Inside High-Earning Practices 2025 Edition

Trends, Technologies, and Tactics from Dentistry's Top Earners

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Executive Summary

Dentistry has never offered more paths to success — or more variables to consider. From solo practice ownership to DSO affiliation, the business of dentistry is evolving rapidly. But what's working? How do income, patient volume, technology investment, and career stage intersect? And which strategies move the needle?

To explore these questions, we surveyed more than 500 U.S. general dentists to gain insight into their roles, practice settings, earnings, career stages, technology preferences, and other aspects of their practice. The results reveal clear trends that distinguish high earners from their peers, offering insight into what it takes to thrive in today's competitive dental landscape.

Our research suggests that dentists earning over $400,000 per year are not just lucky. They are making different choices about technology, staffing, acquiring patients, and managing their practices. Those earning over $700,000 built systems that allow them to work smarter, not harder, taking more time off while maintaining higher patient volumes and revenue.

This report offers actionable insights to help dental professionals elevate practice performance.

Who Are the High Earners?

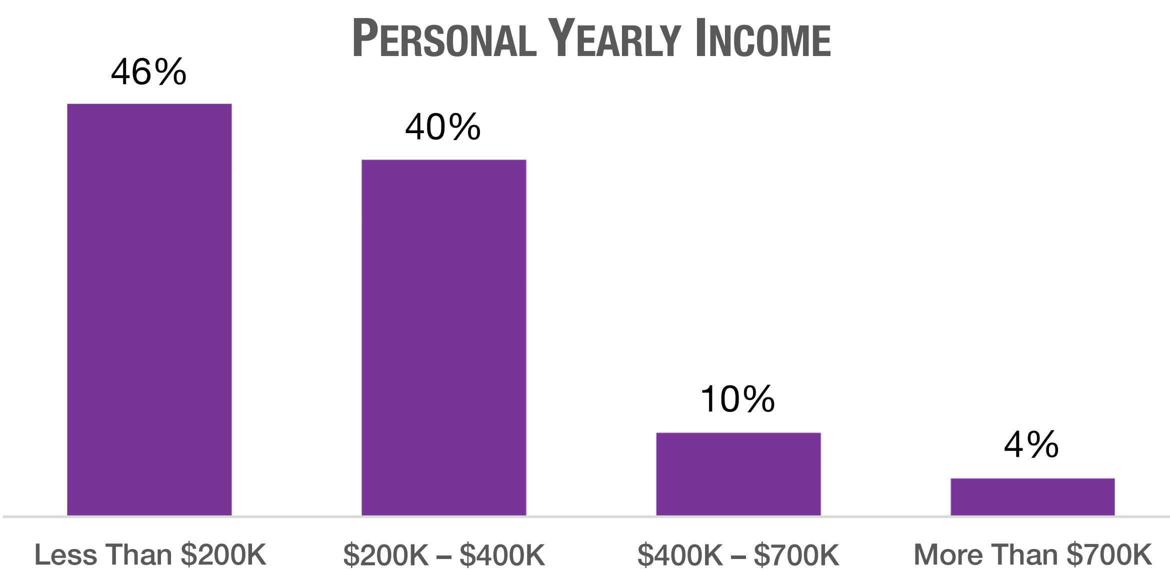
Key Takeaways:

- 14% of dentists make more than $400,000/year and are what we classify as "high earning"
- High-earning dentists are overwhelmingly practice owners or partners
- DSO dentists are significantly less likely to be high earners

Defining Top Performers in Modern Dentistry

Before exploring what separates top performers, we need to establish clear definitions. Based on the results of our survey, we grouped dentists and practices into distinct earning tiers:

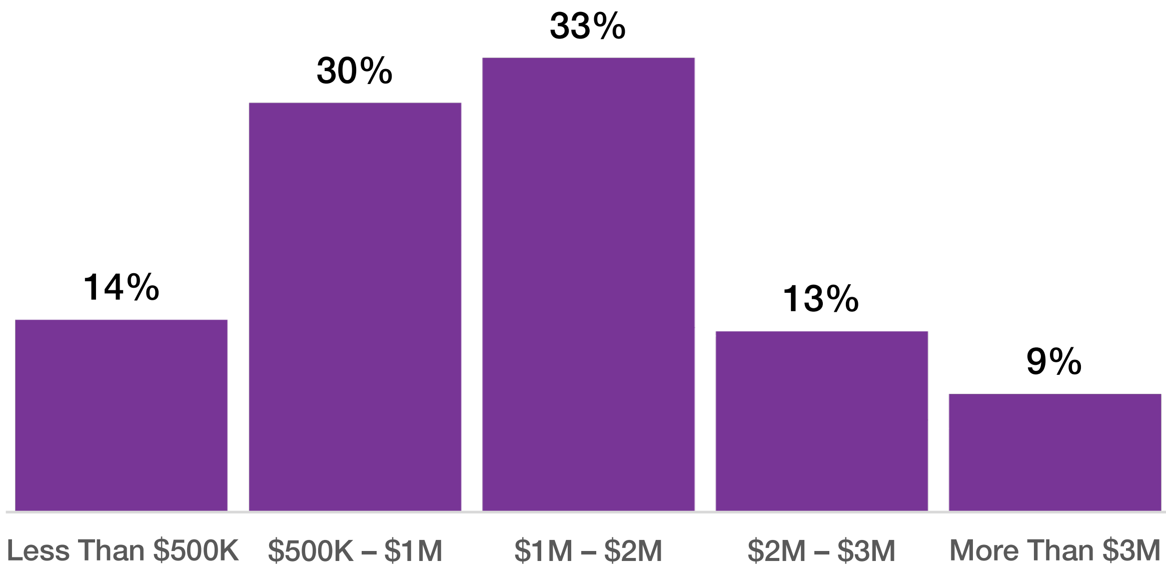
- **High-Earning Dentists: Personal income > $400,000/year**
- **Very High-Earning Dentists: Personal income > $700,000/year**



Our research indicates that approximately 14% of dentists fell into the "High-Earning" category, while "Very High-Earning" dentists comprise the top 4%.

