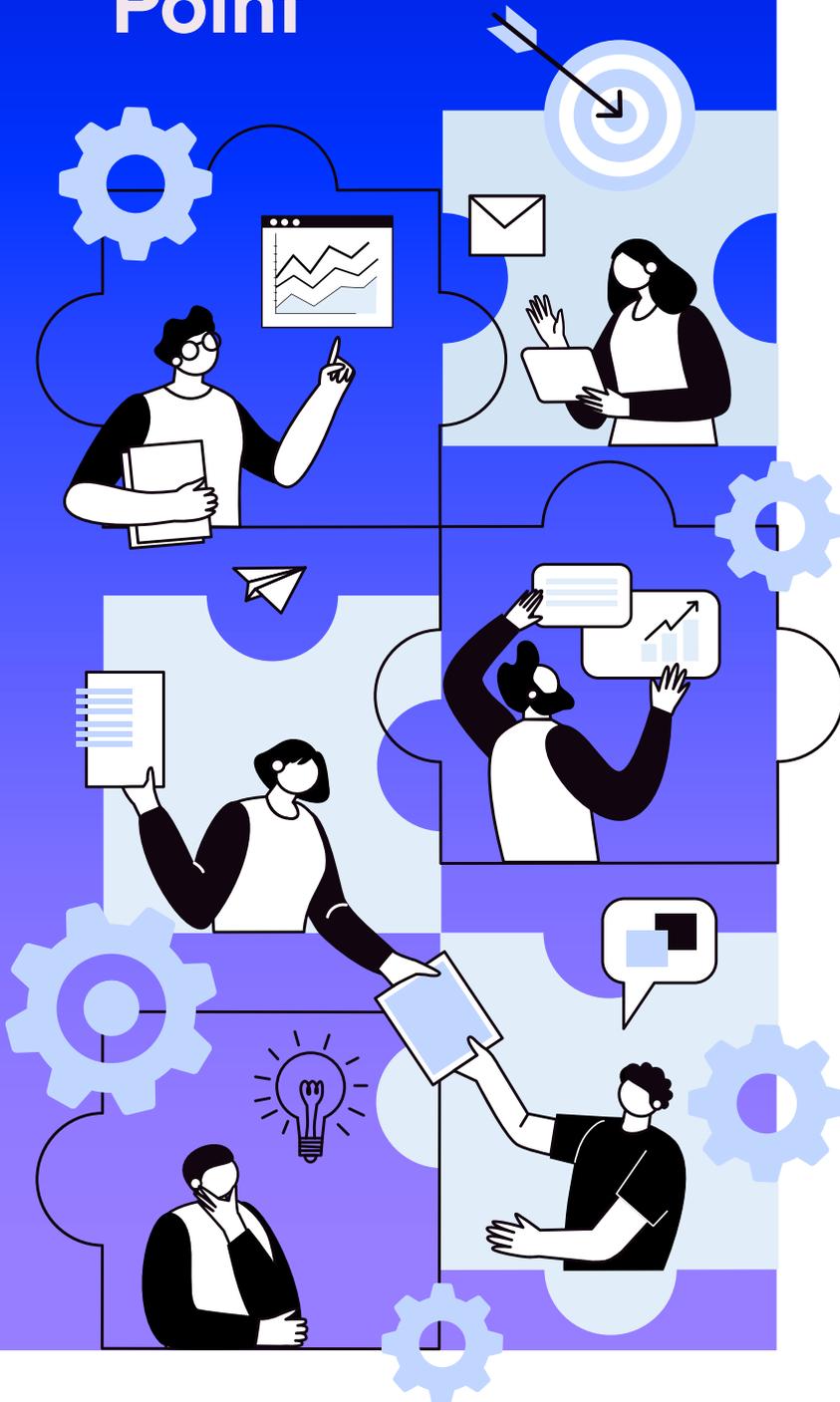
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Eric Giesecke
CEO
Planet DDS

Dentistry Is at an Inflection Point



If you lead a dental organization today, you can feel it: The industry is at an inflection point.

Growth is still very much on the table. What's changed is the margin for imprecision. Capital decisions carry more weight. Operational choices compound faster. Technology decisions, in particular, shape not just efficiency but confidence in data, performance, and the ability to scale without disruption.

That reality is what prompted this year's *Dental Industry Outlook*.

This report isn't about hype or predictions for the sake of predictions. It's grounded in real data from thousands of practices, combined with perspectives from operators, clinicians, investment advisors, and industry leaders who are navigating these challenges every day. Our goal is simple: to help you make better decisions in a more complex environment.

What stands out most this year is a clear shift in priorities across the industry.

Artificial intelligence, automation, and modern cloud platforms are no longer futuristic concepts. When implemented thoughtfully, they give teams room to do their best work.

Growth is still the goal, but how organizations get there is changing. Same-store growth, operational discipline, and technology standardization are no longer “nice to have.” They’re signals of maturity. They’re what investors are looking for. And more importantly, they’re what allows teams to spend less time fighting systems and more time focused on patients and outcomes.

We’re also seeing technology move from promise to practice.

Artificial intelligence, automation, and modern cloud platforms are no longer futuristic concepts. They’re being used right now to reduce administrative burden, improve case acceptance, tighten revenue cycle performance, and give leaders clearer visibility into their businesses. When implemented thoughtfully, these tools don’t replace people. They give teams room to do their best work.

Another theme you’ll see throughout this report is connection:

- Connection between data and decisions
- Connection between clinical care and the business that supports it
- Connection between leadership teams and the frontline staff delivering care every day

The most resilient DSOs we work with aren’t chasing every new idea. They’re focused. They’re intentional. And they’re building connected systems that scale with them instead of holding them back.

Whether you’re running a single location, leading a growing DSO, or preparing for your next phase of growth, this report can help give you clarity, perspective, and confidence. It’s not just about where the industry is going but about the role you can play in shaping what comes next.

Thank you for taking the time to read it and for the work you do to move dentistry forward.

Same-store growth, operational discipline, and technology standardization are no longer “nice to have.” They’re signals of maturity.



For more information on how dental operating systems are revolutionizing the industry, download the e-book: [DentalOS™: Powering the Next Generation of Dental Businesses](#)



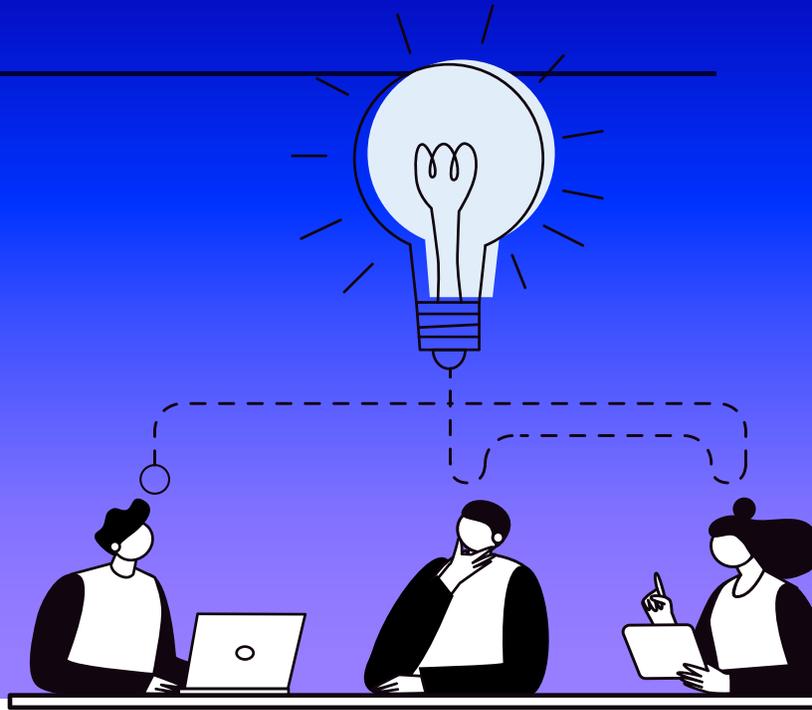
Planet DDS is a leading provider of cloud-based solutions, empowering growth-minded dental businesses with a comprehensive platform that includes Denticon, Cloud 9 Ortho, and Apteryx Imaging, delivering seamless integrations, improved workflows, and scalable technology.



