

High Tech with the Human Touch



by Benjamin Lund, Editor, *Dentaltown Magazine*

In a world of increasing automation (even within its own walls), Burbank Dental Laboratory strives to maintain a human connection with its clients – be it through artistry of its lab technicians, or its personalized customer service

Burbank Dental Laboratory (Burbank, California) is all about maintaining personal connections with its clients. The lab, like the rest of its peers, has implemented various automated processes to ensure product consistency time after time, yet its staff of lab technicians continues to add unique characterizations increasing the aesthetic value of each restoration. Burbank is ever positioning itself to increase its national market share, yet it strives to stay close to its personal customer care roots. *Dentaltown Magazine* interviewed Burbank's Vice President of Marketing David French to learn more about the lab and its drive to keep communication and service at the forefront.

Please give me a brief history of Burbank. When did it start? How did it grow? What are the key products Burbank produces?

French: Burbank Dental Laboratory was founded by the Sedler family in 1979, shortly after they immigrated from the former Soviet Union. It was primarily a local laboratory servicing the immediate area within 20 miles of Burbank, California. In 1985, son Tony Sedler took over the lab and began to take the laboratory on a journey of modernization and expansion into a national laboratory. Tony added new technology as it became available, accelerating over the past few years (as has the technology boom in dentistry).

We are a full-service dental lab team member/partner in every sense of the phrase. We are best known for our anterior aesthetics, i.e. NanoVeneers and now the Nano-Ultra-Thin Veneers for very minimal prep, Lava restorations, etc. We have also proven our aesthetic ability at American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) annual meetings by winning gold, silver and bronze medals in the Smile Gallery competition, and by working with multiple doctors on AACD accreditation cases.

We bring to the table much more than quality aesthetic restorations. What we can deliver to the clinical team in the form of case planning, material selection and problem solving is truly unique and valuable. We can bring to bear our vast experience in dentistry from a lab perspective, but also a great deal of understanding of the clinical environment. That is being enhanced even more so with our relationships with the Spear Institute/Scottsdale Center for Dentistry, and the University of Southern California (USC) Oral Health Center to name a few.

How does Burbank operate differently than other labs?

French: An extreme commitment to customer service is one of our hallmark traits. This is exhibited by our willingness to work with our doctors on turnaround time, case design matters and proper material selection. The Burbank team strives for excellent communication on all matters. Our goal is to keep the clinical team meeting production needs as well as minimizing surprises and miscues on material selection and procedures. This rabid commitment to meeting our customer needs, coupled with our depth of experience and knowledge provides the clinical team with an experience that will help minimize the stress that every practice faces every day. We employ many individuals who have more than 25 years in combined experience in both lab and clinical environments.

How many of your clients are local and how many of your clients are outside your area (percentage-wise)?

French: About 40 percent are within our local pick-up zone (Los Angeles, Orange County and Southern Ventura County, California). Sixty percent of our clients are outside of our local area.

What are you doing to better bridge the gap between you and your out-of-area clients?

French: Communication, training and technology allow us to provide a virtual local lab experience with all of our accounts. It was only until recently that local doctors had a distinct advantage over out-of-area doctors. We have worked really hard to improve our “human technologies” in our communication skills. We believe that this is the first and most important enhancement for our clients’ experiences. That being said, we continue to immerse our communication team in customer service training and communication workshops. Built on a firm foundation of clear and personal communication, we are adding layers of technology to shrink the distance factor to virtually zero. Some of those technologies include the following:

- We have implemented and continue to perfect our use of communication management software (CMS). Documenting all of our communications in our CMS keeps our whole team on the same page and clear on what the clinical team’s desires and needs are. This software allows all of our e-mails and electronic images to be archived in one location. This is increasingly important as electronic communication becomes more and more standard.
- ClearMatch is a software-based shade communication system that allows our doctors to communicate shade very accurately without the need to buy additional hardware for their practices. The clinical team uses its dental digital camera and a color standard to electronically send shade information to our lab, which the ClearMatch software interprets. It also allows us to verify the shade prior to delivery in the same manner. This gives out-of-area offices a virtual custom shade experience.
- Become One & virtual meetings allow us to have live communication with the clinical team while we share images and video online.
- Virtual impression systems are now becoming a bigger part of our experience. Burbank supports: iTero, 3M’s Lava COS and Sirona’s CEREC. These advances will allow clinical and lab teams to begin communicating about impressions and prep design without having to ship impressions. We can even begin fabricating some restorations prior to the arrival of the CAD/CAM-created models. This speeds up turnaround time without impacting quality.

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What percentage of restorations are you producing via CAD/CAM? How do you see this transforming dental labs in the future?

French: Currently our CAD/CAM percentage is between 25 and 30 percent – but the growth is exponential. Consider about five or six years ago, Procera and CEREC were just about the only games in town to produce CAD/CAM restorations. Now it is difficult to count the number of options available. We anticipate that the majority of our restorations will be touched in one way or another by CAD/CAM technologies in the very near future.

CAD/CAM gives us the opportunity to use digital means to create repeatable, consistent results every time. When the starting point is a virtual impression leading to the digital creation of a resin model, thus eliminating distortion, expansion and wear, that gives you a great foundation to build on. Then in the lab, we can create wax or ceramics that consistently match with doctor preferences.

