



5 Ways to Grow Your Practice

Is your software an expense or an investment?

by Reuven Lirov, M.A.

Expert commentary by
Michelle Corrigan and Wendy Thorington

Feeling Charitable

Welcome, Dr. Friedman, Mrs. Friedman,” the director of the charity murmured. “We’re so happy to have you this evening.” He pressed Alex’s hand, and then Laura’s, and moved on to the next couple with a smile that managed to seem both practiced and sincere.

“He’s very good at this, isn’t he?” Laura said softly to Alex as they mingled.

Alex had to agree. He also had to wonder whether anyone really enjoyed these fundraisers. Maybe his wife did, actually—it was a chance to dress up, dinner was good, and she was able to treat it like a party. It helped her school’s visibility, too, he supposed. Certainly she always seemed to hand out plenty of business cards. And it was for a very worthy cause.

Still, when he got a chance for a private word as they found their table, he asked Laura, “Do you think they really get much ROI from these events?”

“I’m not sure I know what you mean,” Laura said, tucking her evening bag into his coat pocket. “The last one we went to, they raised \$43,000, right?”

“Yes, but look at all this wine, the decorations, surf and turf on the menu, whatever those fancy flowers are—”

“Orchids,” Laura informed him. “Honey, they don’t pay for all those things. They’re all donated.”

“That’s why we have to applaud every single company and individual that had anything to do with the event,” Alex agreed.

“And it raises awareness. If we just sent a check instead of coming here, we wouldn’t hear all those heartfelt stories--”

“They are touching,” Alex observed. “I hope you have tissues ready.”

“Of course! I don’t think I’ve ever gotten through one of these evenings without having to resort to tissues! But don’t you think that it reinforces the importance of the charity? We probably give more because we understand the issues more clearly.”

“And then there’s the press coverage the next day. That’s probably worth quite a bit.”

“Why is this on your mind?” Laura asked. “You aren’t usually cynical about these things.”

“I guess it’s because we’re going through this Dream Practice Analysis process at work, and I’ve been having a hard time with the question of ROI.”

“When you devote your life to helping people, it’s hard to think in terms of ROI,” Laura suggested. “That’s true for us at the school. We focus on what’s best for the

kids and don’t consider profits—until it’s time for a board meeting or we have to come up with money for a new heater.”

“That’s as it should be,” Alex said. “But if you don’t think about ROI, you won’t be able to keep your doors open and your facilities excellent, and then you can’t help anyone.”

“This event is a good example,” Laura said as another couple joined their table. “It’s all about balance.”

Alex greeted the others at the table and settled in for an evening of speeches, but he still wasn’t sure he and his team were really making the connection between the practice and ROI. He figured he could think about it more during the corporate thank you speeches. They certainly must have figured the ROI before they chose to participate in this event. Why shouldn’t his practice take the same attitude?

Can Dr. Friedman get comfortable with using ROI to make decisions within his practice?

Dream or Vision?

Alex was staring out the window when his wife reached his office. He had his hands steepled, and something close to a frown on his face.

“What’s going on?” Laura asked him.

“Hey, Laura,” Alex greeted her. “Let’s get out of here for a few minutes.”

“I was coming to see if you could take time for lunch, but ‘get out of here’ doesn’t sound good.”

Alex didn’t respond until they were out the door. “I am feeling a bit frustrated.”

“Is it the Dream Practice Analysis?”

“That’s it. The process ought to be good for the practice. No matter what decision we make, doing some analysis of the practice and comparing where we are with where we want to be is a smart move.”

Laura agreed. “It’s been a while since you took a high-level look at the practice,” she pointed out. “It’s easy to get so caught up in the day-to-day stuff that you don’t have a clear vision of how to move forward.”



“It also makes sense to analyze the ROI of investments we’re thinking about making in the practice. That’s not how we usually approach things, but we are a business. Everyone on the team wants to get paid for their work, and we want to see a good return on our investments, even if we’re not always comfortable thinking about it in those terms.”

Laura agreed again. “So, what’s the problem?”