Mike Huffaker
Chief Revenue Officer
Planet DDS

Growth Is Getting Harder. That's a Good Thing.

In 2026, sustainable revenue will favor focus, operational clarity, and connected systems over scale alone.



For years, dental group growth looked deceptively simple.

Acquire practices, stack EBITDA, repeat. The model rewarded speed over substance, and for a while, the math worked. What it did not build was durable businesses.

When capital tightened and margins compressed, organizations that had been running fast discovered they had been running without a foundation beneath them. That reckoning is exactly what the dental industry needed. Growth is harder now because it must be earned. And that is genuinely good news for the organizations willing to do the work for their patients.

Accumulation Is Not Performance

What passed for growth in the expansion years was often just accumulation. Buy enough practices fast enough, and the aggregate numbers look impressive. Until those practices need to actually perform. The DSOs that will win from here are not the ones with the most locations. They are the ones who can demonstrate consistent, repeatable results across their locations. Same-store growth is now the scoreboard, and you cannot

manufacture it. You have to build the operational infrastructure that produces it.

Clinical Autonomy and Accountability Are Not Opposites

This is the conversation the industry has been avoiding. Clinical autonomy belongs in the operatory, in the treatment relationship between provider and patient. But it has been stretched well beyond those boundaries, becoming a shield against operational accountability, and that has cost DSOs enormously.

When a group introduces aligners, or a proven treatment like Curodont, or radiographic AI, the resistance that follows is often labeled as clinical autonomy. But declining to adopt something that benefits patients is not autonomy. It is a business decision to wear clinical clothing.

Growth is harder now because it must be earned. And that is genuinely good news for the organizations willing to do the work for their patients.

The same pattern plays out in technology. No DSO should ever promise an acquired practice that nothing will change. When the time comes to standardize on a single platform—and for any serious group, that time will come—organizations that made those promises find themselves negotiating against their own words. Clinical leadership must be part of the solution, brought along on the why and the how. Holding them accountable is not a violation of their autonomy. It is respect for their role.

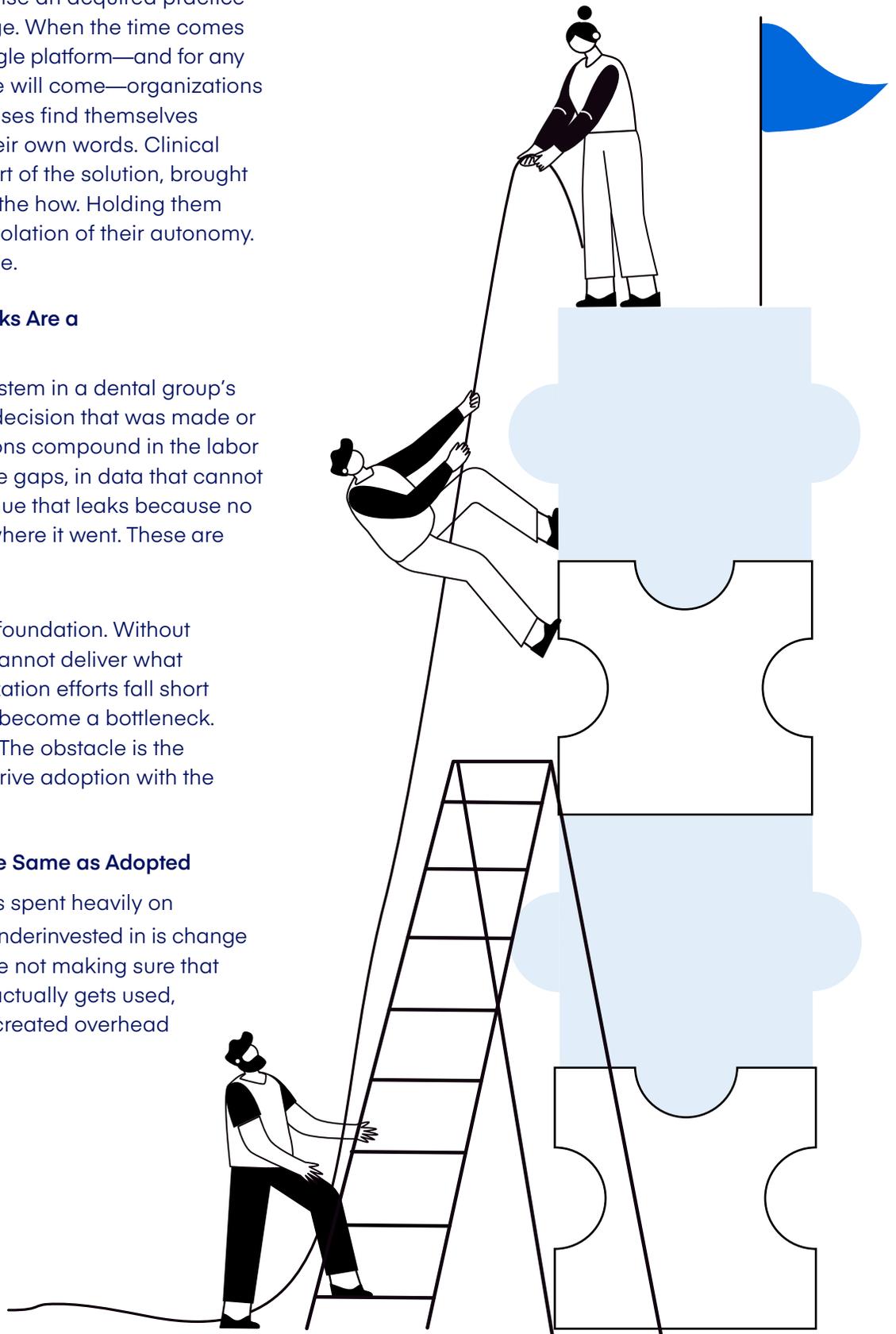
Fragmented Tech Stacks Are a Leadership Problem

Every disconnected system in a dental group's portfolio represents a decision that was made or avoided. Those decisions compound in the labor required to manage the gaps, in data that cannot be trusted and in revenue that leaks because no one has visibility into where it went. These are leadership issues.

Standardization is the foundation. Without it, AI and automation cannot deliver what they promise. Centralization efforts fall short and lack of processes become a bottleneck. The technology exists. The obstacle is the organizational will to drive adoption with the discipline it requires.

Implemented Is Not the Same as Adopted

The dental industry has spent heavily on software. What it has underinvested in is change management. If you are not making sure that what gets purchased actually gets used, and used well, you've created overhead with a login screen.



The organizations seeing real returns from technology are treating implementations as business transformations that include executive sponsorship, defined ownership, and accountability for adoption. The ones wondering why nothing changed treated it as an IT project.

Culture Is What You Tolerate

Culture is not a values statement on a wall. It is the lived experience of every person in every practice, every day. The organizations building something real are doing it through consistency. They have high expectations applied evenly, transparent communication, and the willingness to address behavior that falls short of stated standards.

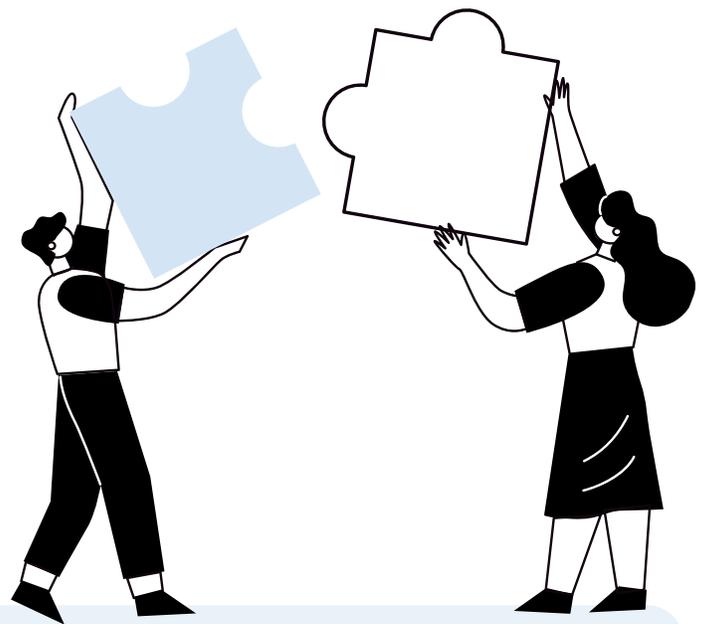
Your culture is only as strong as the worst behavior you allow. That is true in one location, and it scales, for better or worse, across hundreds.

