

Brando's dentist builds business with bite: Focusing on phobics

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David Blende, D.D.S., is a different kind of dentist. He focuses on high-end care such as full-mouth reconstructions and other dental procedures that typically require use of IV sedation in the dental office or general anesthesia in a hospital surgical suite. Blende said he particularly serves patients who fear dentists most -- so-called "phobics" who constitute an estimated 1-in-7 dental patients and would rather do anything than land in a dentist's office. Other key markets: Busy executives and their spouses; seniors and patients with complicated dental problems or disabilities, many from across the country and around the world.

His solo San Francisco dental practice, Blende Dental Group, has also ended up catering to celebrities of various kinds, including high-profile business executives and a gaggle of Hollywood stars at a satellite practice in Beverly Hills. The overall practice, aided by 14 staffers, nabbed \$3.4 million in revenue last year and projects \$4 million in 2005 revenue.

Blende, who does dental surgery at California Pacific Medical Center, Marin General Hospital and Kaiser Permanente facilities, says his model is financially and clinically successful, but doesn't appeal to many dentists. "Nobody looks over your shoulder," he said. "I've presented this model to a lot of people, and it just doesn't happen."

Among Blende's best-known current or former patients:

The late Marlon Brando, the only movie-land name Blende is willing to share.

Gus Panos, general managing partner of San Mateo's Peter Pan BMW.

Carmen Policy, former president of the San Francisco 49ers, and his wife, Gail Policy.

Carl Pascarella, president and CEO of Visa USA, and his wife, art patron and philanthropist Yurie Pascarella.

Jane Ford, co-founder of San Francisco-based Benefit Cosmetics.

Art Zafiropoulo, chairman and CEO of Ultratech Inc., a San Jose-based high-tech manufacturing company, and his wife, Lisa Zafiropoulo.

Zafiropoulo, who runs Ultratech, a supplier of lithography and laser-processing systems used to make semiconductors and nanotechnology devices, also owns the Ferrari of Silicon Valley car dealership. "He's absolutely an 'A' player when it comes to this kind of work," Zafiropoulo said, noting that he's always hated dentists and cringes when he goes into a dentist's office. But after spending several years, and an estimated \$100,000, on a full-mouth reconstruction, he's a big fan of Blende's approach.

"They go out of their way to take care of people like me," he said. "People who aren't wimpy in business, but are wimpy in a (dentist's) chair."