- **High-Revenue Practices: Annual revenue > $2M**
- **Very High-Revenue Practices: Annual revenue > $3M**

ANNUAL PRACTICE REVENUE



We found that the top 22% of practices are in our “High-Revenue” category, and the top 9% of practices can be classified as “Very High-Revenue.”

The Ownership Advantage

Large group models and corporate ownership are becoming increasingly prominent. However, the data indicate a clear correlation between owning a practice and higher earning potential.

The ownership advantage becomes even more pronounced when examining specific practice roles. Solo practice owners represent more than half of high-earning dentists and just one-third of dentists in lower income tiers. Dentists who share practice ownership as partners or co-owners make up 27.8% of the high earners. Associates comprise just 10.1%. The implications are clear: ownership provides the autonomy to make investments, implement systems, and pursue strategies that employee dentists don’t have. While practice ownership is the most reliable path to significant income, it comes with additional business responsibilities and financial risks, which is why many dentists choose to work for DSOs.

Annual Income by Practice Role

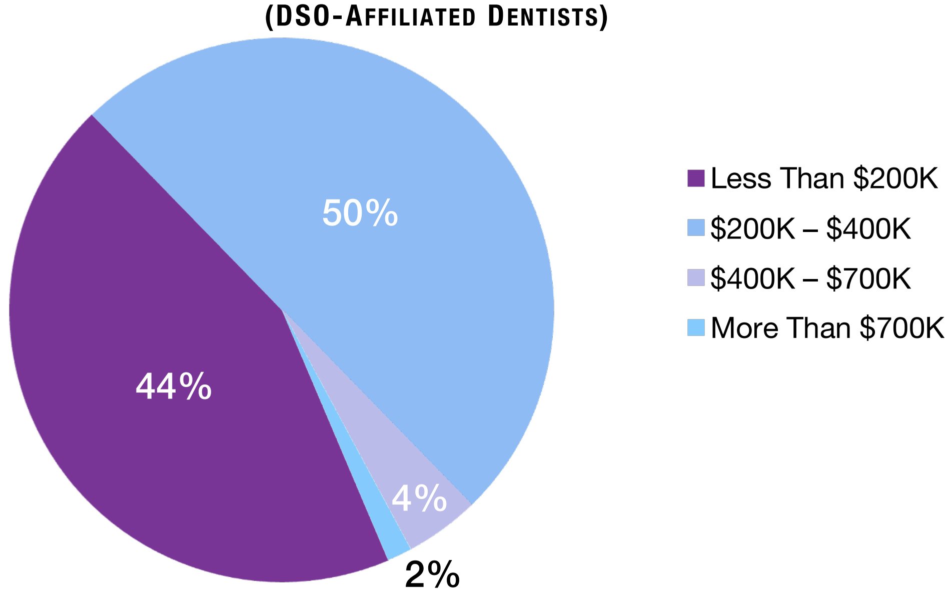
	Other Dentists		High-Earning Dentists	
Salary Range	Less Than $200K	$200K – $400K	$400K – $700K	More Than $700K
Solo Owner	38.9%	40.9%	11.3%	8.9%
Partner / Co-Owner	15.9%	52.2%	29.0%	2.9%
Associate (Employee)	58.1%	38.1%	3.3%	0.5%
Contractor / Locum	79.2%	16.7%	4.2%	0.0%

The DSO Dilemma

Working as a dentist at a DSO removes some of those risks and responsibilities, but part of the tradeoff is that dentists affiliated with DSOs face distinct earning limitations. **Only 7% of DSO-affiliated respondents earn more than $400,000 annually, compared to 14% in solo or small group settings.**

Personal Yearly Income

(DSO-Affiliated Dentists)



However, this income trade-off may come with benefits in work-life balance, as DSO dentists report more consistent schedules and standardized work hours. They're most likely to work standard 31–40-hour weeks and least likely to work more than 40 hours weekly.

DSO-affiliated doctors are also 4x more likely to target a non-clinical role by age 50, suggesting that DSOs may be viewed as a steppingstone to other opportunities.

The Experience Factor

Earnings Vs. Career Stage				
	Other Dentists		High-Earning Dentists	
Salary Range	Less Than $200K	$200K – $400K	$400K – $700K	More Than $700K
New – Less Than 1 Year	75.7%	21.6%	2.7%	0.0%
Early – 1 to 5 Years	61.1%	35.7%	2.1%	1.1%
Mid – 6 to 10 Years	38.8%	50%	10.0%	1.2%
Experienced – 10 to 20 Years	41.7%	41.7%	10.7%	5.9%
Veteran – More Than 20 Years	40.3%	40.4%	12.6%	6.7%

Unsurprisingly, dentists tend to see their earnings increase as they gain experience. More than 75% of new dentists fall into the lowest earnings tier, but earnings begin to accelerate during the early career stage.

The most critical period for income growth is the mid-career stage, where dentists are approximately 4x more likely to become high earners. This stage likely represents milestones like:

- Achieving practice ownership
- Building referral networks
- Developing profitable clinical skills

Technology as a Practice and Career Growth Multiplier

Key Takeaways:

- Technology adoption correlates with higher earnings
- 3D Printing, CBCT, Digital Radiography, and Chairside Milling are more commonly used among high- and very high-earners

The High-Tech High Earner

One of the most compelling findings in our research is the strong correlation between technology adoption and high earnings. High-earning dentists aren't just early adopters—they understand how digital tools enhance their clinical capabilities and revenue potential.