The dental organizations that struggled these past few years were not failed by the market. Most were failed by the gap between how ambitious their growth was and how underdeveloped their operating infrastructure was. That gap is closing now. Not because things got easier, but because the environment stopped rewarding those who ignored it.

The question is not whether your organization can survive in a more demanding environment. It is whether you are building the kind of business that gets stronger because of it. That is the type of business that your teams and your patients deserve.

For more insights, follow [The Dental Economist Show](#)—where profit meets purpose.

The question is not whether your organization can survive in a more demanding environment. It is whether you are building the kind of business that gets stronger because of it.



To learn more about how AI is the new operating model for DSOs and dental groups, download the guide: [The New AI Operating Model for DSOs and Dental Groups](#)



For more insights from Planet DDS CRO Mike Huffaker, follow [The Dental Economist Show](#) weekly podcast. Expert insights. Real strategy.



Nathan James
Chief Product Officer
Planet DDS



Product as an EBITDA Multiplier

EBITDA

EBITDA stands for Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization. It serves as the fundamental metric in assessing a dental practice's financial health and valuation. It provides a clear picture of operational profitability by excluding non-operational expenses, which allows for a more accurate comparison across practices. In the context of dental mergers and acquisitions (M&A), pricing is determined by the valuation multiple applied to the practice's EBITDA.

For years, technology in dentistry has been described with the same set of buzzwords. Platform. Automation. AI. Integration. The language is familiar. What's less often articulated is how product decisions translate to EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization).

At its core, a DSO exists for two reasons. One is mission-driven: to support clinicians by centralizing administrative work so they can focus on patient care. The other is economic: to deliver a needed service at an acceptable price while maximizing enterprise value for owners and shareholders.

Both are true. But only one funds the other.

EBITDA is not an abstract metric; it's what creates room to invest in people, patient experience, and innovation. And as economic pressure continues to build across dentistry, EBITDA isn't something leaders can treat as an output anymore. It has to be engineered.

That's where product development comes in.

The pressure is real, and it's structural

Now that I'm immersed in the dental industry, one thing has become clear: Margin pressure isn't temporary.

Consumer spending remains constrained. Wage inflation is squeezing margins. Supply costs aren't coming down. Turnover, especially among hygienists and front office staff, is significantly higher than what most service industries would consider sustainable. At the same time, dental insurance reimbursement and pricing flexibility remain limited.

You can't outgrow that environment with volume alone. And you can't cut expenses too deeply without damaging the organization.

The only durable lever left is leverage itself. Operational leverage. Labor leverage. Data leverage.

Product, when designed well, creates that leverage.

Five Capabilities That Actually Move EBITDA

There are five technology concepts that get talked about constantly in this industry. What matters is not whether you have them but whether they're implemented in a way that produces measurable financial impact.

1 Tech stack standardization

This is the foundation. Private equity has followed the same playbook for decades: Centralize operations, standardize systems, eliminate duplication, renegotiate at scale, and optimize staffing. Technology is the lever that allows those steps to happen efficiently and repeatedly.

Without a standardized core system, every other optimization hits friction. And without that foundation, advanced capabilities like AI never deliver their promised returns. Process debt, not innovation, becomes the bottleneck.

2 RCM optimization

Revenue cycle management (RCM) is one of the most overlooked EBITDA levers in dentistry. When you look closely at collections data, the leakage is real. Write-offs, under-collected balances, and inefficient follow-up can easily amount to three percent of production.

That's not theoretical upside. That's dollars already earned but never realized.

Automation, integrated eligibility, intelligent task management, and centralized visibility can recover meaningful top-line revenue while also reducing the labor required to manage it.

3 Workflow automation

Staffing shortages aren't just a hiring problem; they're a design problem.

When workflows require people to click, reconcile, and manually move data between

systems, headcount becomes the constraint. Automation changes that equation, not by replacing teams wholesale, but by allowing the same team to handle more volume with less friction and less burnout.

That labor efficiency drops directly to the bottom line.

4 API-first integration

AI and automation only work when systems can talk to each other at the data level. APIs aren't a technical preference; they're an economic one.

API-driven systems scale at a fraction of the cost of screen scraping or brittle automation. They allow intelligence to read, write, and act across systems without multiplying infrastructure or labor expense. At scale, that difference is measured in real dollars.

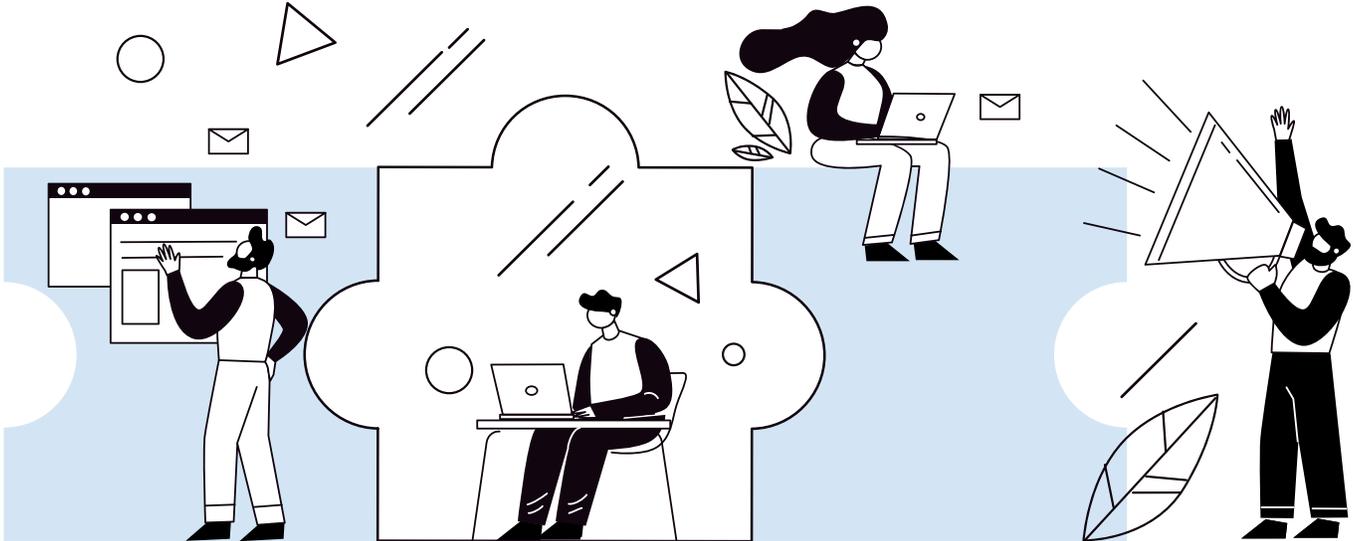
5 AI modernization

AI is not the future of dentistry; it's the present. But its real impact isn't in surface-level tools or novelty features.

The real EBITDA unlock comes from agent-based systems that can prioritize work, make decisions, and execute across scheduling, payments, reconciliation, and patient communication. That's labor arbitrage at a level most industries have never had access to before.

The organizations that modernize around AI will see gains on both sides of the income statement: increased revenue capture and meaningful cost reduction.

As economic pressure continues to build across dentistry, EBITDA isn't something leaders can treat as an output anymore. It has to be engineered.



How We're Building for 2026

At Planet DDS, this perspective shapes our entire product strategy.

Our focus isn't on shipping isolated features; it's on building a connected platform that turns these capabilities into compounding advantage. Denticon, Cloud 9, and Apteryx form the core, but the real power comes from the ecosystem around them: a growing network of integrated partners, a robust API layer, and an AI strategy designed to operate across the system, not alongside it.

