Can a Single Piece of Technology Make That Big of a Difference...Oh yeah!

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I have a general dentistry practice in Lafayette, Louisiana. In the summer of 2005, I was practicing out of a 900-square-foot office with three operatories. I made a very good living, and I was profitable because I had little overhead. But my office was certainly nothing to brag about; it was dated and run down. And of course, it was too small for my growing practice. I was, however, quite high-tech with computers in every room, digital X-rays, digital cameras, DIAGNODent, and all the other “toys” you could think of. And then disaster struck...

In the summer of 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. A second hurricane named Rita hit Lafayette a few weeks later and devastated the city. We struggled for several months to recover. On top of our own problems, much of New Orleans had relocated to Lafayette into temporary shelters. It was a nightmare. No one had money, and those that did certainly were not spending it on their teeth. As you can imagine, the last half of 2005 was not a good year for me from a business perspective.

In the aftermath, I made sure I had as few bills as possible. I attempted to reduce my overhead as much as possible and still provide quality dental care to the few patients willing to come in for treatment. I knew it would be a while before my production numbers went back to normal.

At that time, the one technology I didn’t have was CAD/CAM. I had been looking at it for several years, but with only three operatories between myself and my hygienist, I questioned if it was right for me. I did more than my share of full-mouth rehab cases and a lot of veneer cases. My lab bill each month ranged from $5,000 to $20,000. My concern was not whether I prepped enough units, but if there were enough single posterior units; so I delayed getting the technology. In November 2005, I was contacted by a new company named D4D Technologies. They had seen several of my published articles on high-tech dentistry and wanted my opinion on a new CAD/CAM system that used no powder and would compete with CEREC. Even though it was still a beta version, I fell in love with the system.

For the first year, I only used the E4D system to restore posterior teeth, which at that time was all it was intended to do. The biggest portion of my lab bill, however, was not the posterior crowns, but the anterior cases. The lab charged more for these restorations, and I prepped more of them. How much could I save with the E4D system if I did ALL of the teeth with it?!

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About this time, Lee Culp, who is a master at ceramics, joined E4D. Perfect! I spent a lot of time learning how to do anterior cases with the E4D system from Lee.

Over the next few years the E4D system developed better anterior restoration functions and the ability to scan impressions. I altered my thinking to believe I could do just about any restoration with the E4D system, and my entire way of thinking about CAD/CAM changed.

I no longer worried if we scanned the prep in the mouth (most profitable), off the impression, or off a mounted model. As long as the patient agreed to pay for the crown that day, we did the work. Most posterior cases were completed in a single appointment. If that was not possible due to the patient’s schedule or ours, we had the patient come back at the end of the day to cement. If that was not possible, we placed the patient in a temporary and cemented the following week. Either way, I was still saving the lab bill, and my profits were rising each month.

I started to focus on how to maximize my profits with the E4D system. I realized we were pulling a lot of patients from the hygiene room into my room, so I sent my hygienist to train on the E4D system. Now she asks each patient not only if they want their crown done but if they want it done today! She then numbs the patient, performs the prophy, and I come in to prep. She then makes the crown, schedules the patient to come back at the end of the day, or has the assistant come in and place a temporary. All on her schedule.

By 2008, we had had the E4D system for three years. I had paid off a lot of debt, and I realized that I needed a bigger office! So, in 2009, we started looking for the perfect property in Lafayette. By 2010, I had purchased an acre and a half of bare ground in a prime part of town. In 2011, we moved into our brand new 3,000-square-foot office fully designed around the E4D system.

The bottom line is I went from a 900-square-foot office into a beautiful brand new 3,000-square-foot office mostly because of the E4D system. No other piece of technology in my office could have done that.

Dr. Tony Soileau’s general dentistry practice in Lafayette, Louisiana, focuses on restorative rehabilitation and cosmetic enhancements. He’s a highly sought after national and international lecturer on digital photography and computer assistance in diagnosing, treatment planning, and performing comprehensive dental procedures. Dr. Soileau is a faculty member at the Institute of Oral Art and Design (IOAD) in Tampa, Florida, and the Pacific Aesthetic Continuum (PAC~Live), San Francisco, and serves on the genR8Tnext seminars advisory board. He is a member of the ADDA, LDA, ADA, AGD, and the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.