DRIVEN, COMPETITIVE, AND MOTIVATED

E4D Technologies’ digital impression scanner elevates team communication and technical outcomes

For as long as he can remember, Lee Culp, CDT, has had a keen interest in art. His enthusiasm for the field, however, was matched by his rational thinking. Believing he lacked the “chops” to make it as a professional painter or sketch artist, Culp enrolled in the University of Georgia to pursue a career in architecture, believing that an industrial job with artistic qualities could be a way to marry his love of art with the need to make a living. While in school, Culp began working part-time as a delivery driver for a dental laboratory. Then, one of the laboratory’s technicians left, leaving an opening. “They asked me if I wanted to stay on and make a little money while they were looking for a new technician. I agreed—and then never went back to school,” Culp says. When he decided to make dental technology his career, Culp developed a deep passion for the profession, apprenticing in several laboratories before starting a business at age 25. Even as a laboratory owner, Culp continued his quest for acquiring knowledge about dental technology, consistently investing in continuing education and certification.

After becoming a certified dental technician, Culp began speaking and lecturing. “I’ve been on stage since I was 3 years old, acting, singing, and dancing. I’ve always felt very comfortable in front of people, so it seemed natural for my career to go down this path.” As Culp’s career continued to advance, he started working as a consultant for different companies and major industry manufacturers, offering his input during product development. Today, Culp not only owns a laboratory, but also serves as Chief Technology Officer at MicroDental Laboratories, a network of 20 dental laboratories operating under one corporation.

Culp has always been extremely driven and competitive, and credits his diverse and successful career to a desire to always do better. “I have studied, copied, and emulated people who were the best at what they did. In turn, it eventually got to a point where I could teach others what I have learned,” he explains. Culp also believes that his varied career has provided him with insights into the dental industry to which few are privy. “I’ve seen the industry from so many different angles—apprentice, technician, laboratory owner of both high-end boutiques and production-oriented large laboratories, and educator. I can use knowledge gained in one part of the industry and lend that expertise to other areas. Right now I’m trying to bring my small-laboratory thinking into the high-production, efficiency range,” Culp says. This mindset was what led Culp to look into digital dentistry. “When I first encountered digital dentistry, I wanted to prove that it could work as a major manufacturing platform. When MicroDental Laboratories called me to help it transition its laboratory work to a digital workflow, I couldn’t pass up the opportunity.”

As Culp started transitioning MicroDental Laboratories to a digital workflow, he quickly determined that he would need to ensure that all the in-network laboratories had access to the best possible technology available on the dental market. That was why MicroDental partnered with E4D Technologies, incorporating the E4D’s scanning, design, and milling technologies into MicroDental’s workflow. Culp describes, “E4D’s...”
technology impresses me on a number of levels. Its software is excellent and allows technicians to digitally design beautiful, natural-looking restorations in a rapid timeframe, and its mills offer a level of precision comparable to hand-milled work. Additionally, E4D’s digital impression technology, like the new Planmeca PlanScan™ scanner, is also better, faster, and more productive than it ever was in the past.

As more clinicians adopt chairside impression scanning technology, the value of this technical work performed will increase and become even more affordable. “These devices improve the quality of impressions that laboratories receive from their dentists,” Culp says, mentioning that they provide the dentist and technician the simultaneous opportunity to view the prep, margins, and the amount of space block-out for the restoration. “If we can all look at and evaluate the patient’s oral landscape together, it improves our level of communication and increases the quality of the final restoration,” explains Culp.

According to Culp, communication between the laboratory and clinician is imperative to successful execution of a case. Digital technology helps to bridge the gap and push everyone on the same page. “In the past, if the technician had a concern, he or she would have to call the dentist and try to describe the problem over the phone. Then, the dentist would try to visualize the case without a model for reference. The entire process was very difficult. With digital scanning technology, we are able to instantaneously address areas of concern with digital files that can be accessed by the entire team. It saves so much time and aggravation.” Culp also says that enhanced communication capabilities encourage the entire dental team to interact more often, as everyone can share pictures and screen shots of a restoration at different stages of design. “It’s all in real time, and we’re able to perfect the aesthetics before we go on to final processing.”

As far as Culp is concerned, digital impression technology and digital dentistry in general have changed the dental laboratory industry for the better. “Dentistry is all about predictability and efficiency. We talk about aesthetics and artistry, but those things come second to having an efficient workflow and predictable outcome. Only after we perfect our technical skills can we enhance our artistic abilities,” he says.

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