We're investing heavily in areas that directly influence EBITDA drivers: scheduling efficiency, treatment plan acceptance, specialty expansion for same-store growth, RCM automation, and system-level intelligence that surfaces opportunities leaders can actually act on.

This isn't about chasing trends; it's about designing product with financial outcomes in mind.



For more information on how to increase revenue, download: [RCM Automation Guide: Solutions for DSOs and Dental Groups](#)

What This Means for DSOs in 2026

EBITDA isn't created in spreadsheets. It's created in systems and workflows.

In 2026, the DSOs that outperform won't be the ones with the most tools or the loudest AI story. They'll be the ones whose product foundation allows people, data, and intelligence to work together without friction.

That's when technology stops being a cost center and starts becoming a multiplier.

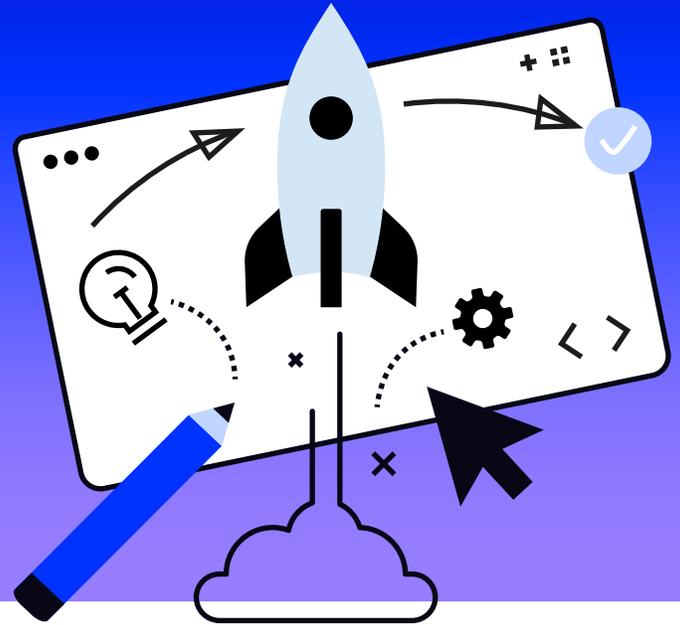


[Planet DDS](#) is a leading provider of cloud-based solutions, empowering growth-minded dental businesses with a comprehensive platform that includes Denticon, Cloud 9 Ortho, and Apteryx Imaging, delivering seamless integrations, improved workflows, and scalable technology.



Brian Colao
 Director
 Dykema DSO Industry Group

Discipline, Differentiation, and Durable Growth: The 2026 Playbook for DSOs



As competition intensifies and capital markets begin to ease, 2026 will reward dental support organizations that execute with precision. The keys to success will be driving same-store growth, embracing technology, strengthening culture, and pursuing disciplined expansion strategies.



DSOs must master same-store growth by acquiring new patients, performing more services for existing patients, and conducting a top-down analysis of the organization to eliminate unnecessary expenses.



Focusing on culture is critical as there is direct correlation between positive culture and staff retention, positive patient experience, and increased value of the organization.



The implementation of new technology is essential for lowering overhead, compensating for staff shortages, and improving the overall quality of patient care.



The anticipated additional interest rate reductions in the second half of 2026 should create a more favorable climate for growth that will enable DSOs to implement highly selective and disciplined merger and acquisition (M&A), and de novo strategies.

This year, the most valuable organizations will differentiate themselves through innovative technology, mastery of same-store growth, the creation of a positive culture, and the execution of targeted M&A and de novo strategies.



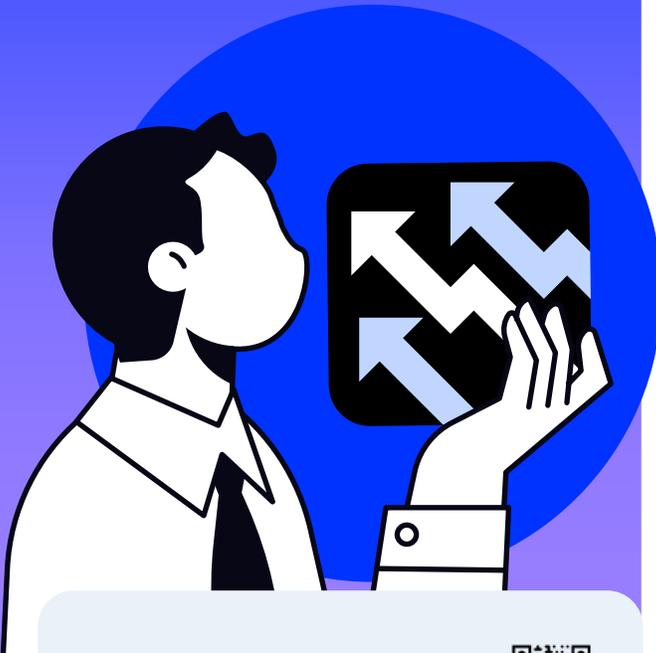
[Dykema](#) is the leading law firm for dental services and the industry leader in legal representation for dental organizations, investors, and founder-operators on all matters affecting the DSO industry.





Andrew Smith
 CEO
 Association of
 Dental Support
 Organizations (ADSO)

Key Trends Shaping Dentistry and DSOs



ADSO® Association of
 Dental Support
 Organizations



The Association of Dental Support Organizations (ADSO) is a non-profit organization committed to providing support to its members, allowing affiliated dentists to focus on patients, expand access to quality dental care, and improve the oral health of their communities.

The dental industry enters 2026 at a moment of transition as policy shifts, affordability concerns, and new technologies influence both patient experience and organizational strategy. According to ADSO analysis:





Rich Blann
Managing Director
DC Advisory

2026 Outlook for DSO Sales and Recapitalizations



Over the last three years, sales and recapitalizations for DSOs declined dramatically from more than 30 deals in 2021–2022 to less than 12 deals from 2023–2025.

Beginning in 2023, DSOs shifted away from a high volume of practice acquisitions to focus on integration, standardizing processes, and driving organic growth.

PE-backed DSOs increased their location counts by 37% in just two years from 2021 to 2023.

Consolidation slowed dramatically over the next three years with only 10% growth from 2023 to 2025.

In 2025, most DSOs focused on executing strategies to drive practice integration and organic growth initiatives while very selectively pursuing highly strategic merger and acquisition (M&A) deals.

This year, we expect these trends to largely continue as many platform DSOs prepare themselves for future sales and recapitalizations.

Three Trends to Watch

- 1** Strategic-focused M&A processes remain highly attractive as a strategy to maximize value for stakeholders through business combinations that drive material synergies.
- 2** Investors are focused on DSOs with integrated platforms and a track record of strong organic growth.
- 3** We anticipate a gradual return to more sale/recapitalization in the near-to-medium term.

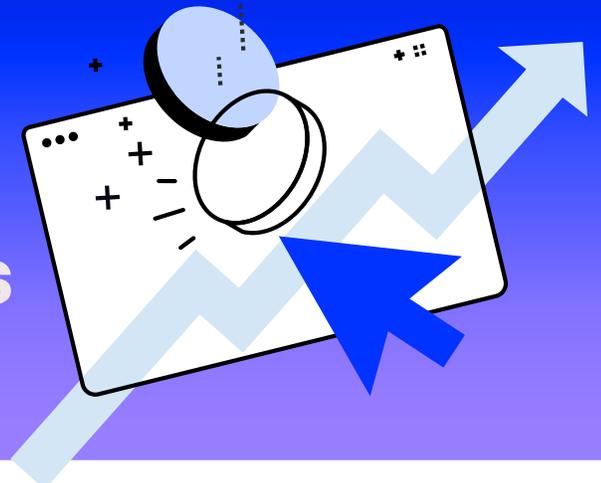


[DC Advisory](#) is the global investment banking arm of Daiwa Securities with over 750 dedicated investment bankers across 24 offices around the world.





Ken Kaufman
Co-Founder
AccruDent



Financial KPIs Every Dental Business Owner Must Know

As your business grows, so must your financial literacy. The following KPIs are critical to understanding the financial health of your business.