The Big Four: 3D Printing, CBCT, Digital Radiography, and Chairside Milling

High-earning dentists demonstrate a clear preference for advanced technology, viewing it as both a clinical enhancement and a business investment. A few technologies stand out as particularly predictive of higher earnings.

	Technologies Very High-Income Dentists Are More Likely to Use	Technologies High-Income Dentists Are More Likely to Use
3D Printer	+70.8%	+42.8%
CBCT Machine	+38.1%	+35.2%
Digital Radiography	+25.3%	+22.0%
Chairside Milling System	+25.4%	+13.1%
Digital Impression System	-6.9%	+5.1%

3D Printing: High-earning dentists are 42.8% more likely to use 3D printing, with very high earners showing an even more dramatic 70.8% higher adoption rate.

CBCT Machines: The 35.2% higher adoption rate among high earners (38.1% for very high earners) reflects the diagnostic and treatment planning advantages of 3D imaging.

Digital Radiography: The 22% higher adoption rate among high earners suggests that even foundational digital technologies contribute to operational efficiency and patient experience improvements that translate to revenue gains.

Chairside Milling Systems: High-earning dentists have a 13.1% higher adoption rate of chairside milling systems. The number jumps to 25.4% for very high earners. This technology enables same-day crown delivery, eliminating temporary restorations and reducing patient visits.

The AI Opportunity Gap

Despite industry buzz around artificial intelligence (AI), overall AI adoption remains low across all income levels and practice settings. However, **high-income dentists are twice as likely to use treatment planning AI**, suggesting an early-adopter advantage that may expand as AI tools mature.

Staffing: Investment Strategy or Cost Center

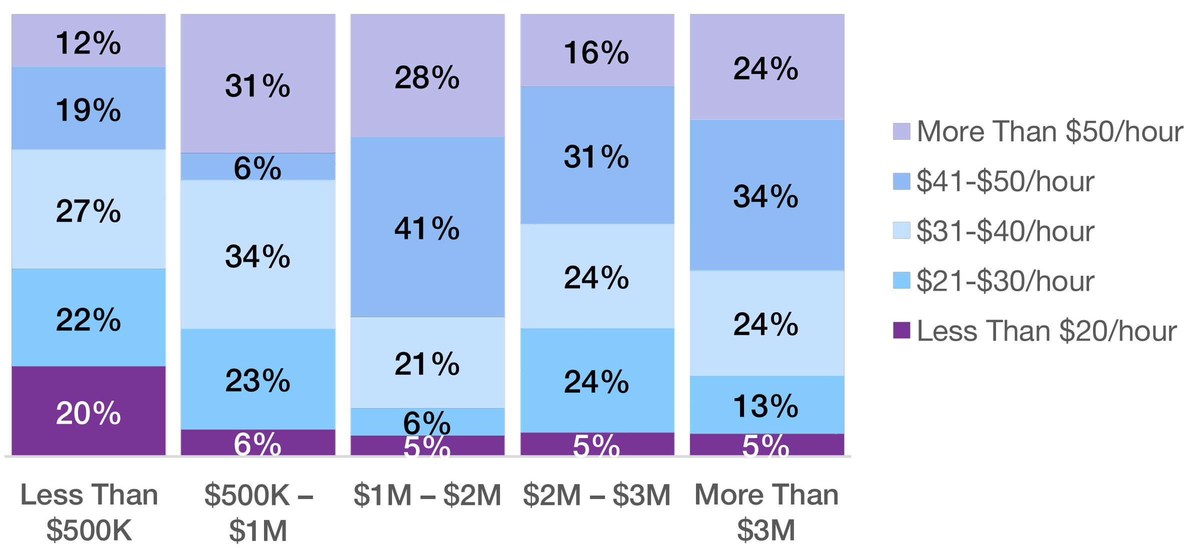
Key Takeaway:

- Paying above-median wages is strongly correlated with higher practice revenue

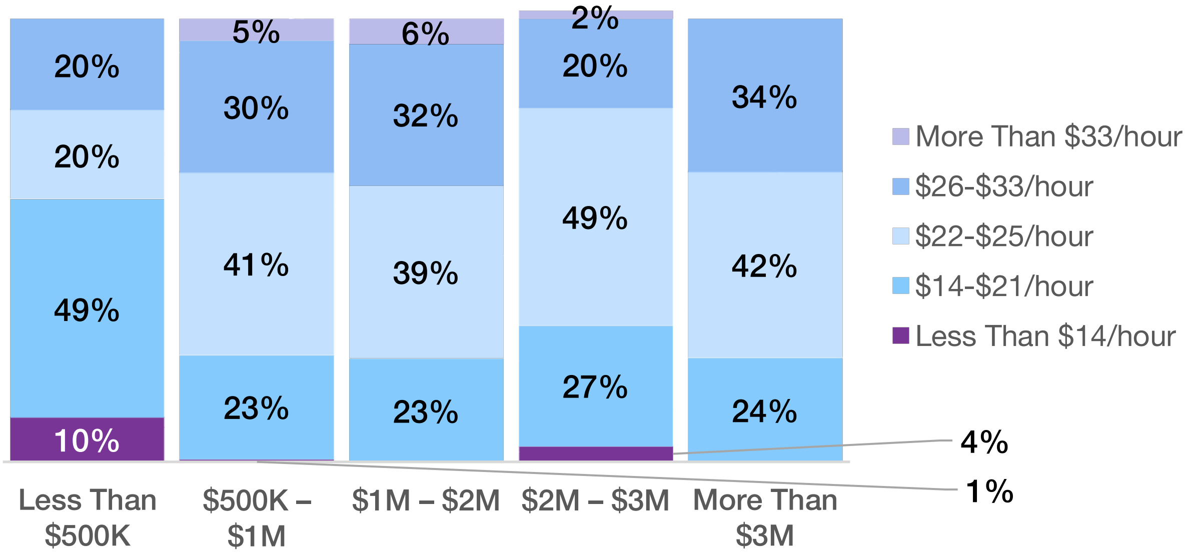
One of the most actionable findings in our research is the strong correlation between staff compensation and practice performance. High-revenue practices consistently pay above-median wages to both assistants and hygienists. **Top-earning practices (over $3 million) are 4x more likely to pay assistants more than $30/hour than practices earning less than $1 million.**

