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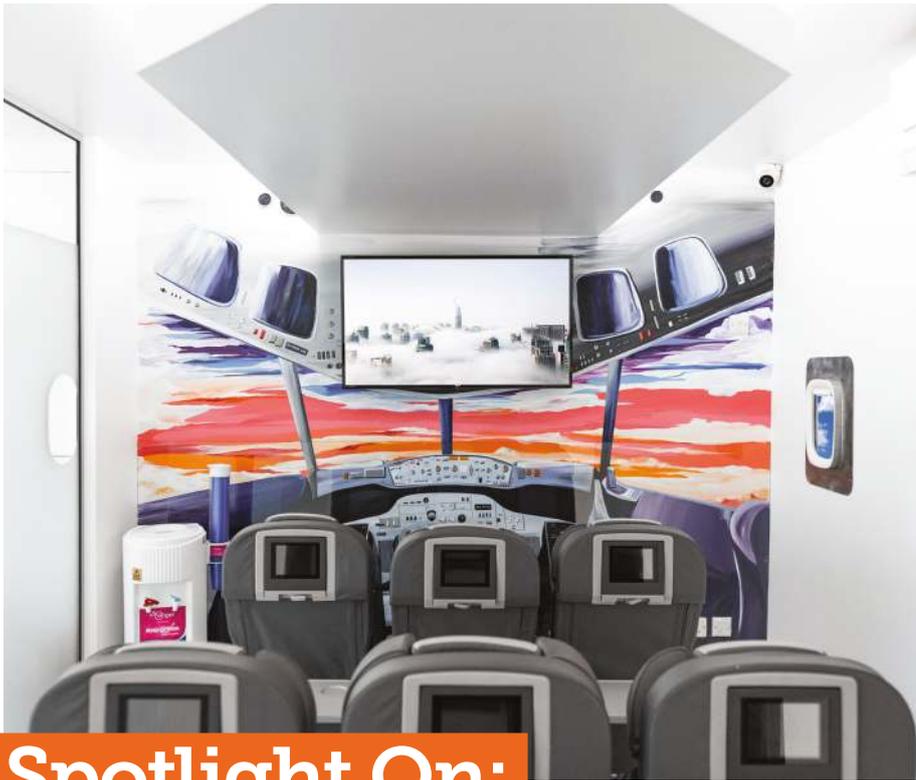
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Spotlight On: Smileworks

An insight into the unique aesthetic practice with the UK's most elaborate theme



Dr MJ Rowland-Warmann

From the moment you step into Smileworks Liverpool, you feel more like you are bound for a holiday, rather than a medical procedure. The reception desk is a cleverly crafted repurposed air brake from a Tornado F3 aircraft, the waiting room consists of seats from a real Boeing 747, and porthole windows are placed on the side of the walls, as well as a realistic cockpit mural at the front. Yes, Dr MJ Rowland-Warmann owns an aviation-themed dental and aesthetic practice, with elements of the theme everywhere. If you were to meet Dr Rowland-Warmann, you wouldn't be

surprised that she chose a unique theme for her practice; her own wedding was medieval themed after all. However, when you learn the details behind the practice's inception, it's more than just a theme.

"You really do get the very best customer service at 34,000 feet," Dr MJ Rowland-Warmann says, "And I believe customer service is one of the most important determining factors for a long-lasting business so our theme really does transpire across everything that we strive for." Dr Rowland-Warmann adds that medical aesthetics and dentistry are very much like air travel. "You can pay cheap, and you will get that kind of experience. You can pay premium and you can get luxury and first-class service. We think of ourselves much like Virgin Atlantic, where you can always guarantee high-quality, good service with great value and people who really look after you. The theme is also just fun; having fun whilst delivering fantastic customer services is one of our core values," she says.

So how did the idea actually come about, what was required to turn the idea into reality, and, most importantly, how do patients respond to a theme of this extent?

Turning a concept into reality

"It all started with an aeroplane drinks trolley," Dr Rowland-Warmann remembers, "I was on a flight to the US and looked in the catalogue and saw a drinks trolley and thought how fun and useful it would be to have one in the practice. Now, the airline theme has woven into the fabric of everything!" she laughs, explaining that it's all in the details. They decided they wanted a desk made of aeroplane parts, so found on eBay what she describes as a 2m long, old, tired and heavy piece of metal that she didn't know what to do with. "We posted an advert on Gumtree to find someone to make us a desk out of the part, and we didn't have very high hopes to be honest. However, someone got in touch who made floats for the Olympic Games closing ceremony. This piece of metal came back as a beautiful, amazing, practice desk that was mirror polished. It was down to the millimetre perfect and I remember thinking it was like the ring in the Lord of the Rings! It was honestly the most impressive thing I had ever seen, and I think this desk is the secret of Smileworks' power, it just has this magical quality," she says.