KPI	How to Calculate	Why It Matters	Target	Tracking Frequency
Adjusted Production	Total Production - Adjustments	Represents clinical effort and output; total amount of collectable work	\$1M baseline / practice	At least monthly in P&L (on accrual) or PMS
EBITDA Margin	EBITDA / Adjusted Production	What % of revenue is true profit; #1 metric for buyers and partners	18–25% is healthy; 25% or higher is elite	Monthly in P&L
Provider Comp Ratio	Provider Pay / Adjusted Production	% of revenue taken by provider pay; single largest expense; reduces profitability fast	Approximately 32% overall, ranges vary by provider	Monthly in P&L
Free Cash Flow	Operating Cash Flow - CAPEX	Are you generating or consuming cash? No cash = no business	More positive = stronger financial health	Monthly in the statement of cash flow
AR by Aging Category	Outstanding claims and patient balances, separated by date of service (DOS)	Ensures you collect the revenue you produce; shows health of RCM team	<\$350K / office, <\$50k 90+ days, trending down	Monthly in balance sheet (on accrual) or PMS



AccruDent is the premier accounting and fractional CFO firm in the DSO space, dedicated to providing financial clarity that you can trust.





Tom Barberio
Chief Information Officer
Thinc Forward

The True Cost of Modern Dental IT



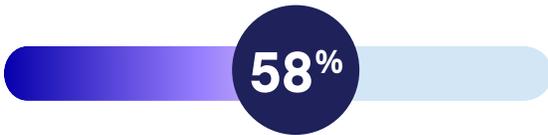
For more than 30 years, [Thinc Forward](#) has provided expert dental IT support and technology services to thousands of satisfied DSOs and practices. Its specialized team delivers top-notch support, exceptional IT knowledge, and extensive experience in HIPAA and HITECH compliance, enhancing all aspects of managing a dental group.

Here are five fast, high-impact insights every DSO leader should know about the true cost—and opportunity—of modern dental IT. These statistics are from Thinc Forward’s analysis of more than 10,000 technology deployments:

- 1 DSOs lose 8% to 12% of annual revenue** due to IT inconsistencies, aging infrastructure, and disconnected PMS/X-ray systems—most of it completely recoverable with proper IT and analytics alignment.
- 2 Standardizing the network stack across all locations** (firewall, switch, Wi-Fi, ISP) reduces support tickets by 40% to 55% and cuts average downtime per office by 60 minutes per week.
- 3 Modern sensor + imaging deployments** such as Apteryx XVWeb improve diagnostic efficiency by 20% to 30%, and DSOs switching to cloud imaging see 23% fewer retakes.
- 4 A single unified Azure domain for a DSO** can reduce onboarding time from 3 to 5 hours to under 30 minutes while eliminating 90% of old VPN/RDP vulnerabilities that cause HIPAA compliance issues.
- 5 DSOs with centralized IT governance and PMS systems** (patching, SOC monitoring, cloud backups, EDR) experience 83% fewer critical incidents and recover from cyber events 7 times faster than decentralized practices.

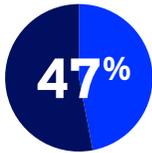
Diving into Data: Dentistry

Ever wonder how your practice compares against others?
Here are the average benchmarks for common key performance indicators.



58% average **case acceptance rate** marked as accepted, scheduled, or completed 1/2025–12/2025

2024 industry average: 57%



47% average **case completion rate** of treatment plans created between 1/2025–6/2025 that were completed by 12/2025

2024 industry average: 42%



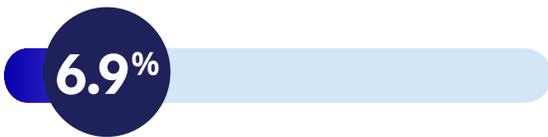
12.9% of patients **canceled an appointment** in advance

2024 industry average: 15.5%



46 average **new patients** per month per practice, including specialty

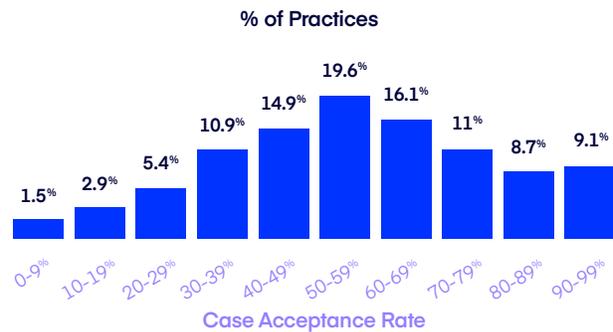
2024 industry average: 43



6.9% of patients **failed to show** for an appointment without prior notice

2024 industry average: 7.4%

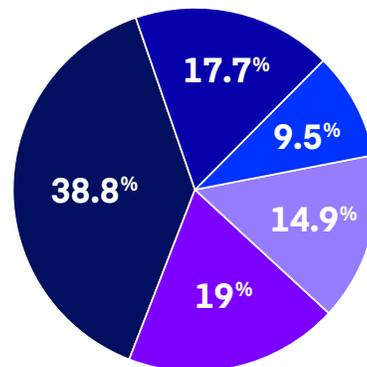
Case Acceptance Varies Widely by Practice



63% average hygiene reappointment rate within 12 months

2024 industry average: 60%

Number of New Patients Varies Widely



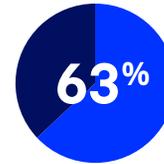
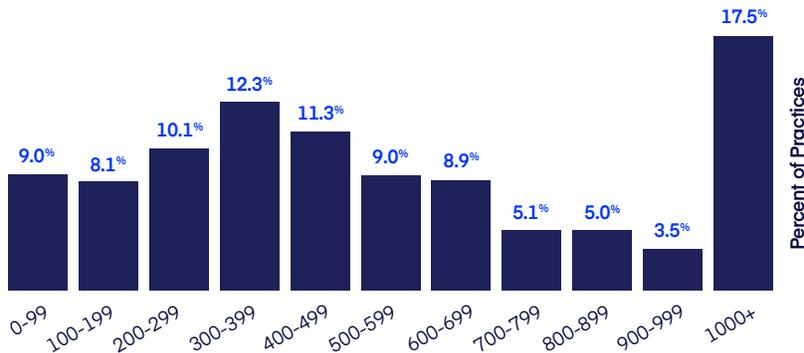
Number of visits per month per practice

■ 0-19 ■ 20-39 ■ 40-59 ■ 60-79 ■ 80+

Source: Planet DDS analysis of more than 5,200 practices on Denticon includes general dentistry, specialty dentistry, emergency dental clinics, and mobile dentistry clinics. Individual practice results are influenced by their patient, provider, and payer mix. For some analyses, the sample size may differ from the total number of practices listed above, as in the YoY growth analysis.

An analysis of more than 2,800 practices on Cloud 9 orthodontic practice management software revealed that the number of new orthodontic patients varied widely by practice in 2025.

Number of New Ortho Patient Consults per Practice Location



A Planet DDS analysis of **3,300 practices** found that **63%** of practices achieved same-store growth in production in 2025 compared with 2024.



633.5 new ortho patient exams per practice on average

Average Daily Production



The gross daily production figures are calculated by the practice's expected collections, not UCR fees. They do not reflect adjustments or write-offs.



68.3% average case acceptance rate

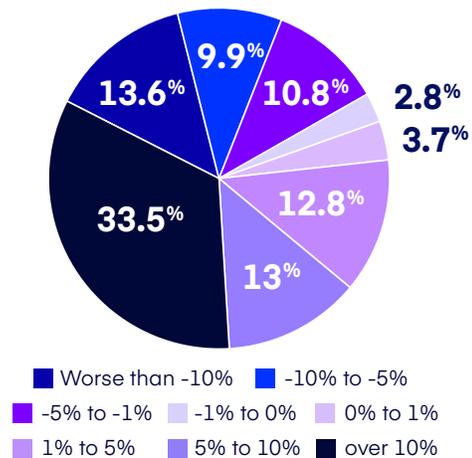
2024 industry average: 64.4%

Same-Store Growth Trends

across 3,294 practice locations

	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	2025
Simple Average*	8.1%	9.8%	10%	7.7%	6.6%
Trimmed Mean*	4.5%	5.9%	6.8%	4.1%	4.9%
Weighted Average*	3.5%	4.6%	4.8%	3.4%	4%

2025 YoY Production Growth



***Simple Average:** Shows all individual practice growth rates. Best for "How did a typical practice perform?" **Trimmed Mean:** Shows the average after removing extreme outliers (top/bottom 10%). Best for "What's the typical performance without outliers skewing results?" **Weighted Average:** Shows overall growth based on total revenue across all practices. Best for "How did all practices within the Planet DDS ecosystem perform overall?" and for understanding total practices/revenue performance.