Do you think there will ever be a point where automation takes over and lab technicians aren't needed anymore?

French: I see it taking over many of the applications that need to be repetitive, but the artistic, highly aesthetic functions will not be replaced any time in the near future. There are just things that are difficult to define, but you know it when you see it; random irregularities that provide aesthetic elements that are unique to every person. We are committed to using technology to create a more consistent, higher quality restoration, and yet using the artistic ability of our experienced technicians to bring unique character to every patient's individual restorations.

How do you gather feedback from your clients and what do you do with it?

French: This is something that we are working on more than ever. It is actually very important to both our ISO 9001-2000 Quality Management Systems Certification (International Organization for Standards) and to our understanding of our customers' needs, so that we can better serve them. We use a

variety of methods: 1. Every case has a feedback sheet so that we can get case-specific responses from our doctors and a rating in critical areas. 2. We have outside field reps who call on many of our accounts face to face, to bring the human element into play and really get to know as many of our clients as possible. 3. We send out questionnaires periodically, so that we can collect global data about how we are doing with our entire population of clients, giving them some anonymity, so that they might share with us where we need to improve.



The economy is on the minds of everyone these days. How is Burbank maintaining its roster of dental clients and how are you drumming up new business?

French: We have become evermore vigilant to maintain even higher quality and customer service so that we will maintain the loyal customer base that we have. We are working hard to address the needs and concerns of the dental community so that we will be a solution to the individual client's challenges. Our mission is to assist our doctors in the building of a better practice. We are working on patient education material and practice development programs for our clients. Our plan is to add value to our services by partnering with our clients to assist them in building their practices.

Every lab on the market touts "high quality." What does Burbank do to assure its clients that the restorations they're receiving are consistently high quality?

French: Part of our ISO training and certification process stresses managing the processes within the lab in order to produce quality output. Within the ISO 9001-2000 system we continue to identify what our doctors define as "quality," then set up a system to produce and measure the end result in finished restorations. But in dentistry, each doctor also has individual preferences, in our discovery process with our individual clients, we identify what the individual concerns are and record that so each lab case has specific preferences. Of course we check and evaluate each and every restoration several times under magnification, but the systems that we are honing will help us produce increasingly more consistent results.

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Many labs have told me that their future goals entail expansion while maintaining personal service. While that is surely an ideal goal, it is difficult to meld one with the other (McDonalds, for instance, surely doesn't come across as having as much of a family feel as, say, a local family-owned restaurant). What is Burbank's goal? What direction would you say Burbank is heading?

French: We certainly are striving to keep that small business feel. You are right; it is difficult to balance growth and personal service. One of our core values as a company is to provide individualized customer service and support. With that foundation in mind we stay more focused on what the main thing is: creating raving fans, of *all* of our clients. We have created an outside customer service team that can develop relationships with the individual offices; this is something that few national labs offer. We are developing an internal customer concierge group so that each office has a familiar voice to connect with that knows them by the sound of their voice and knows what their preferences are. We also are using more and more software to help us keep track of and monitor individual doctor preferences.

What kind of support do you offer your dental clients?

French: We have many people who have years of experience in the lab and clinical settings in dentistry. We bring our collective knowledge in to the doctor's team, to assist them in providing an even better experience for their patients. We have the ability to invest in technology that is making our communication better, and the team to make sure that every detail is covered with the precision and expertise that clinicians demand. We are also committed to keeping our restorations made in the USA. This adds to our economy here and allows for us to have real-time communication with our doctors with their cases in hand.

One of the most exciting things that we are offering our clients is a scholarship to one of Dr. Spear's three-day programs. Dr. Spear's seminars are one of the most sought after CE programs and incredibly valuable to clinicians who want to strive

for excellence and predictability in their practice. We have a program for tuition credits for our active clients, including new accounts in 2009.

What new developments does Burbank have coming down the line?

French: There are several areas that we are working on:

- Continued investment in new technologies. Within the next two years we hope to have an on-site "digital" model fabrication system that will enable us to create models from digital impression systems. This will greatly enhance our ability to control turnaround time for virtual impression cases.
- We have recently rolled out an implant planning service that uses Nobel or Simplant software to plan cases from CT scans. We have a dentist on the team who can generate implant case plans as well as guided surgical appliances for use in the surgical procedures. This service can facilitate "teeth in a day" appointments where temporary restorations can be placed at the same appointment as the implant surgery, in many cases without flaps being required.
 - We recently acquired the laboratory at the USC Center for Oral Health. This development is facilitating Burbank to provide many enhanced services as well as the involvement in many cutting-edge advancements in dentistry. This facility is attracting the nation's best technicians and ceramists to seek positions with our company. We are now able to offer boutique-level restorations that are in the top one percent of aesthetic levels. This lab position allows us to be involved in research and advanced education programs that we can share with our clients at large.
- We are also anticipating being a beta test lab on the Sirona CEREC model fabrication system. We will be working with Dr. Sameer Puri and Sirona in the upcoming year on this project.



For more information, please call 800-336-3053 or visit www.burbankdental.com. ■