Dental Practice Development:

The Importance of a Strong Team in Landlord Build-Outs for Dental Offices



When you lease a space for your new dental practice, it typically marks the beginning of a complex design and construction project. While some dentists opt to manage the build-out themselves with a team that includes a consultant or project manager, dental real estate agent, general contractor, and various vendors (architecture, interior design, dental equipment suppliers, IT, and cabinetry), in some cases, the landlord offers to handle the construction themselves.

This can be a viable option, particularly when the landlord covers some of the costs. However, before committing, it's important to carefully assess both the opportunities and potential risks involved in this approach.

About Masserano Practice Design & Development

At Masserano Practice Design & Development and Align, we specialize in helping dental professionals build practices that are efficient, resilient, and designed for long-term success. From real estate strategy and architectural planning to equipment integration and operational workflows, we bring decades of experience guiding doctors through every phase of their practice journey - including how to prepare for and respond to the unexpected.

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Understanding the Landlord Build-Out Option

In about 25% of dental lease arrangements in our area, landlords offer—or sometimes require—that they oversee the construction or renovation of the space using their own team. On the surface, this may appear to simplify the process, as it saves the dentist from having to source and manage multiple contractors. Additionally, the landlord may offer financial incentives that reduce the tenant's share of the construction costs.

However, dental office build-outs require specialized knowledge that general contractors, particularly those without experience in healthcare or dental environments, may not possess. This can lead to longer timelines, increased oversight, and a final result that may not fully align with the practice's needs. It's essential that dentists approach these offers with a thorough understanding of the unique challenges posed by dental office construction and the potential benefits of assembling a skilled, cohesive team to guide the project.



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The Benefits of an Experienced Team

A well-coordinated team can greatly influence the success of a landlord-led build-out. Even when the landlord is handling the construction, the dentist still plays a critical role in ensuring that the final space meets both functional and regulatory requirements. A team of experienced professionals—including consultants, dental real estate brokers, architects, interior designers, and dental-specific contractors—can help safeguard the project's outcome by providing detailed specifications and guiding the landlord's contractors throughout the process.

For instance, specialized dental equipment requires specific electrical and plumbing configurations. Properly designed cabinetry and millwork ensure that sterile environments are maintained, and the layout of the office directly affects patient flow and operational efficiency. These elements need to be addressed early in the planning phase, and having a knowledgeable team advocate for your needs ensures that your vision for the practice will be realized.



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Proactive Negotiation: Securing Favorable Terms

One advantage of engaging an experienced team early in the process is the opportunity for the dentist's consultant and dental real estate broker to negotiate both the lease and the construction terms simultaneously. By providing architectural drawings and detailed specifications upfront, you can secure more favorable financial terms with your landlord before committing to the space.

This proactive approach allows you to negotiate construction costs and timelines before signing the lease, reducing the risk of cost overruns or delays. It also enables you to direct savings toward essential, income-generating equipment that will contribute to the growth of your practice. Working closely with a team that understands both the financial and construction aspects of the project is critical to ensuring that the overall budget is aligned with your long-term goals.



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Mitigating Delays and Unexpected Costs

A common concern during any construction project is the risk of delays, especially when the dentist is required to start paying rent before the practice is operational. This can be particularly problematic when working with a landlord's contractor, who may not have the experience necessary to efficiently complete a dental-specific build-out.

By engaging a team with dental construction expertise, you can help mitigate these risks starting from the negotiation of the right lease terms that properly accommodate this process. The team will oversee the project, ensuring that the landlord's contractors adhere to agreed-upon timelines and specifications, and that the project progresses smoothly. This oversight is crucial in preventing costly delays and ensuring that the practice opens its doors on schedule.



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The Importance of Specialization

While landlords may have experience managing general construction projects, building a dental office requires a deeper level of specialization. General contractors may not fully understand the intricate details of designing a functional, regulatory-compliant dental space. From low-voltage wiring for imaging equipment to cabinetry designed for efficient sterilization, the needs of a dental office differ significantly from those of other commercial spaces.

Therefore, it is essential that the project be guided by a team with expertise in dental office construction and design. Importantly, this team should be led by someone who understands real estate and lease arrangements, the needs of the landlord, and who can serve as the "orchestra conductor" for both the dentist's and the landlord's teams. When working with a landlord's contractor who will have less experience in building dental offices, the project may likely take longer than the landlord realizes and will require more oversight by the dentist's team than one managed by a general contractor experienced in dental office construction.

That said, if properly coached and managed by the dentist's team, landlords and their chosen contractors often go the extra mile to address challenges head-on, knowing they will maintain a long-term relationship with the tenant after construction is complete.

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A Collaborative Approach

In many cases, landlords are motivated to complete the build-out as efficiently as possible so they can start collecting rent. While third-party contractors may need to profit from the construction itself, landlords are more focused on getting their tenants operational quickly. This can create opportunities for dentists who approach the process with the right team.

When properly managed, a landlord-involved build-out can offer cost savings and a reasonably smooth path to opening day. However, the project's success often hinges on the dentist's ability to assemble and lead a team that understands both the construction and business aspects of dental practice development. A strong team ensures that the space meets the practice's specific needs, adheres to strict timelines, and avoids common pitfalls that can lead to cost overruns or operational inefficiencies.



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Conclusion

The decision to let your landlord oversee the build-out of your dental office is one that requires careful consideration. While the financial incentives may be appealing, the specialized nature of dental office construction demands a team that can provide the necessary expertise and oversight. By assembling a well-coordinated team of professionals—dental real estate agent, project manager and consultant, architects, contractors, interior designers, and dental equipment specialists—you can ensure that your new space is not only functional and compliant but also designed to support the long-term success of your practice.

Masserano Practice Design & Development, Align Healthcare Real Estate, and Align Healthcare Practices specialize in guiding dentists through the complexities of building out new office spaces, whether the project is managed by the dentist or the landlord. Our team is well-versed in the unique needs of dental practices and can help you navigate the process from lease negotiation to the final stages of construction.

Check out some of our recent projects that were landlord build outs orchestrated by us!



Montclair New Jersey - Fresh Pediatric Dentistry



Millburn New Jersey- Sweet Tooth Pediatric Denitstry



Trumbull CT - Willow Tree Pediatric Dentistry

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