

‘Staying committed throughout these challenges and using them as learning experiences helped us convert potential risks into actual opportunities for growth’

I find landmark anniversaries and birthdays really interesting. They're barometers of change: how far have you come, what progress have you made, how have times changed? For Dentally's **Nick Davies** and **James Harker**, their journey started out before most in the sector, and *BDJ In Practice* spoke to the duo to assess just how far they have come.

Which one change since you established Dentally has had the biggest effect on the profession?

JH: The end-to-end digital workflow has fundamentally transformed dentistry in the last decade. Moving away from traditional paper-based processes to a comprehensive digital approach has revolutionised the way dental practices operate. This shift not only makes practice management smoother but significantly enriches the patient experience with improved efficiency and interaction. Patients now expect conveniences like online booking, digital payment options, and easy access to their medical history. This transformation goes beyond convenience; it's about enhancing accessibility and engagement which directly influences patient care quality.

ND: Absolutely, embracing digital tools has not only streamlined administrative tasks but also revolutionised patient interaction and care. Consumers are now used to this kind of experience whether it's ordering a takeaway or booking a haircut – booking their dental appointment is no different. People are busier now than ever so being able to book that appointment in a lunch break

or at the weekend is table stakes and it's what makes them choose between one practice and another.

What sort of mindset does it take to get out there, take risks and be an innovator?

ND: Innovation starts with a willingness to challenge the conventional. It requires an open and adaptable mindset that not only embraces risks but sees them as pathways to new opportunities. When we began, James and I were driven by a vision to address real-world issues. Of course, we encountered several challenges along the way – technological barriers, competitive pressures, and market scepticism. However, staying committed throughout these challenges and using them as learning experiences helped us convert potential risks into actual opportunities for growth. To be an innovator is to remain inquisitive, forward-thinking, and bold enough to envision solutions that don't yet exist and to bring them into reality.

ND: It's about maintaining a curious and resilient mindset. Innovators often face hurdles, but persistence and a problem-solving attitude help turn challenges into

stepping stones towards success. The ability to learn from each experience and adapt strategies accordingly and often at short notice is crucial for any innovator and certainly, a mindset we encourage across our teams at Dentally.

Are there parallels to be drawn with practitioners who see certain technologies as expenditure rather than investments – they don't take risks that will pay off?

JH: Absolutely. This perspective shift is crucial. Viewing technology as just an expense can prevent practices from embracing innovative solutions due to fear of upfront costs – something we are understandably seeing more and more of due to the rise in the cost of living. Yet, recognising it as an investment can have countless benefits in the long run – not just for new practices either.

ND: Those who see it as an investment realise the benefits of staying on the cutting edge. As James mentioned, it's not just about spending money; it's about investing in the future of the practice. We've seen countless practices adopt this proactive approach and have it result in enhanced operational effectiveness, elevated

patient satisfaction, and ultimately, improved financial health of the practice itself. Equipping your team with the right tools can boost morale and prevent the need for multiple software. By optimising workflows and consolidating tasks into a central system, practices can significantly reduce the time their team dedicates to monotonous administrative tasks, allowing them to focus more on the bigger picture stuff that is crucial for growth.

How has cloud based software driven some of these changes?

ND: Cloud-based software is at the heart of this transformation. It's not just about data storage; it's about accessibility, flexibility, and enabling practices to provide a level of patient care that was previously unattainable. Dentally can be accessible remotely which is a big deal in today's world. It means whether you're in the practice or at home, you can access patient data, manage appointments, and perform other administrative tasks securely, anywhere, anytime. This kind of connectivity not only makes decision-making faster but also lets dental professionals adapt their practices in a way that truly works for them.

JH: We really saw this jump throughout the pandemic. Practices that were previously reluctant to switch to digital processes had their hand forced to prevent the spread of infection and keep operations running. This is when they began to see the real benefit that cloud software can bring to many areas of their practice and most decided to never turn back. Now they see the day-to-day flexibility it brings with practices able to work more fluently across sites and even on the go.

How can the profession best use cloud-based software to benefit patients in an ever-demanding environment?

JH: Integration and automation are key. By streamlining administrative tasks and time-consuming activities, we free up dental professionals to focus on what they do best – caring for patients. This approach streamlines operational workflows and significantly boosts patient interaction and satisfaction by minimising wait times, optimising treatment schedules, and providing seamless communication channels.

ND: Cloud software can also enhance patient engagement through personalised

and automated communications. Things like recalls, reminders and post-appointment messaging no longer weigh on the shoulders of receptionists. Practices can ensure they're sending the right message at the right time which ultimately leads to less failure to attend appointments and short notice cancellations. Instead, practices see maximised appointment books, boosted success rates and revenue with reasonably less effort!

What's the next phase in their evolution?

ND: Looking forward, we're excited about integrating AI more deeply into dental practices. Imagine AI not just as a tool but as a co-pilot in dental practices, helping handle complexities with greater precision. We see huge potential in AI for diagnostics, analysis and clinical consistency. We aim to keep our platform evolving to always meet the sophisticated needs of dental practices.

JH: This integration of AI is really exciting and will pave the way for early detection in dentistry, where practitioners can foresee potential issues and address them proactively, improving patient outcomes and efficiency – all without having to leave Dentally, keeping the clinical workflow as seamless as possible.

Finally, where do you see the sector in 10 years' time and how will Dentally evolve to meet the inevitable changes?

JH: I envision a future where technological solutions are not just nice to have but are intrinsic to the operation and success of dental practices. From administrative tasks to clinical decisions, technology will play a pivotal role. For Dentally, it means continuous innovation, based on direct feedback from dental professionals, ensuring that our tools not only meet but anticipate the needs of the sector. Merging state-of-the-art technology with the irreplaceable human touch in dental care remains our ultimate objective to help practices navigate challenges and thrive in the ever-evolving dental landscape.

ND: Indeed, the evolution towards more data-driven operations will require an adaptive learning approach, which is where our Elevate programme becomes essential. It's designed to guide practices, leveraging comprehensive analytics to help

them benchmark performance and identify areas for enhancement relative to industry standards. Our aim with Dentally is to stay at the forefront, continuously adapting and innovating to meet the evolving needs of practice teams. We want to help practitioners do the same for their patients. ♦



Bio

Nick Davies, Executive Director, UKI & APAC and Strategic Development, Dentally

In his role and as co-founder of Dentally, Nick works collaboratively with GTM teams in several regions including the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, guiding the team to provide powerful intuitive software for dentists. With a shared vision alongside his team to make a difference to patient oral health, he focuses on the continual development of innovative products, service, and support – backed with powerful data and analytics that help dental practices grow, develop and thrive whilst they focus day-to-day on patient care.

James Harker, Executive Director of Technology, Dentally

James is at the forefront of revolutionising dental practice management with our market-leading cloud solution, Dentally. In his current role, James collaborates globally, leading development, engineering, and product teams across the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. With a passion for writing software code, James focuses on delivering secure, innovative cloud-based products that prioritise customer success and growth.

Find out more at www.dentally.com.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41404-024-2841-4>