Dr Rowland-Warmann also commissioned bespoke uniforms for her staff, which grew from a team of just three in 2013 to 40 after several practice expansions. She explains, "We got in touch with a fashion design student in London to create bespoke themed uniforms, and a local lady in Liverpool who made us our hats. I didn't want to be wearing a generic uniform as I didn't want to be the same as other practices. All the uniforms have rank stripes



I think we probably have the most photographed waiting room in the UK!

on the shoulder; the support staff get one, the associates get two, Ed, my husband, is our first officer and director of marketing so has three, and I have four as the director and clinical lead – or our captain!” Dr Rowland-Warmann highlights that she takes pride in ensuring her staff feel comfortable and good about themselves in what they wear, as she believes it helps them deliver a better service to patients.

The theme is probably most evident in the waiting room; the real aeroplane seats, plane windows and cockpit mural is so realistic you really do feel like you are flying through the skies. “I think we probably have the most photographed waiting room in the UK,” Dr Rowland-Warmann laughs, adding, “So many patients take pictures and tag

everything,” she says.

Dr Rowland-Warmann explains that the theme actually helps to attract the types of patients she is looking for. “Having a practice with a theme like this makes it clear that we don’t take ourselves too seriously; we of course take our work very seriously, but we are all humans and like to have fun. We tend to attract the type of patients who are mostly happy, light hearted, genuine and love what we are trying to do. The overall patient experience, which is reinforced with our theme, really does leave a lasting impression on patients, which makes them remember you and come back,” she says. When you look at Smileworks’ online reviews, it’s clear that Dr Rowland-Warmann is doing something right. “We have more

nautical-themed practice, for example.” Your staff are also important, Dr Rowland-Warmann confirms. “We put extra emphasis on hiring the right people who will fit with our core values and overall theme. Growing our own talent is really important and we hire on attitude, rather than ability, because I believe technical skills can be taught, whereas attitude can’t,” she says, adding that it’s important to her that staff are nice, have great customer service and are very enthusiastic. “We have a relatively young team and I think you always need to maintain a fun vibe and a working environment where you build meaningful relationships with the patient – this is the most important thing,” she explains. Dr Rowland-Warmann is excited for the future of Smileworks, which is currently undergoing another expansion. She says this will see the premises housing seven aesthetic treatment rooms, seven dental surgeries and an aesthetic training academy. Dr Rowland-Warmann hopes to have a team of around 50 once open. “The theme won’t be as obvious in our extension as it will have more of a focus on training,



us on social media and we have people who play jokes on their significant others pretending they have gone away!”

The patient experience

Of course, the theme is not for everyone, Dr Rowland-Warmann admits. “We do get the occasional grumpy person who says they don’t like dentists and they don’t like flying, and I just think, well, what are you doing here? Patients do have a choice of where they go, and I am not worried if a few people are not enthusiastic about our theme and ethos. You cannot appeal to everyone and that’s a really important message for other practices to remember. I think some practices struggle and believe they have to appeal to everyone and

than 550 Google reviews with a rating of 4.9 and they say for every one person who writes it, 100 people think it so we are extremely delighted about our positive feedback,” she says proudly.

Advice for creating a themed practice

For those thinking about opening a new practice or rebranding with a theme, Dr Rowland-Warmann advises to always consider your core values in everything that you do. “A theme is an attraction for the eye, but also an essential pillar of your values. Don’t just pick a theme that doesn’t align to anything you strive for – just because you like sailing doesn’t mean you should have a

but it will still have the Smileworks feel; the staff will all still be wearing the same uniforms for example,” she notes. When reflecting on how the theme has helped her practice grow, she concludes, “Some of the details might seem a bit ‘kookie’ to some, but I think they really do reconfirm what we are trying to achieve. It’s all about being good to your patients and making them feel valued and cared for. As a customer, I believe the experience is what sets something apart and I will happily part with money if I know my experience is going to be positive and that people care. That is what underpins everything that we do – and we have fun doing it!”