Drew Hamilton
Chief Revenue Officer
DentalXChange

AI and Changing Patient Expectations Drive Rapid RCM Innovations

The dental revenue cycle management (RCM) landscape is rapidly evolving, driven by innovation advancements leveraging AI and changing patient expectations.



60% of dental practices now utilize some form of AI-powered automation.

According to industry reports, more than 60% of dental practices now utilize some form of AI-powered automation for insurance verification and claims processing, resulting in a 30% reduction in administrative errors and improved reimbursement times.



Nearly **75%** of dental offices offer real-time digital payment options.

Nearly 75% of dental offices offer real-time patient financial estimates and digital payment options, reflecting the growing demand for financial transparency and convenience.



40% increase in integrated RCM platforms with electronic health records.

Integration of RCM platforms with electronic health records (EHR) has increased by 40% in the past two years, leading to more accurate billing and seamless data sharing.



85% of dental organizations are updating data privacy protocols.

Compliance remains a top priority, with 85% of dental organizations reporting updates to their data privacy protocols in response to stricter regulatory standards.



50% increase in virtual dental consultations.

Expansion of telehealth services has led to a 50% increase in virtual dental consultations, necessitating new billing protocols and reimbursement strategies tailored for remote care.

dental
Xchange



Since 1989, [DentalXChange](#) has been on the forefront of modernizing and innovating dental claims, creating dental RCM solutions that bring ease to the payments process.



Jill Nesbitt
Founder & Senior Consultant
Optimize Dental Consulting

Same-Store Growth Is Hiding in the Tech You Already Own



DSOs are fighting to improve same-store growth, yet the biggest opportunities often sit inside the software they already own. Here are five clear wins that can move the needle—no new tools required:

- 1 Standardizing your PMS can give you real-time financial visibility and cut 4 to 5 days off month-end close:** One of our DSO clients eliminated manual waterfall spreadsheets entirely once they moved to a single practice management system, finally getting an accurate net production number without hours of Excel manipulation.
- 2 Automating revenue cycle management (RCM) workflows returns hours per day to the team—without adding headcount:** One office reported saving up to 4 hours per day simply by moving from manual portal insurance checks to automated verification already built into their PMS.
- 3 Call conversion is the most measurable revenue lever DSOs are targeting:** Adoption is accelerating because the return on investment (ROI) is visible. We're supporting a 425-location DSO in tracking missed calls, booking rates, and A/B testing to directly tie phone performance to production lift.
- 4 DSOs leave no-cost automation on the table because it requires change management—not new software:** Most cloud PMS platforms already include automated payment posting, text-to-pay, and online scheduling, yet many groups underutilize them. The real gap isn't technology; it's adoption.
- 5 Clear tech ownership is one of the fastest ways to boost same-store growth:** Cloud software releases new features monthly, but without defined ownership, those improvements never get implemented. Assigning system owners ensures new capabilities are tracked, prioritized, and rolled out successfully.



Optimize Dental Consulting helps DSOs get real results from their tech stack—standardizing platforms, driving adoption, and leading the operational changes that actually move same-store growth.



Neal Golding
Founder & President
JellyFish RAS

Why Dental Leaders Need Context, Not Just Reports



Most executives say they want better data. What they actually want is easy-to-understand, actionable insights.

Outcomes Without Context Are Meaningless

A metric alone is just a number. To make it useful, you need context:

- ✓ Geography (region, location, market)
- ✓ Trends over time
- ✓ Subcategories (insurance mix, provider type, service line)
- ✓ The right balance of summary and detail

Different Roles Need Different Data Points

- ✓ Take the patient reappointment percentage, measuring how many patients leave the practice with a future appointment scheduled.
- ✓ The CEO may want to see the three-month trend line for the entire company.
- ✓ Regional managers may want to just see the trend for just their region.
- ✓ A practice manager needs to be able to drill down to the actual patients who didn't reappoint in order to follow up either via automated or manual outreach.

Segmentation Turns Insight into Action

Knowing the reappointment rate becomes powerful when segmented:

- ✓ By payer type (PPO vs. self-pay vs. Medicaid, etc.)
- ✓ By practice location
- ✓ By type of service
- ✓ By hygienist

Now you're seeing patterns and can course-correct where needed.

AI Turns Patterns into Predictive Action

The next step isn't just visibility and understanding. It's AI modeling. As AI algorithms continue to evolve, they will be able to detect patterns across:

- ✓ No-show history
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Zip code
- ✓ Insurance type
- ✓ Services received
- ✓ Frequency of care

Once identified, the practice team can enact:

- ✓ Proactive outreach
- ✓ Adjusted scheduling workflows
- ✓ Personalized communication
- ✓ Risk-based recall strategies

The Standard Moving Forward

Great reporting answers three questions:

- 1 What happened?
- 2 Why did it happen?
- 3 What should we do next?

Context is what turns data into a growth driver.

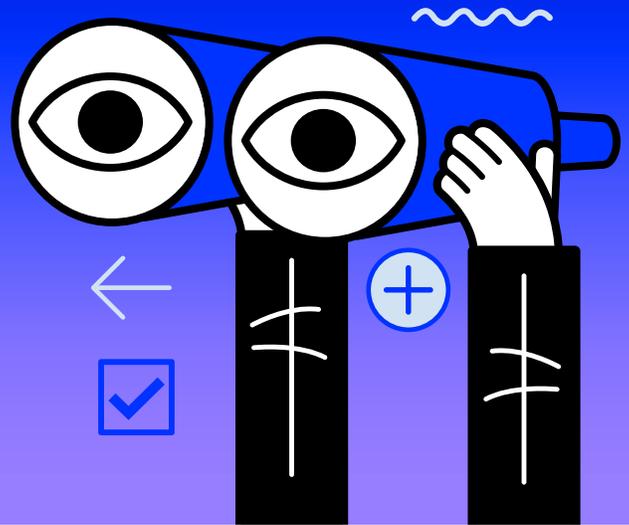


[JellyFish RAS](#) provides reporting, analysis and strategy to provide dental practices and DSOs new insights and action-oriented recommendations designed to drive growth.



Jill Allen
Founder & CEO
Jill Allen & Associates

Practice Blind Spots That Quietly Stall Orthodontic Growth



Most orthodontic practices don't struggle because of clinical skills. They stall because of operational blind spots that compound quietly over time. Here are the most common issues we found as an orthodontic consulting firm working with start-ups, acquisitions, and established practices nationwide:

Chair time is your most expensive line item.

Practices track lab fees and supplies closely but underestimate the cost of inefficient chair time. Small delays in flow, staffing, or scheduling add up to major profit loss over a year.

Strong conversion isn't permanent.

New patient conversion rates often dip after a treatment coordinator (TC) change or role shift. Without a defined process and training cadence, even great practices slide backward fast.

Growth without structure creates burnout.

Adding patients before systems are stable strains teams and doctors alike. Sustainable growth requires intentional workflows, not just higher volume.

Leadership gaps show up as "team problems."

What looks like disengagement or resistance is often unclear expectations, inconsistent communication, or missing accountability structures.

Data only matters if it drives decisions.

Practices collect plenty of numbers, but few consistently use them to guide staffing, scheduling, or strategic planning. Metrics should inform action, not just reporting.



Jill Allen & Associates
Practice Management Consultants



Jill Allen & Associates is a premier orthodontic consulting firm helping practices grow smarter through strategy, systems, and team development, from start-up to succession.