“What isn’t a problem?! I’m hearing objections to the idea of using ROI as a measure, because it’s too mechanical or inhuman or something. I’m hearing objections to thinking about a Dream Practice because we’re already fine as we are and because people are tired of changes and because it’s too far removed from reality and because it’s too limiting—I tell you, the team is coming up with lots of objections, but they all sound like excuses.”



“Do they have to be on board with it?”

“I’m not a loner,” Alex objected. “I like to have consensus in the practice.”

“You’re not a loner, but you are the leader.” Laura slipped her arm through his. “You may have to be the one to provide the vision.”

Is the idea of a Dream Practice a clear vision...or just a dream?

Dreams and knowledge

“Luisa,” Alex began, “I’ll need your help gathering up the information for the Dream Practice Analysis—”

“Can I tell you a story, Dr. Friedman?” Luisa asked. When Alex stopped in surprise, she went on, “A man got home from work all red and breathing hard and his wife asked him what was going on. ‘I ran home behind the bus and saved a dollar today!’ the man said. His wife said, ‘Why didn’t you run home behind a taxi and save \$20?’”

Alex’s quizzical expression didn’t change. “I guess it depends how you tell it,” Luisa remarked. “The point is, we can’t really know how much the software can save us till we try it out. And then it’s too late.”

“That’s exactly why we’re going through this process,” Alex objected. “These guys are experts! With the information they need, they’ll be able to help us determine the ROI of making the changes they

recommend. It’s not just about saving money. I think we’ve already seen cases in which improving our practice has also increased revenue and even productivity. All of that is included in the idea of return on investment, and we just don’t have the knowledge to take all of those factors into account. We only have experience of our own practice; getting some help from people who have broader knowledge in this area is smart.”

“I just think it’s dangerous to share that much information,” Luisa said stubbornly.

“We haven’t been able to do the calculations ourselves,” Alex pointed out. “It’s not like the difference between a bus and a taxi. It’s more complex than that.”

Luisa sniffed.

“This is not a criticism of your management of the office, Luisa. I know you have it under control. I also know that knowledge has value. Doing this Dream Practice Analysis could be a growth process for all of us—and it will let us make better decisions.”

“Yes, Dr. Friedman.”

Alex had to chuckle. It was impressive, how much additional meaning Luisa was able to put into those words.

“Trust me on this, okay?” he said. “I think we’ll get a good return



on our investment of time and attention, no matter what decision we end up making.”

Luisa looked up. “You’re probably right about that. After all, knowledge is power. If you’ll get me the list of information we need, I’ll start on it this afternoon.”

Can Dr. Friedman gain practical knowledge from a Dream Practice Analysis?

The Forest for the Trees

“Dr. Friedman?” Luisa spoke softly from the door to Alex’s office.

He looked up from the documentation he was working on. It was unusual for his office manager to come to his door. She usually used the intercom. “How can I help?” he asked.

“I just wanted to say—” Luisa hesitated. “Well, just that the Dream Practice Analysis was very useful. I know I wasn’t as cooperative about it as I could have been.”

Alex remembered just how cooperative Luisa had been and struggled not to laugh.

“What did you find helpful?” he asked instead.

“First, I see what you mean now about ROI vs. expense. I really was thinking in terms of reducing costs, not in terms of investments in the practice. I can see that making investments makes sense when the return is going to be positive, and also that you have to run the numbers before you can tell.”

Alex nodded. That had definitely been a useful part of the process for him, too.

“When we shared our practice stats—and you know I didn’t want to do that—”

“I remember,” said Alex. He and Luisa had gone through several rounds of discussions on that point.

“Well, seeing how they stacked up against the typical numbers for the industry and for our products was very interesting.” Luisa considered. “Inspiring, even. I think we might all scale up our goals after that conversation. I also see why they needed those numbers. I really wasn’t expecting a plan that was tailored to our needs, but they couldn’t have put together something like that without having our information.”

Alex nodded again. That was very true. It was one thing to discuss generalities and another to see just how his practice might be affected. Looking at the metrics that would make the most difference for their particular needs had been an eye opener for him, too.

“I liked the way they talked about the opportunities and the guarantees, too,” Luisa continued. “I think sometimes I get

so focused on the day-to-day things like trimming costs by pennies or making some process a tiny bit more efficient... It’s like that saying about not seeing the forest for the trees.”

