



FROM ROCK STAR
TO SUCCESSFUL
YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR,
ROBERT RUDMAN, DDS, MS,
TOOK A UNIQUE PATH TO
ORTHODONTICS

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

BY ALISON WERNER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CHARLES BEAVER

At 17, Robert Rudman, DDS, MS, was touring the country in a successful rock band as a guitarist. At 24, he was selling the transportation service business he had started with a friend at 18 to an investment group and returning to college to finish a business degree. By 26, he was in dental school looking ahead to a career in orthodontics. Not the typical path one takes to carve out a successful career as an orthodontist.

The Orthodontist

After graduating from Marquette University School of Dentistry in Milwaukee, Rudman started his orthodontic career in Minnesota, but after a few years he made the decision to move west. He settled on Denver as the place to develop his career, having enjoyed skiing and white water rafting there years earlier. There, he joined the practice of another orthodontist in Littleton, Colo, only days before the April 1999 shooting at Columbine High School that killed 12 students and one teacher. The practice, which was near the high school, saw an influx of students in the days after the shooting as their retainers were abandoned during the evacuation in the school, which was then under a lockdown by the FBI. “We were replacing everybody’s retainers frantically,” Rudman remembers. “You don’t really think about those small things when something like that happens.”

A year and a half later, Rudman had the opportunity to buy one of the two offices of that same orthodontist, allowing him to own his own full-time practice. Twelve years on, he has created a thriving practice, which serves the Denver and Stapleton areas.

Over the years, he doubled the 800-square-foot office to 1,600 square feet and later to 2,200 square feet. But the expansions were always piecemeal. Eventually, Rudman realized the space wasn’t efficient or patient-friendly. Basically, he, his staff, and his growing practice had outgrown the space. So, in 2011, Rudman made the decision to move the office to a new site a couple blocks from its old location and start with a blank slate. The result gave him the space he’d dreamed of. With views of the mountains and downtown Denver, the new space allowed clinical care to be centralized with easy access to sterilization resources. It also had three private rooms that can be used as treatment rooms, as well as new patient exam rooms, giving Rudman and his staff a lot of flexibility. In addition, the space allowed for an in-house lab.

The in-house lab allows Rudman and his staff to more efficiently treat patients. Two orthodontic assistants, who are dual trained to do lab and clinical work, staff the lab. “There is just a quicker turnaround on things,” Rudman says. “We can get a patient in one day and turn it around the next day.” And as he does indirect bonding exclusively, including phase I patients, the in-house lab provides more quality control, not to mention patient convenience.

PRACTICE PROFILE ADVANCED ORTHODONTIC CARE

Location: Denver

Education: Marquette University
School of Dentistry (DDS, MS)

Office square footage: 3,500

Number of chairs: 8

Top six products: AcceleDent,
Synergy® R bracket system, iTero
Digital Impression System, RMbond®
Indirect Bonding System, Ormco
Copper Niti, Ormco Insignia custom
bracket system

Years in practice: 12

Average patients per day: 80

Days worked per week: 3.5

Website: cherrycreeksmiles.com



Rudman's desire to always find a better way to do things led to his invention of the Synergy R bracket system.

the orthodontic field and better treatment options.

In 2006, he invented the Synergy® R bracket system, which combines the utility of a twin bracket and the benefits of a self-ligating bracket without moving parts. The posterior brackets, which all have a convertible cap, allow users to thread the wire so everything is frictionless in the back, while simultaneously allowing control of the front to be maintained. Rudman took the idea to Denver-based RMO (Rocky Mountain® Orthodontics), and Synergy R was born. The partnership also led to Rudman's involvement in the development of the company's Rmbond® Indirect Bonding System.

The Early Adopter

Rudman is always looking for technology that allows him to improve his patients' experience and treatment success. That drive led him to be an early adopter of AcceleDent. Manufactured by Houston-based OrthoAccel® Technologies Inc, AcceleDent is an appliance used by patients at home to accelerate orthodontic tooth movement, reducing treatment time with braces and clear aligners. He had first seen it in use while on a lecturing trip to Australia in 2009. "I got to talk to orthodontists there, and they were pretty impressed with what it was doing," he says. Returning to Denver, Rudman educated himself about the device and readied himself for its eventual approval by the FDA. In fact, it was one of Rudman's patients who was the first person in the United States to finish treatment using AcceleDent. The patient's treatment time, originally estimated at 18 months, was completed in 10 months.

For Rudman, AcceleDent allows him to convince otherwise hesitant patients to commit to braces. "I think a lot of time adults come in and want to do something like Invisalign, and

they're not a good candidate for it. Their immediate response is, 'I'm going to have to be in braces for 2 years.' If I can put them down into a 12- to 15-month time frame, then they can deal with it. We can pursue a more ideal treatment when they know they have the option to be done faster."

The Entrepreneur

But long before Rudman was thinking about ways to make orthodontic treatment more appealing to his patients and growing his orthodontic practice, he was thinking up ways to stand out from the crowd. Since childhood, Rudman has had an entrepreneurial spirit. At 8, he would fill a large trash can with sodas and take them down to the local park to sell. And as a young teen, he had a lawn-cutting business. So, teaming up with a friend in high school to start a company that serviced transportation equipment wasn't so surprising. In fact, Rudman credits those early entrepreneurial endeavors, more than his college business degree, with the success of his practice.

"It gave me confidence and the knowledge to know you have

to go out and drum up business." It taught him the importance of marketing and how to manage a large staff. Today, Rudman relies on his staff of 11 to make his practice just as successful as his past pursuits. "I have an awesome team that I have complete confidence in, and I always empower them to use their skills to make our practice great."