The data shows that this is a strategic investment. Practices paying higher wages experience better patient retention, suggesting that staff quality and satisfaction directly impact patient experience and loyalty.

HYGIENIST HOURLY WAGE BY PRACTICE REVENUE



ASSISTANT HOURLY WAGE BY PRACTICE REVENUE



Staff Retention Effect

Close to 60% of practices that pay hygienists more than $40/hour and assistants more than $22/hour report annual revenues exceeding $1 million. Conversely, 36% of practices paying hygienists $30/hour or less and assistants $21/hour or less earn under $500,000 annually.

This correlation likely exists because higher-paid staff typically deliver better patient experiences, develop deeper clinical skills, and stay at the practice longer. The retention benefits compound over time, as experienced staff require less training, make fewer errors, and contribute to a positive practice culture and increased efficiency.

The Hidden Costs of Cheap Labor

Very high earners understand this dynamic, paying more consistently in upper compensation tiers. This investment in staff quality aligns with their ability to maintain high patient volumes while taking more time off—a clear indicator of operational excellence.

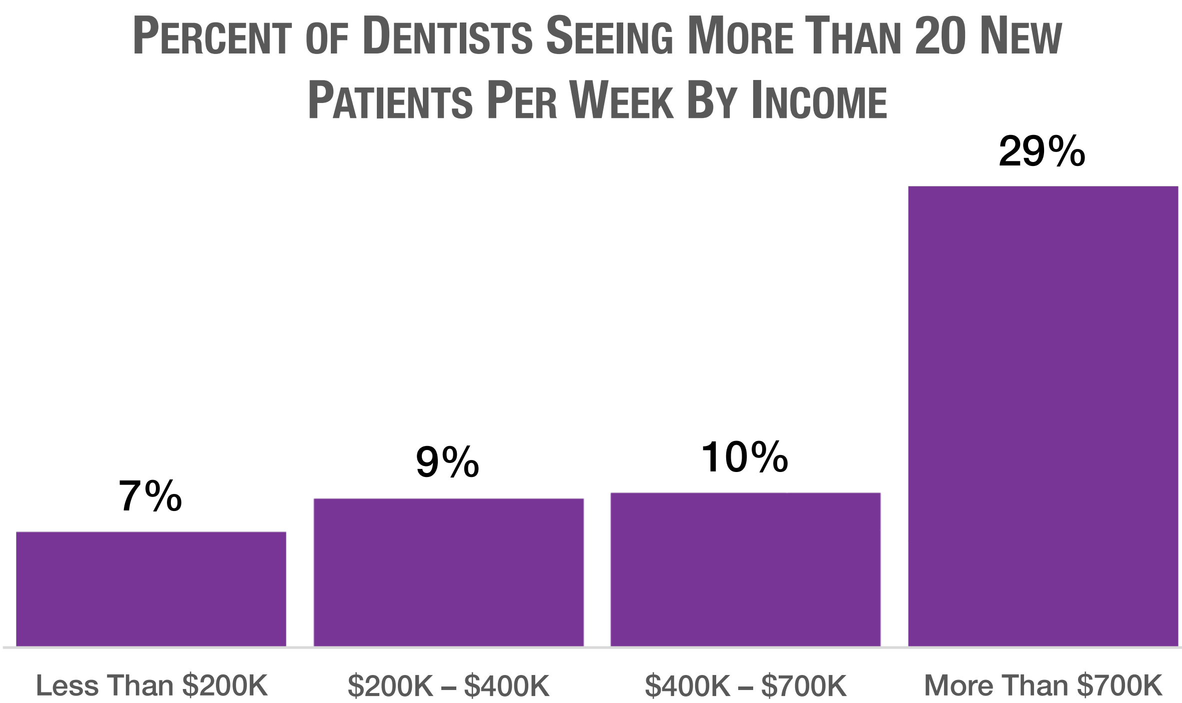
Patient Acquisition Insights

Key Takeaways:

- High-earning dentists see approximately 30% more new patients per week
- Referrals are the top method for acquiring new patients

New Patient Volume

Unsurprisingly, treating more patients leads to higher earnings; however, the data show that a steady flow of new patients is a key component of this connection.



