DISCOVERING THE DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL WORKFLOW

How Planmeca’s Planscan digital impression system contributed to the growth of a small dental laboratory

JIMMY FINCHER, CDT, who has owned Cosmetic Advantage in Lewisville, Texas for 5 years, received training as a laboratory technician during a 6-year stint in the U.S. Air Force. “I had enlisted to fight for my country in 1990 during Desert Storm and Desert Shield,” he says, adding that the military leadership quickly determined that his skills were better suited for the dental laboratory than the battlefield.

When he completed his service, Fincher was firmly established as a dental technician and then launched a civilian career, operating laboratories within larger companies. Then, in 2009, he decided to leverage his reputation among the Dallas dental community and opened the laboratory as a one-man shop.

Since then, his laboratory has grown to a staff of 11, with eight technicians, including him. “I used to work with 50 people or more, but I enjoy operating a smaller laboratory, and the nice thing about digital is that it allows you to do just that,” he says.

According to Fincher, he chose the Ed3 system (now Planmeca Planscan) 4.5 years ago based on the quality of the restorations. “We technicians like to believe that no machine can do a better job than we can, so it was important to me that whatever system I bought could do just as good a job—if not better—yet be very productive,” he says. The Planscan system, he says, “was like finding a machine that’s just like the perfect technician. It has made our better and definitely more productive.”

Describing how he has incorporated Planscan into his workflow and overall business model, Fincher explains that the first step is usually pouring the model because most of his clients dentures are still sending traditional impressions, which need to be digitally scanned into the system.

Nevertheless, Fincher says the system has sped up fabrication and allowed him to reduce turnaround times. “It’s just more efficient. After the models are poured, they go straight into the scanning room. So it’s something that will have a framework design. It’s already being immediately virtually designed the same day it’s been scanned.”

Fincher says his two Planmeca mills run constantly during the workday, producing 85% of his laboratory’s crowns. “It is my main producer in the laboratory. It keeps our entire work flow going,” he says the ceramists—a total of three, including Fincher—are able to complete their work more quickly because they start with a higher-quality restoration. “We’re touching up something that is already so nice that we just have to do the finishing touches,” he asserts.

Fincher says the system has also improved accuracy because—unlike humans—it is consistent. “Whether it’s Monday morning or Friday afternoon, it’s fully awake and on the job.”

Fincher says although he can complete every thing from single units to veneers, inlays and onlays, and bridgework, his laboratory is still equipped to...
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Observing that the clinician and laboratory technician have different but equally valuable perspectives on the restoration, Fincher says, “At the laboratory, we plan the case from the tooth backwards—that is, we’re thinking about the final restoration, while the clinician is trying to determine the best place to put the implant. Now, we’re meeting in the middle.”

This, he says, is another win-win situation using the E4D technology backed by Planmeca software and other resources. “We are working together to find a solution that is best for the patient.”

Working with new technology has opened more doors than Fincher ever thought possible. He speaks and teaches to dentists and other laboratory owners on digital workflow and collaboration. “Although some of my colleagues are fearful of the transition, digital scanning has actually helped me to build better relationships with my customers and expanded my business nationwide.”

Fig 3. CAD/CAM technology has become a standard in Fincher’s laboratory. The ease of use is not limited to single restorations; it is used daily on multiple-unit cases, as well as high-end cosmetics.

Fig 4. The final results show highly esthetic restorations that are uncompromising in quality, yet completed in less time.

**Planmeca PlanScan™ Scanner**

Planmeca PlanScan captures the oral environment with precision, reproducing all of the anatomical details registered by the impression and delivers accurate 3D models for more clinically precise prosthesis. Each scanner is equipped with three removable tips, as well as an adapter, cable, and cradle. The two-piece cradle features a weighted base, or can be well-mounted or separated to fit into a standard handpiece caddy.

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