Margaret McGuckin

Founder
i3 Ignite

Do You Know How Work Really Happens in Your Practice?



i3 Ignite is a strategic advisory firm helping DSOs and dental organizations bridge the gap between data, execution, and sustainable growth.



AI technology can't fix what a practice doesn't understand. By clearly mapping patient-facing workflows and using AI to surface what's working, what's not, and who owns the outcomes, practices can turn insight into consistent execution. Here's where to start:

Map your current patient-facing processes.

You can't optimize what you haven't tracked. If you want to improve case acceptance with AI, start by mapping out the full workflow—front desk intake, treatment presentations, and patient follow-up—and identify where the friction points exist.

Use AI to clarify what's working and what's not.

Many practices move faster with AI, but that doesn't mean they're improving. AI should reveal operational inefficiencies, not just automate them. Look at who is doing what, how consistently, and whether those steps are driving results.

Create AI-informed training and playbooks.

Train doctors and team members based on what actually gets results. Track high-performing workflows and translate them into step-by-step training guides. For example: "When X happens, here's what you say and here's what you do next."

Get intentional about feedback loops.

AI is only as good as the data it's trained on. Use it to provide simple visibility into whether teams are following the process—and whether the process is working. That feedback builds confidence, alignment, and better patient outcomes.

Align on accountability.

Someone has to own the map. AI helps democratize insights, but it still requires a person (or team) to track trends, spot outliers, and make adjustments. Whether it's the CEO or a dedicated operations lead, assign clear ownership to sustain results.

Revenue Cycle Transformation

Revenue leakage is one of the highest-risk areas during transformation but also one of the greatest opportunities for recovery, stability, and long-term savings. Inefficient billing, missed claims, poor data integrity, and weak reporting all increase the demand for revenue cycle transformation services during conversion events and centralization activities.

Accurate plan builds, fee schedules, and practice setup are essential to prevent rejected claims, inaccurate payments, and incorrect treatment plan presentations.

Waiting to integrate revenue cycle systems until “later” creates costly rework, retraining, and revenue disruption.

Merger and Acquisition Readiness

Operational maturity (clean data, standardized workflows, compliance readiness, and efficient technology) is becoming a key driver of valuation for practices pursuing growth or private equity investment.

Enhancing orthodontic revenue cycle capabilities (e.g., long-term contracts and financial workflows) supports reconciliation, forecasting, and long-term financial stability.

Standardizing workflows across specialties reduce practice-level friction, improve scheduling and compensation accuracy, and elevate organizational maturity.

These improvements position organizations for greater scalability, stronger financial performance, and more attractive investment potential.

Waiting to integrate revenue cycle systems until “later” creates costly rework, retraining, and revenue disruption.



[ProspHire](#) leads end-to-end dental practice management system (DPMS) conversions for multi-location organizations through a proven implementation framework that strengthens operations with minimal impact to production, collections, or schedule utilization.



For more information on how to standardize operations across locations, download the e-book: [Scaling Smarter: Standardization Guide for DSOs and Dental Groups](#)



David Harris, CFE
CEO
Prosperident

How to Catch a Thief in Your Practice

Embezzlement remains one of the most persistent and costly risks facing dental organizations, often going unnoticed until significant financial damage has already occurred.



Dentistry is the **#1 most embezzled** profession in the world.¹

60% to 70% of dentists will be the **victim of embezzlement** at some point in their careers, according to multiple reports from the ADA and others.²

The **average amount stolen** is **\$109,000** with cases going past \$1 million.

Embezzlement often goes **undetected** for up to **2 years**.

You can **detect embezzlement in days** (not years) with expert assistance.

Here are some indicators that embezzlement could be taking place:

- Collections recorded in the practice management system do not match bank deposits.
- Day-end balancing is not performed or not audited.
- There are high outstanding insurance claims.
- The collection ratio declines over time.
- The adjustment ratio increases over time.
- The primary money handler refuses to cross-train others.

prosperident



Prosperident is the oldest, largest, and most experienced dental embezzlement firm in the world, providing investigation, preventative systems, and litigation support.

¹ David Harris, *Dental Embezzlement: The Art of Theft and the Science of Control* (Tellwell Talent, 2019)

² Reva Darling, "MDA Services: 4 Reasons to Call in the Embezzlement Protection and Investigation Professionals," *Journal of the Michigan Dental Association* 107, no. 11 (2025).



Gary Salman
CEO
Black Talon Security

Root Canal or Ransomware?

One Affects a Patient.
One Affects Your Entire DSO.



Implementing robust cybersecurity measures within dental support organizations (DSOs) is no longer just a compliance necessity but a strategic business imperative that protects sensitive data, maintains patient trust, and can significantly streamline operational technology costs.

Massive Breach Costs

A single data breach in a healthcare organization costs an average of **\$10.93 million**, the highest across any industry for 14 consecutive years, underscoring the critical need for defense.

Rapid Operational Recovery

DSOs with a standardized incident response plan can significantly reduce downtime; organizations that plan effectively can save upward of **\$1.2 million** in breach costs compared to those without.

Consolidated Vendor Costs

Standardizing a single, effective cybersecurity program across all affiliated practices eliminates redundant software licenses and vendor contracts, directly reducing overall current tech spend.

Patient Trust and Retention

Over half of all patients (**53%**) would switch healthcare providers if theirs experienced a data breach, making data protection a direct driver of patient retention and long-term revenue.

Reduced Cyber Insurance Premiums

Robust, proven cybersecurity controls can lead to lower cyber liability insurance premiums and better coverage terms, further optimizing operational costs.



Black Talon Security is the most trusted cyber partner for DSOs of all sizes. Our top-tier cybersecurity solutions and EAGLEi cyber risk management platform, combined with credentialed security experts who understand your workflows and risk areas, provide the protection your DSO needs to stay secure.



Chris Gibson
 Market President, Dental
 The Purple Guys, an Ntiva Company

Private Equity Expectations for IT



DSOs are scaling fast, and that growth comes with pressure. Here are the key drivers for meeting private equity and other investor expectations in 2026:

- ✓ **IT due diligence**
 is often overlooked in the early M&A stages. It shouldn't be. Skipping this process can lead to massive capital costs and compliance risks down the line.
- ✓ **Private equity firms**
 expect portfolio companies to have real security standards. Most in-house teams and small managed service providers (MSPs) just can't keep up.
- ✓ **Proven dental IT experience**
 ensures your technology partner knows how to support multi-location practices, manage complex integrations, and scale without breaking things.
- ✓ **Co-managed IT**
 is no longer a "nice to have." It's how DSOs grow smarter and faster without overloading internal teams.
- ✓ **Faster ticket resolution**
 means less downtime, happier staff, and a smoother patient experience.

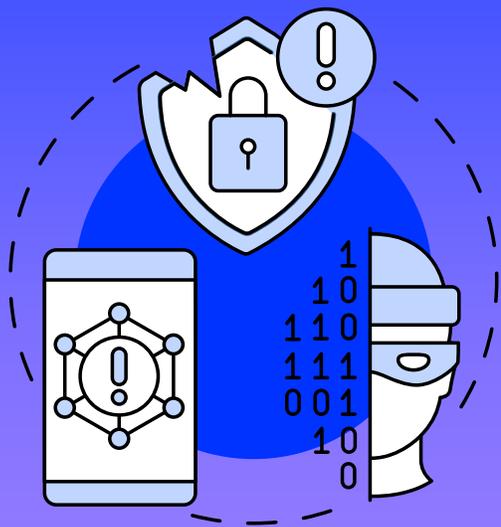


Ntiva supports DSOs with smart, scalable, and secure IT.