“I hope,” said Alex, “that you know how much I appreciate your attention to detail. We wouldn’t be the great practice we are today if it weren’t for you.”

“Thank you, Dr. Friedman.” Luisa’s smile returned. “We are a great practice. Now we’ll head on toward becoming a dream practice.”

Is Dr. Friedman’s office manager now ready to see the forest?





The Experts Respond

Michelle Corrigan is a dedicated medical practice management veteran with a goal of helping providers become accomplished practice owners and business people. Michelle is passionate about working together with providers to determine their practice needs and figure out process, staffing, and technology solutions.

For a mental health practice, as with any kind of medical business, there's an obvious return on investment: patient care. The reward of seeing a patient improve makes it worth the time spent working with them. The desire to help people is why many therapists, such as Dr. Friedman, got into the business in the first place. But ultimately, the realization has to sink in that Alex's practice is, in fact, a business, with expenses and bills to be paid. Quality care can only go so far in keeping the lights on. Without a sound business plan and budget, continued success becomes an elusive goal.

A Dream Practice Analysis helps make that goal a little more tangible, putting specific numbers into play. For Dr. Friedman, working with the ClinicMind team is an important part of finding exactly what his practice is capable of. And as he points out to Luisa, it's not just about saving money. Practice management software helps increase revenue and productivity, both of which have a positive impact on the bottom line.

Luisa's objections are valid on the small stage, but pale in comparison to the big picture possibilities. The Dream Practice Analysis is a specialized, personalized report that is unique to each individual practice. By allowing his practice to be part of the process, Dr. Friedman

is making a positive move, and finding all the ways that they can improve, changes they can make to better serve their patients—all while creating an efficient, effective office that's capable of growing and succeeding, long-term.

Wendy Thorington brings 5 years experience of Coding certification, and 21 years experience in Practice Management. Wendy excels in identifying billing patterns, processing errors and/or system issues that inhabit the final adjudication of claims. Wendy continues to implement new billing validations as payers dictate their billing policies.

The Internet can be an exceptional means of reaching prospective clients, but only if those efforts are concentrated in the right areas. It doesn't sound like Dr. Friedman really has much of an idea of just what needs to be done, but he at least is receptive to the idea of getting onboard. That's a start. And Internet marketing, like any kind of marketing effort, starts with client buy-in.

When he meets with a professional from a marketing firm, he's sure to learn about social media and where to advertise, but also about more advanced techniques, such as retargeting. These are all means of not only generating new leads, but continuing to deliver your message, even after the person leaves your website. But even before that, Alex needs to determine what his message is. "Open for Business" is not a message; he needs to explain to people seeking treatment just why he's the therapist they should see.

As with any endeavor, it can be said that "there's no such thing as a sure thing." There are plenty of proven methodologies for Internet success. Blueprints people have followed in building their business online. And

Alex could simply follow the playbook and appreciate the results. But there are no guarantees. For a small business, like Dr. Friedman's practice, with a localized audience, it requires a different kind of effort. That's why it can be extremely beneficial to work with a specialist, such as TherapyEverywhere, that works specifically with mental health practices to help them understand the landscape—and stake a claim to their little corner of the Web.

What Would You Do?

Some advice from the Clinic Mind community

Alex said it right, if you don't understand ROI you won't be able to keep your doors open and continue to help those patients you love to help so much. Completing a Dream Practice Analysis is painless and in the end will lead you down the road to happiness.

—Josh Wolf

If I owned a Mental Health Practice I would want an expert to help determine where we are right now with real numbers and then where we could be in 5 or 10 years down the road if we became more efficient. Ideally the expert would come up with a plan to help my Practice implement the improvements and help us get there.