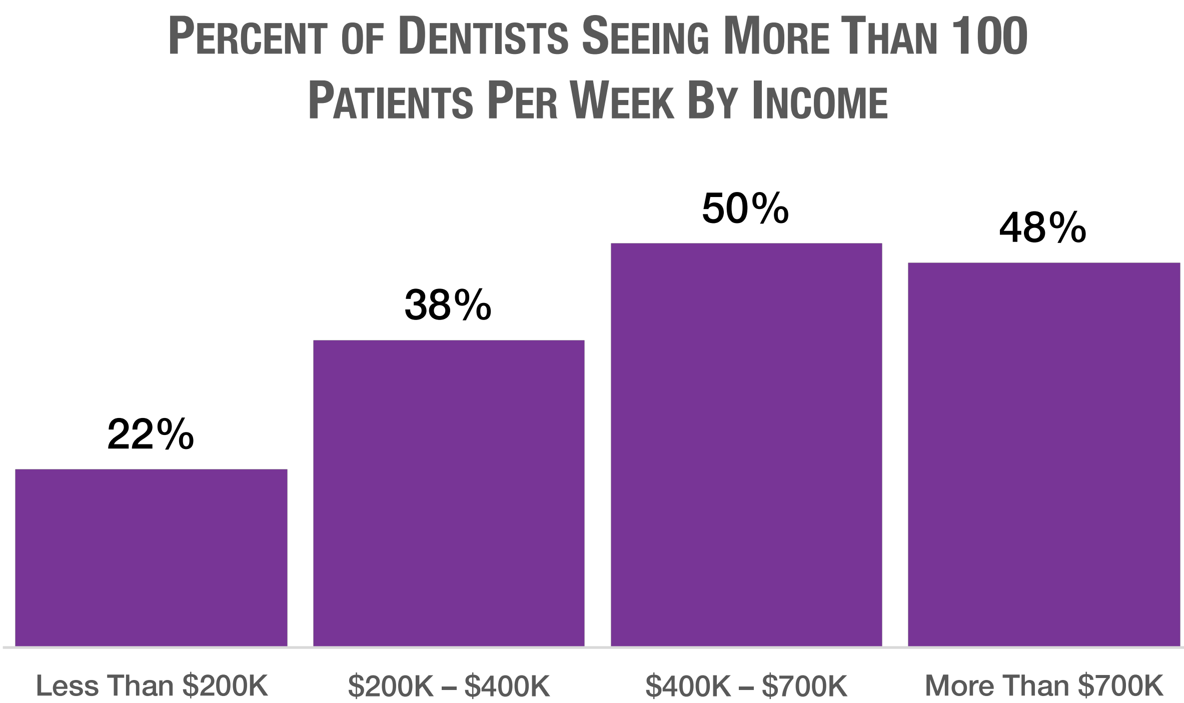
High-earning dentists average 10.6 new patients per week compared to 8.2 for other dentists. Furthermore, very high-earning dentists are 3x more likely to see more than 20 new patients per week than dentists earning between $200,000 and $700,000 per year, and they are nearly 4x more likely to see more than 20 new patients per week than dentists who earn less than $200,000 per year.

This higher new patient volume isn't accidental—it reflects systematic approaches to patient acquisition and retention that compound over time.

Total Patient Volume

These trends also play out for the total volume of patients a dentist treats in a week. **Dentists earning over $400,000 are more than** 2x **as likely to treat over 100 patients weekly**

compared to those earning under $200,000. Very high earners average 89 patients weekly versus 75 for others—a 14-patient/week difference that represents substantial revenue potential.

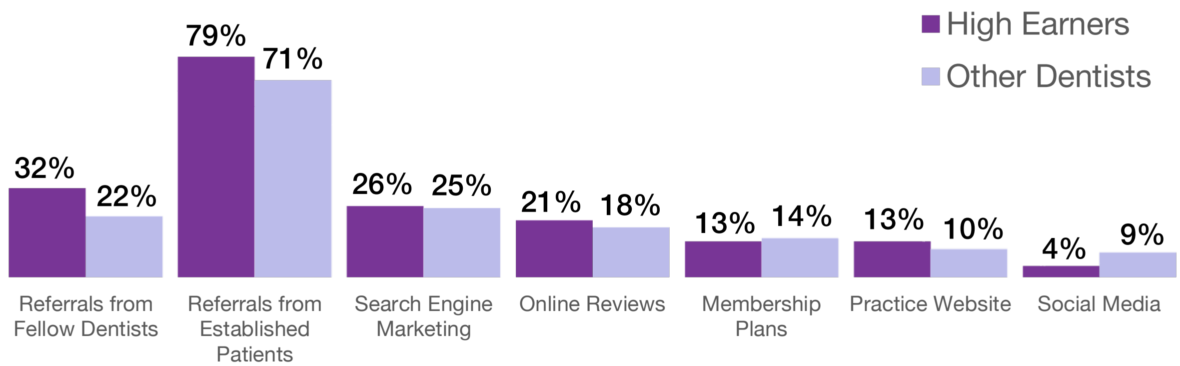


Top Patient Acquisition Strategies

Our research reveals distinct patterns in how high-earning dentists approach patient acquisition. While patient referrals remain the top strategy across all income levels, high earners leverage additional channels more effectively. They are 25% more likely to receive referrals from fellow practitioners and 30% more likely to successfully use online advertising to attract new patients.

The most telling difference, however, lies in strategic awareness. Lower-earning dentists are twice as likely to report that they don't know what drives their patient acquisition—a critical blind spot that limits their ability to scale effectively. **This finding underscores a fundamental principle: high-earning dentists don't just treat more patients; they understand exactly where those patients come from and can replicate their most successful acquisition channels.**

SUCCESSFUL NEW PATIENT ACQUISITION STRATEGIES HIGH-EARNING DENTISTS VS OTHER DENTISTS



Very high-earning dentists employ a distinctly different patient acquisition approach that prioritizes relationship-building over broad marketing tactics.

