

# Changing the Face of Dentistry

Justin Ash, CEO of Oasis Healthcare, explains how the business is looking to redefine the service delivery model for dentistry

It's all smiles for Justin Ash, CEO of Oasis Healthcare, as the company expands rapidly across the UK.

Here, Justin explains how the strategy for organic and acquisitive growth is underpinned by the need to provide consumers with what they want: price transparency, greater flexibility in opening hours and digital services.

## What's driven Oasis' growth in the past 18 months?

We're going through quite a dramatic growth phase. During 2014, we bought 110 new practices on top of the existing 200 we had before, which we've been

busy integrating. It's gone very well. In 2015 we bought an additional 40 sites.

We're going to exceed £300 million in revenue in 2015, which is a dramatic growth on prior years.

But if you put us together with all of the other groups in the UK, we've only got about 15 per cent of the market, so there's lots of consolidation still to do and dentistry is a strong growth market at the moment.

We've also been investing heavily across our businesses, including rebranding and creating the first UK national TV campaign for dentistry.

## What does your TV and digital campaign involve?

The world of healthcare is focusing on consumer engagement and going digital; we see a lot of potential for recruiting patients, building relationships and informing them.

We've only just started using TV and digital to grow the business. We've introduced online booking in the last 12 months, which is proving increasingly popular.

Eighty-five per cent of the response from our television advertising initially goes via online; we had a call centre >



but as so much traffic went online we didn't continue with it.

### Do you have plans to expand internationally?

We entered the Republic of Ireland in 2014 and are opening four or five new-builds there a year.

Dentistry is not dissimilar across the world and branded dentistry is a growing global trend, so I'm certain at some point we'll go international but we'll do that when we've consolidated all of the opportunities we have in the UK. At the moment there's still plenty of room for acquisitive and organic growth.

### Does such rapid growth present difficulties for the business?

Our biggest challenge is coping with growth while keeping strategically focused. We've done a pretty good job at it. We're being disciplined about the acquisitions that we buy and their pricing. We're only going for opportunities that we think we can make improvements to and that fit with our own standards and strategic goals.

### You're private equity-backed, but do you plan to go public?

I think we would be a good public company because of our mixed private and public income streams, but we haven't got plans to do that within the immediate future at least.

### How important is it to have a consumer focus to your operations?

Very. We did research to find out what people wanted from dentistry

and obviously quality of care is vital, but the two things that matter most to them after that are accessibility and transparent pricing.

There's been quite a lot of pressure on the dentistry market for transparent pricing so we offer very clear, national, single price points.

If you walk into any of our practices our prices are clearly displayed; you could not fail to see how much you're going to be charged. We also display our customer ratings on the wall every month.

Accessibility means extended opening and the ability to book online rather than having to call the practice. A lot of our growth has come from all of our practices having 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM opening times, Monday to Thursdays, and a growing number are open at the weekend. We're going to keep pushing that.

### Is this consumer-led strategy challenging the market?

Part of the Chancellor's statement says the government wants dentistry to offer a better deal for patients and we completely agree; that's why we're here.

The better deal for patients is to go at a time that suits them, not the practice or dentist; to know how much they're going to be charged, be it private or NHS; to have a wide range of treatments, and to have clear information about the treatments, which is where the website and online booking come in.

I think the reason why we're growing faster than the market is because we've

led on those things. The consumer feedback is very positive. It will challenge the market to consider these things and it's the last market in the highstreet healthcare sector to do so; pharmacists and opticians have already been through this journey.

While the trend in healthcare is to offer benefits of scale through things like online and digital – it remains critical to also offer a very personal, local interaction, supported by a national brand that you can trust.

We put a lot of effort into building the feel of a local practice, for example each reception has pictures of the local community and we reach out to schools and services to meet local needs.

I think that combination is how healthcare works best. ■



**Justin Ash**  
CEO  
Oasis Healthcare

Justin joined Oasis in 2008 as CEO, shortly after it de-listed in 2007. Since then, Oasis has grown into the UK's first national branded dentistry provider.

In 2013, Justin led the sale of Oasis from Duke Street Capital to Bridgepoint at a value of £185m, which highlighted its successful growth story.

Oasis acquired Smiles Dental and Apex Dental Care in 2014

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