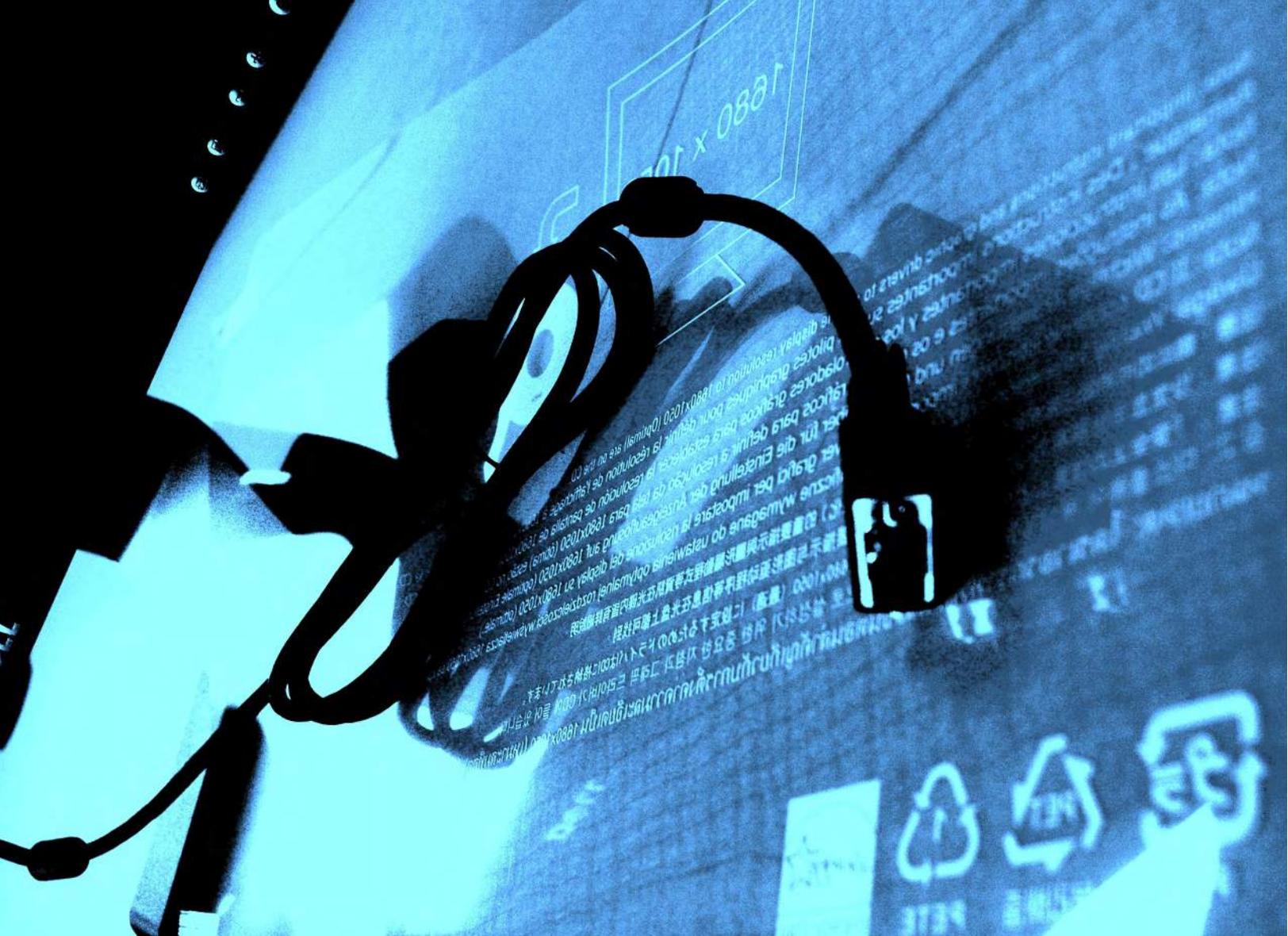
—George Konold

"There is no comparison between that which is lost by not succeeding and that which is lost by not trying" Francis Bacon. Luisa needs to realize that Dr. Friedman is trying to succeed by adding tools that will improve and grow his practice. Collecting the required data to have a Dream Practice Analysis done is a positive investment of her time.

—Naomi Perez

As much as practice owners generally don't want to think about numbers—with the possible exception of revenue and accounts receivable—sometimes it's a necessary evil. Fortunately, the Dream Practice Analysis makes it possible to understand and appreciate the data, so they can act accordingly.

—David



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