What They Do More:

- 58% more likely to cite their website as a top patient source
- 53% more likely to benefit from referrals from other dental practices
- 2.3x more likely to utilize online advertisements effectively

What They Do Less:

- Social media: 57% less likely to use
- Search engine marketing: 52% less likely to use
- Online reviews: 34% less likely to depend on
- Insurance membership/discount plans: 15% less likely to offer

Improving Income by Improving Case Acceptance

Key Takeaways:

- High earning dentists are 2x more likely to use digital smile design
- Effective value communication and structured treatment plans are key for improving case acceptance

High-income dentists don’t just see more patients—they focus on communication and visualization to close more cases by. Their success in getting patients to “yes” involves a combination of chairside presentation, technology, and help from their team.

The Digital Smile Design Difference

High-earning dentists are 106% more likely to use digital smile design than their lower-earning counterparts. This technology enables dentists to show patients exactly what their results will look like, dramatically improving case acceptance rates for cosmetic and restorative procedures.

The Front Desk Drive Revenue

High-earning dentists are 42% more likely to prioritize front desk training for effective value communication. This finding highlights the critical role of non-clinical staff in revenue generation. Well-trained front desk staff can effectively explain the value of treatment, address patients' financial concerns, and guide them through the decision-making process.

This investment in communication training extends beyond the front desk. High-earning dentists are 37% more likely to use structured treatment plans as a case acceptance strategy, suggesting they've developed systematic approaches to presenting complex treatments in ways that patients can understand and accept.

Operational Challenges: How Success and Structure Change Your Problems

Key Takeaways:

- Hiring new staff is the most cited challenge for high and very high-earners
- Patient acquisition and retention are more commonly cited as challenges for doctors in lower earning tiers

The challenges dentists face shift dramatically based on their income level and practice structure, revealing distinct operational profiles across different practice types.

More Money, Different Problems

High-earning dentists face fundamentally different problems from their peers. While doctors earning under $400K struggle with patient attraction and retention, high earners are more likely to report hiring challenges. This shift indicates that successful dentists have solved basic patient acquisition problems and now focus on scaling challenges like staff recruitment and management.

Very high earners ($700K+) report the fewest challenges overall, being 42% less likely to struggle with patient attraction and 44% less likely to face retention issues. Having built strong patient bases and operational systems, their primary concerns center on hiring and maintaining growth rather than survival.

PRACTICE CHALLENGES: VERY HIGH-EARNING DENTISTS VS. OTHERS

	Very High-Earning Dentists	Other Dentists
Patient Retention	8.3%	16.4%
Attracting New Patients	16.7%	30.1%
Hiring New Staff	33.3%	43.0%
Staff Retention	25.0%	28.5%
Implementing Technology	16.7%	20.7%

Practice Structure Determines Challenge Profile

Each practice structure faces distinct operational hurdles:

Solo Practices excel at staff retention, being 34% less likely to report retention difficulties than other settings. Their smaller scale allows for personalized management and flexible compensation decisions.

Small Group Practices occupy a strategic sweet spot for technology implementation, being 66% less likely to report tech challenges than larger practices. However, they're 17% more likely to struggle with hiring, possibly competing against DSO benefit packages without the same resources.

DSO Practices face unique patient acquisition challenges despite centralized marketing support, suggesting that local relationships and individual dentist reputation remain more important than standardized marketing approaches.

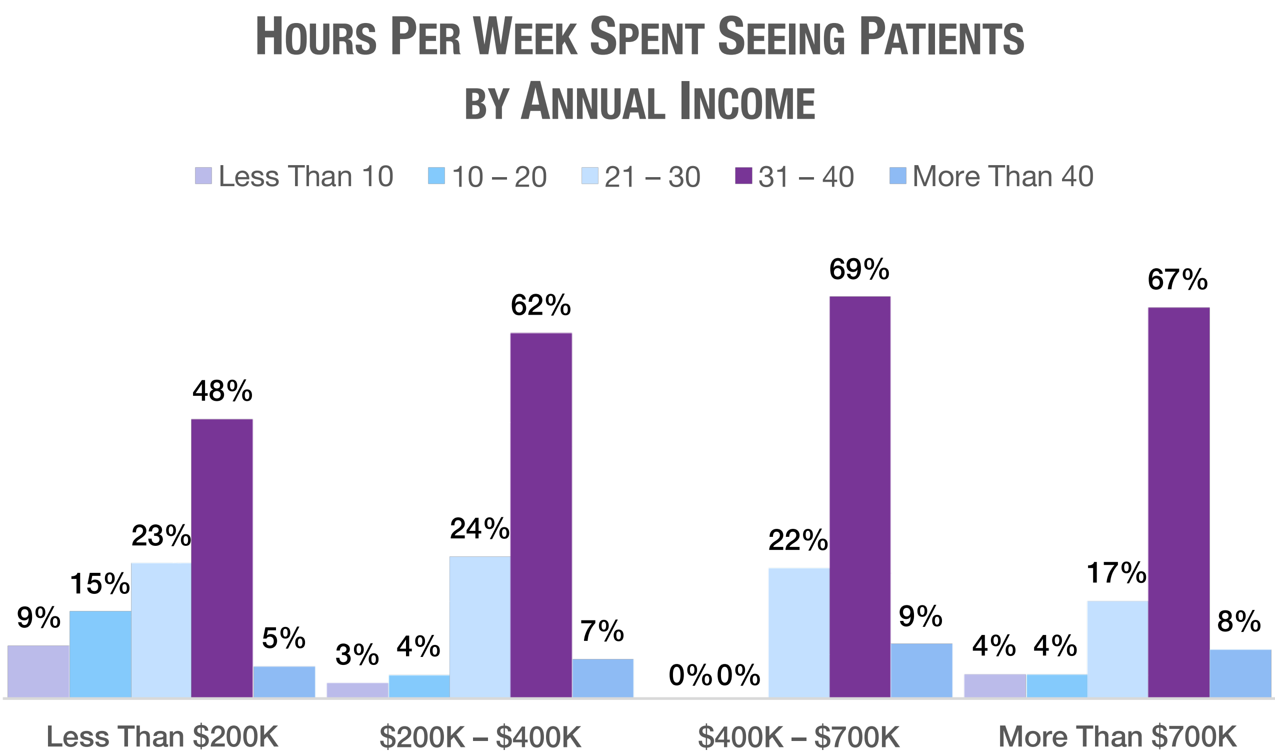
Finding the Right Work-Life Balance

Key Takeaways:

