

# A clear plan and purpose



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**D**uring these economic times, I believe that it is easy to get discouraged about living our dreams and opening up a dental office. As a recent graduate of UMDNJ — New Jersey Dental School Class of 2009 — I did not want to let the economic climate or the financial burden of dental school

stop me from fulfilling that dream. I truly enjoy receiving *Dental Economics* and have incorporated a lot of the information from articles into my life as a dentist.

I knew that someday I would love to have my own office, but I found myself overwhelmed at the thought. I had a clear vision of providing my patients with the most outstanding customer service and dental care in a relaxing environment. The problem was, I had no idea how to accomplish that goal on a limited budget. I worked for several offices when I got out of school because I wanted to see how different people practice dentistry and gain knowledge about owning a business. Working in different offices fueled my desire to do dentistry “my way,” so I decided to branch out on my own.

But how could I achieve this goal and not be ridiculously in debt? I spoke to several doctors about how much it cost them to open their offices. For a four-operator office with only two operatories fully furnished, the average cost was \$350,000 — not including working capital. I knew another recent graduate who had just spent a whopping \$650,000 and had only two functional rooms!

I considered finding a partner because that would help my finances tremendously, but I found it very hard to find someone who shared my same vision and goals. I knew I wanted to be a solo practitioner, but for me this was a huge financial investment. I was really nervous since I already owed more than \$200,000 from pursuing my degree. I wanted to figure out the most economical way to achieve my goal and still have a state-of-the-art practice. I decided to start researching my options about opening my own office. I wanted to see if I could open an office for about \$350,000 with all rooms completed.

I considered the idea of purchasing a second-generation office. With the help of my realtor, I found an office in a shopping center that was built out 10 years ago. The office was in pristine condition. Although it was no longer equipped, the framework was still in place. The office had been vacant for six months because the previous doctor had decided to become an associate at another office to ease the transition into retirement. For me, this office was

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### Purchases from Patterson Dental Group

- 1 Planmeca XC pan
- 2 Air Techniques ScanX
- 3 Progeny JB-70 X-ray system
- 4 Proma A5210 Compass dental unit
- 5 Proma A5152 track light and monitor mount

### Purchases from Midwest Dental Group

- 1 Pelton & Crane 3003 dental chair with advanced comfort ultraleather upholstery and Ergosoothe massage
- 2 Pelton & Crane — SPIRIT 2000 ELLIPSE Unit — with fiber optics
- 3 Porter nitrous system
- 4 Pelton & Crane LED Helios 3000 track light with flexible monitor mount
- 5 17" LCD glass, water-sealed, anti-glare, high-resolution monitors
- 6 Scan-x imaging system
- 7 Cliniview imaging software
- 8 Dell — networks system — installed and supported by Midwest Dental

### Purchased from previous dentist

- 1 Two Royal dental chairs
- 2 Air Techniques Airstar 22
- 3 Autoclave
- 4 Biosonic
- 5 Vacstar 50

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a godsend.

The office was 1,750 square feet with four operatories, a sterilization center, a lab area, a consultation room, and a personal office for me. The great thing about it was it would save me an estimated \$150,000 in building costs. I got bids from contractors about doing some cosmetic updates and spent \$43,000 in construction costs. I negotiated with the landlord for three months of free rent and \$5 per square foot for tenant improvements. I found an interior decorating team that prided itself on decorating within a budget.

I also discovered that the previous owner was willing to sell some of his equipment. I purchased two Royal dental chairs, three dentists' stools, three dental assisting stools, an air/water compressor system from Air Tech, a Delta sterilization unit, an ultrasonic machine, a model trimmer, and a plastic tray suck-down machine — all for \$8,500. Instead of being able to have only two functional operatories like most starting dentists, I was able to have four operatories from the outset. Because I was going for a relaxing spa theme, I bought two brand new dental chairs with massaging capabilities from Pelton & Crane. I bought massagers to add to the chairs I purchased from the previous owner when they were reupholstered.

I purchased a used Planmeca panoramic X-ray machine that was only two years old for \$11,000 from a dentist who was switching from phosphor plates to sensors. I worked with Patterson and Midwest Dental Supply Company to get their special prices for first-time dentists.

I found ways to make my dream of opening my dental office possible even on a budget. As a recent grad, I often feel like it's hard to make these decisions. I believe that a lot of new dentists read *Dental Economics* and would like to hear about how to open their own offices while keeping the bottom line low.

My advice to anyone who is trying to open his or her own office is to have a clear plan of what you want and how you want to accomplish it. Visit with as many dentists as possible, because they will be valuable resources to you throughout your journey. And lastly, set up and stick to a budget. You won't believe how much a limited budget can make such a huge difference in the amount of money you spend. **DG**

*Dr. Simone Ellis practices dentistry in Missouri City, Texas, right outside the Houston area. Her office name, which opened in early June, is Smile Design Studios, Family and Cosmetic Dentistry. Dr. Ellis was born and raised in Kansas City, Kan., and graduated from Xavier University in New Orleans, majoring in biology premed. She enjoys spending time with her husband, Rasul, and becoming more involved in her new community. She is a member of the American Dental Association, Greater Houston Dental Society, and Texas Dental Association. You may reach Dr. Ellis at [anaria2001@yahoo.com](mailto:anaria2001@yahoo.com).*