Carrie Millar
VP, Business Development
Dentist Insurance Services

The 5 Most Expensive Commercial Insurance Mistakes DSOs Make



For many DSOs, insurance oversights surface during growth, acquisitions, or audits, exposing these costly mistakes that compound risk and expense over time:

- 1 Failing to use a group malpractice policy**
When each provider holds an individual policy, the parent organization is exposed to corporate liability and loses access to group pricing that reduces total premiums.
- 2 Managing each location's insurance separately**
Allowing offices to handle their own policies leads to inconsistent limits, missed multi-location discounts, and duplicate coverage that can cost tens of thousands of dollars each year.
- 3 Not requesting loss reports during LOI discovery**
You should have your trusted insurance broker review all loss histories before closing. Past malpractice claims, cyber incidents, workers compensation claims, and employment practices losses reveal the true risk profile of an acquisition and help you avoid costly surprises.
- 4 Skipping a comprehensive cyber liability policy**
Many DSOs believe their IT vendor or general liability policy covers cyber risks, but only a true cyber policy pays for ransomware, forensic investigation, business interruption, and patient notification. With the emergence of AI-driven cyberattacks, robust coverage is vital.
- 5 Not designating a single insurance coordinator at your DSO**
When multiple departments oversee different types of insurance, policies lapse, offices accidentally double-insure exposures, and critical updates fall through the cracks due to lack of centralization. Whether it be procurement, accounting, or operations, one person needs to own the insurance.



[Dentist Insurance Services](#) is a specialized brokerage that helps dental practices and DSOs protect their business with tailored malpractice, cyber, commercial, and workers' compensation insurance solutions.





Patrick Jacobwith
CEO
Sunset Technologies



What Will Define Successful Dental Practices in 2026: Five Forces to Watch

In a year where uptime, security, and data integrity will define a practice's strength, the dental organizations that invest in resilient, well-integrated technology will be the ones positioned to grow with confidence. The following insights outline the operational risks and competitive shifts shaping dental practices in 2026.

- 1 Roughly 80% of a dental practice's valuation is tied to its patient base and the stability, integrity, and accessibility of that patient data.**

Practices entering a merger and acquisition (M&A) agreement without protecting this 80% through strong IT, security, and compliance foundations are increasingly seeing valuation reductions and heightened risk during due diligence.

- 2 Cyber events remain the #1 operational threat, with ransomware downtime costing practices an average of \$8,500 per hour.**

In 2026, practices with strong security posture, resilient infrastructure, and a clear continuity plan will be the winners. They will be the ones limiting downtime, reducing financial exposure, and protecting long-term practice value.

- 3 Integration is no longer optional; it is the backbone of clinical efficiency and patient experience.**

As disjointed systems continue to disrupt workflows and remain a leading cause of avoidable downtime, practices need end-to-end integration to drive operational success.



4 Unsupported operating systems and outdated hardware will create the biggest compliance and insurance exposure of the year.

Since Windows 10 support has ended, insurers and regulators are increasingly treating unsupported systems as compliance failures that can jeopardize claims and increase security risk.

5 Uptime is emerging as a clear competitive advantage in dentistry.

Practices with stable, predictable technical environments consistently experience fewer operational disruptions, higher team satisfaction, and stronger financial performance.



For more information on how to strengthen security across your organization, download the e-book:

[Security, Privacy and Compliance Guide](#)



[Sunset Technologies](#) delivers the integrated IT, cybersecurity, and compliance foundation that ensures uptime, performance, and secure, seamless integration while protecting the long-term value of every practice we serve.



Ali Oromchian
CEO
HR for Health

Top 5 HR Blind Spots for Dentistry in 2026



As labor laws expand and enforcement tightens, HR missteps are becoming more costly for dental organizations. Here are five areas dentistry leaders should be watching closely this year:

1 Sick leave rules just got stricter.

Nineteen states now have sick leave laws on the books (four joined the list just this year). Even small dental practices are expected to comply depending on the state, so make sure your policies and your payroll are up to speed.

2 Your handbook = your rulebook.

If your team policies aren't in writing, followed consistently, and updated as laws change, they might as well not exist. Your handbook should be your north star for every HR decision.

3 Pay accuracy = risk reduction.

Minimum wage and exempt salary thresholds continue to rise. A quick annual pay audit could save you from costly wage claims later.

4 Terminations need a game plan.

Have a documented process *before* you need it. That includes write-ups, policy violations, and knowing your state's final paycheck deadlines.

5 Retirement benefits are no longer optional.

Fourteen states now require employers to offer retirement plans with another six in development. Know which benefits are legally mandated and which ones help you stay competitive.

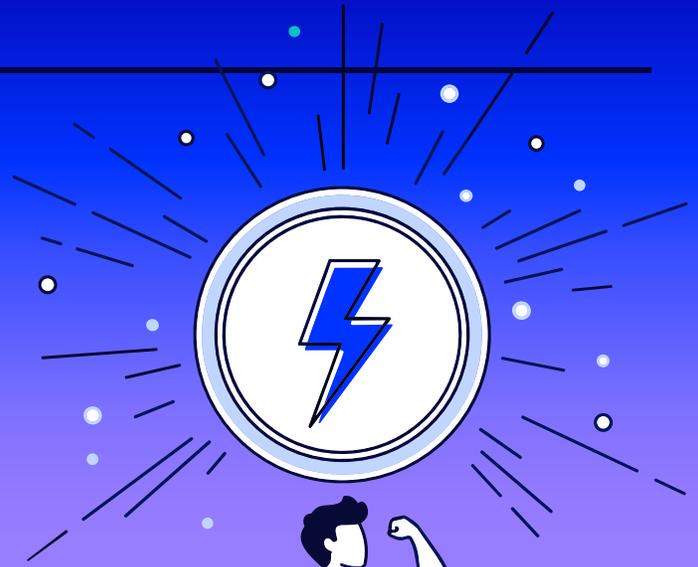


[HR for Health](#) supports growing healthcare practices with payroll, timekeeping, employee handbooks, and more HR tools.



Thomas Passalacqua
 Certified Executive Coach
 Ascend Professional Pathway

Best Practices for Growing Personally and Professionally



Many of us strive to reach new levels in our professions, businesses, and careers. As we push ourselves to grow beyond our current abilities, we usually experience emotions and challenges that may seem out of our control. Follow these five tips to support continued growth:



1

Overcoming doubt

Be assured that feeling fear, doubt, and uncertainty about your path is common and results from stepping outside your comfort zone.



2

Remaining objective

Staying as objective as possible and focusing on facts, progress, and your goals will prevent your emotions from getting the best of you.



3

Tracking Progress

Focusing on consistent actions and tracking progress throughout your process will empower you to move past obstacles, even when you feel unsure.



4

Getting “unstuck”

Most of the time, when we feel stuck, it is a result of our own limiting perceptions about our ability to reach our goals. We often have more capacity and resources than we generally credit ourselves with.



5

Staying focused

Distractions and overstimulation are constantly present in our modern lives. Being diligent about keeping our attention on core actions and objectives is vital to reaching our goals.



Thomas Passalacqua has a master’s degree in education and has worked in the dental industry for nearly ten years. He is a certified executive coach at [Ascend Professional Pathways](#), specializing in helping ambitious professionals reach their goals by gaining clarity to overcome self-doubt, fear, and uncertainty.



About This Report

The *2026 Dental Industry Outlook Report* is an industry-focused report based on the findings from more than 8,000 dental practices and insights and data from dental industry experts. Individual contributions are copyrighted by their respective authors and used with permission.

Data Collection Methods

The datasets presented in this report are cited accordingly, including from the analysis of more than 5,200 practices on Denticon and 2,800 practices on Cloud 9. The data review process involved quantitative and qualitative analysis, data mapping, statistical modeling, normalization, anonymization, and validation.

Planet DDS Contributors

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Use of Data

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denticon | apteryx | cloud 9

Dental software is broken. We aim to fix it. As a partner in growth for DSOs and dental groups outgrowing legacy systems and fragmented tools, Planet DDS delivers a cloud-based AI platform designed to scale alongside growing organizations. Powered by DentalOS™ with AI, Planet DDS is built on connection—connecting people, partners, and technology across an open ecosystem that includes Denticon Practice Management, Cloud 9 Ortho Practice Management, and Apteryx Cloud Imaging.

Trusted by leading DSOs and emerging dental groups nationwide, Planet DDS supports more 100+ location DSOs than any other cloud-based dental practice management provider, enabling 14,500 practices and 175,000 users to move beyond outdated legacy software with seamless integrations, optimized workflows, and scalable technology built for growth. To learn more, visit PlanetDDS.com

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