- High-earning dentists work slightly longer hours
- Very high-earning dentists take more time off and rarely take fewer than 10 days off per year
- DSO-affiliated dentists target moving into a non-clinical role much earlier than other dentists

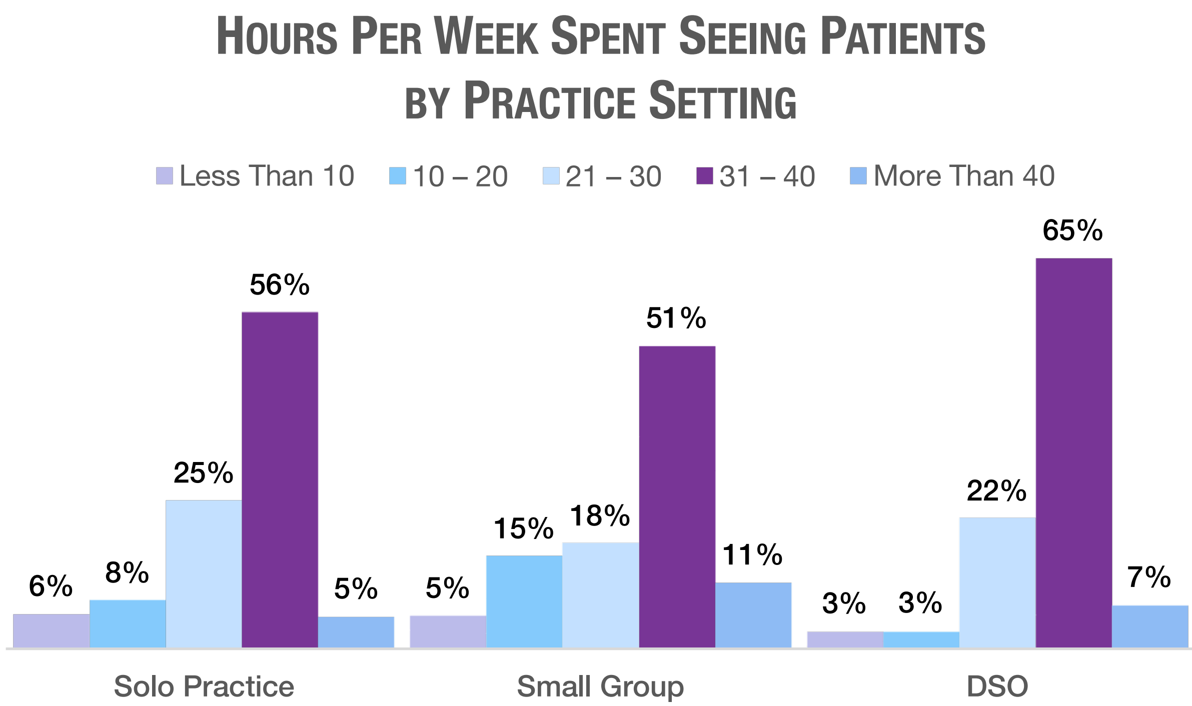
Strategic Time Management Leads to Efficiency

High-earning dentists work slightly longer hours than their peers. They report working approximately 10% more hours overall and are 44% more likely to work over 40 hours per week. However, this additional time investment generates disproportionate income returns, suggesting that high earners have found ways to make their additional hours more productive.



Practice Type Breakdown

Different practice structures create distinct time management profiles, revealing strategic trade-offs between control, predictability, and earning potential:



Small Group Practices: Maximum Intensity

Small group dentists are most likely to work over 40 hours weekly—more than twice as likely as solo practitioners. This intensity reflects the competitive pressures and growth demands of scaling practices, where dentists often work harder to establish their position and build patient bases.

Solo Practices: Maximum Control

Solo practitioners are least likely to work over 40 hours weekly, demonstrating the autonomy advantage of practice ownership.

DSO Practices: Maximum Predictability

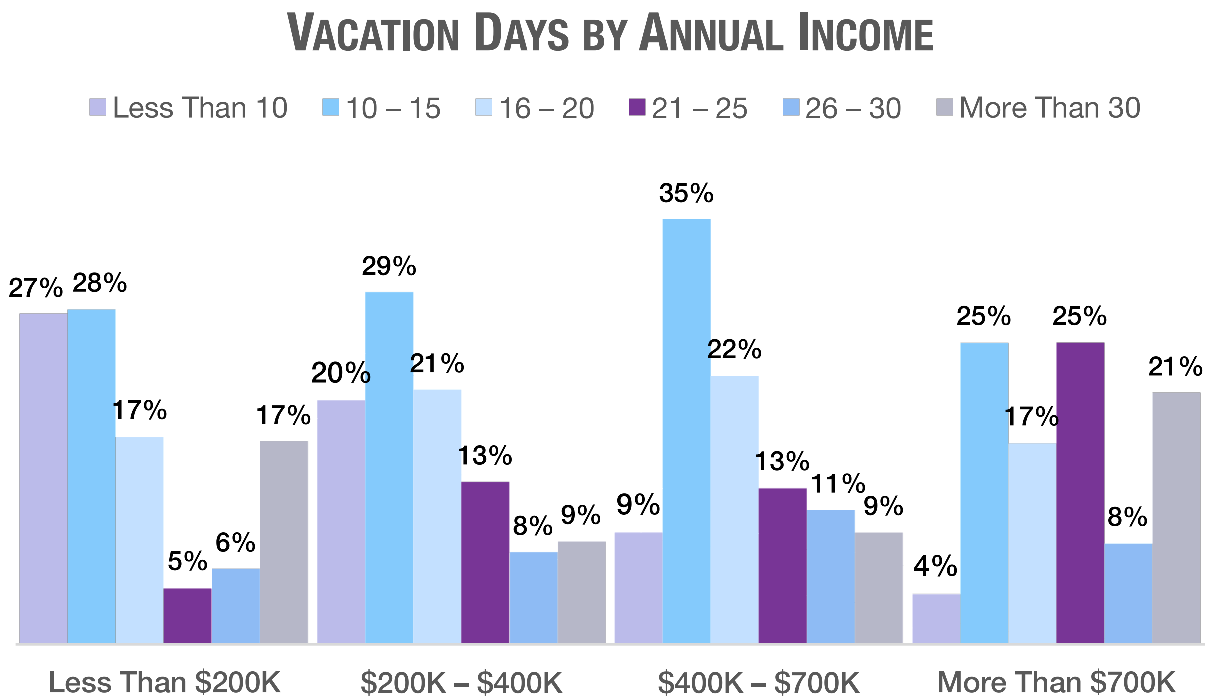
DSO dentists report the most consistent schedules, with the highest percentage working standard 31–40-hour weeks and the lowest percentage exceeding 40 hours. This predictability comes at a cost—they typically take fewer vacation days (16-20 annually) and have the lowest earning potential.

Vacation Days: Systems Enable Freedom

The most counterintuitive finding challenges conventional assumptions about success and time off. Very high earners take significantly more vacation time than their peers:

- Only 4% of $700K+ dentists take fewer than 10 days off annually, compared to 23% of others
- They're 63% more likely to take more than 20 days off per year
- Their most common vacation range is 21-25 days off versus an average of 17 for others

This pattern reveals efficient practice management. Very high earners have built teams, systems, and relationships that can sustain revenue during extended absences.



Retirement Planning: How Earnings Shape Exit Strategies

Income level significantly influences when dentists plan to step away from clinical practice. High-earning dentists typically target retirement between ages 56-60, while lower-earning dentists are more likely to plan to work beyond age 65.

ANNUAL INCOME BY EXIT STRATEGY

	Other Dentists		High-Earning Dentists	
Salary Range	Less Than $200K	$200K – $400K	$400K – $700K	More Than $700K
Move to Non-Clinical Role	33.20%	27.35%	11.11%	8.33%
Sell to DSO	5.08%	11.66%	16.67%	20.83%
Sell to Family Member	3.91%	4.04%	3.70%	4.17%
Sell to Associate	37.89%	49.33%	61.11%	54.17%
Shut Down and Walk Away	19.92%	7.62%	7.41%	12.5%

The DSO Early Exit Strategy

DSO dentists show the most aggressive retirement timelines despite having lower average earnings. A quarter of DSO dentists plan to retire before age 55, and they're four times more likely than other practice types to either retire or transition to non-clinical roles before age 50.

This pattern suggests DSO dentists may be pursuing different wealth-building strategies—potentially using their employment period to develop skills, build savings, or prepare for entrepreneurial ventures outside traditional dental practice. The predictable income and reduced business management responsibilities of DSO employment may also enable more aggressive financial planning for early career transitions.

Conclusion: The Blueprint for High-Earning Success

High-earning dentists aren't just lucky—they've made fundamentally different choices that create compounding competitive advantages. Our research proves that the path to exceptional earnings lies in working smarter through strategic investments in ownership, technology, staff, and operational systems.

Picture of a High-Earning Dentist

Dentists who earn more than $400,000 per year are more likely to:

- $ Be practice owners
- $ Have 10+ years of experience
- $ Run high-revenue practices
- $ Invest in advanced technology
- $ Work slightly longer hours
- $ Compensate staff above the median range
- $ Leverage case acceptance strategies like digital smile design and front-desk training
- $ Devote time to building a reputation and online presence
- $ Be seeing continued growth in income

Five Strategic Pillars of High-Earning Dentists

1. Technology as a Growth Multiplier

High earners consistently invest in advanced imaging, 3D printing, and chairside production tools. They view technology not as an expense but as a capability multiplier that enables higher-value procedures and improved patient outcomes.

2. Communication as a Revenue Engine

Standardized case presentations, digital smile design, and optimized front desk training create measurable increases in case acceptance and patient satisfaction. High earners treat communication skills as core clinical competencies.

3. Strategic Staff Investment

Top practices pay assistants and hygienists above market rates, understanding that staff quality directly impacts patient experience, retention, and practice efficiency. They treat compensation as investment in operational excellence, not overhead.

4. Referral-Driven Growth

While growing practices rely on digital marketing, established high earners transition to referral-based acquisition. They build professional networks and foster patient loyalty, generating higher-quality leads with better treatment acceptance.

5. Systems That Scale

Very high earners have built practices that generate revenue through operational excellence, enabling them to work strategically while taking more vacation time. Their practices succeed through systems, not just personal effort.

The opportunity exists for any motivated dentist willing to implement these proven strategies. The question isn't whether they work—the data confirms they do. The question is whether you're ready to begin.