The Inventor

As Rudman got older, that entrepreneurial spirit grew into an inventive streak that has had him making his own contributions to

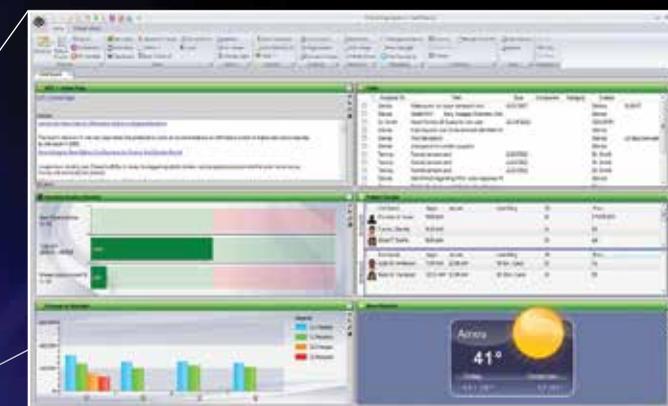
And what motivates Rudman—who lectures on TADs, indirect bonding, practice efficiency, and complicated restorative cases around the world—to pursue these projects? First, a need to always find a better way to do something. And second, the realization that if someone else can invent something and patent it, then why can't he. "I realized that anyone who makes an effort to do something can do it," he says. "You realize that it doesn't always take brains to do something, but rather a lot of hard work to get from point A to point B."



Rudman, who majored in business in college, credits his early entrepreneurial pursuits rather than his business degree for the success of his practice.

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The Rock Star

That competitive spirit has always been with him. In fact, it's what led to his career in a rock band in his teens. At 17, Rudman used to sneak into clubs in the Dallas area, where he grew up, to see a band called The Fugitives. A friend told him that the band's guitar player had quit and they were holding auditions. That same friend had auditioned and recommended that Rudman try out as well. Rudman considered himself a better guitar player than his friend—a fact his friend even admitted. Figuring that if his friend could audition and have a shot at playing with the band why couldn't he, he tried out. He did, and the band picked him.

Rudman's new office space features the latest technology for patient entertainment in the waiting area.



"All these guys were like 26 and 27 years old, and I was this 17-year-old kid. They would have to ask the clubs to let me in because I was too young to drink. The very first gig we played was at this high school—a cancer fundraiser—and I signed autographs for 2 hours," he recalls. Rudman stayed with the band for almost 3 years, traveling on the road.

"My parents loved it," he says with a laugh. "I was dropping out of college every other month." But he was making a living and playing venues like the Cotton Bowl and opening for the popular 1960s rock group Steppenwolf.

Eventually, it was his other pursuit—the transportation service business he'd started with his high school friend—that pulled him away from the rock star life. The business experienced phenomenal growth, and just like in his band years, it got in the way of college. However, by 21, he was enough of a success to be able to afford his own home.

"People would knock at the door and say, 'Is your mom home?' and I'd say, 'This is my house,'" Rudman recalls. He admits that he was making way too much money as a young kid. But he managed to stay out of trouble. "Luckily, I had some kind of moral compass or I was



This 20-year-old photo of Rudman during his rock star days always provides an interesting story to tell patients.

just afraid my mom would show up and spank me."

Rudman found himself on stage again during his orthodontics residency in Milwaukee in a band he started with a friend who was a chiropractor. They called themselves STAB (ie, Straight Teeth and Back) and played open mic nights at clubs throughout the city. While Rudman breaks out the guitar every once in a while now, he jokes that, "The only wires I'm plucking these days are the wires on people's teeth, not the wires on a guitar."

Rudman isn't quick to share these stories of his past pursuits, but his stint as a rock star has become part of the fun had in his practice. "One time we had an open house, and my staff took a 20-year-old picture of me with long hair playing guitar and made a life-size version. We had a guitar, some wild outfits and a wig, and let the referring doctors and their staff who were there for the open house take pictures standing next to the cutout of me. It was a huge hit," Rudman says, adding with a laugh, "Don't ask me why."

Now when kids who play instruments come into his office, he breaks out that original photo and has a laugh with the kids as they try to imagine him with the long hair he sports in the picture. The kids think it's cool that the orthodontist working on their teeth was once on stage rocking out in front of thousands of screaming fans.

The Businessman

Rudman has made a point of growing his young patient population. While his practice started out with 70% adult patients and 30% children, he has flipped those numbers completely. "I worked really hard to get the kid population up because I saw what

Rudman is incredibly proud of the work his staff does. He makes it a point "to empower them to use their skills to make our practice great."



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While Rudman still picks up the guitar occasionally, he jokes that, "The only wires I'm plucking these days are the wires on people's teeth, not the wires on a guitar."

was coming down the line with Invisalign. A lot of adult cases would be siphoned off to the general dentist population," Rudman says. "In addition, an adult population is much more sensitive to economic ups and downs, meaning adults will wait to do something for themselves, but they will always do what their kid needs."

The strategy was intentional, Rudman says, and aimed at keeping his practice safe for the long term. "When you have an adult patient you generally get another adult as a referral. But when you have kids, you generally get the kid's entire family, including the parents, and all their friends."

To keep those families engaged, he offers free monitoring of patients' younger siblings until they start treatment. In addition, his staff created the Smile Detective program for these future young patients. The program gives those future patients a kit that includes a badge with the child's photo, a magnifying glass, and tooth brushing supplies. Once the child is ready to begin treatment, they

receive a postcard with the Smile Detective theme that asks them a number of questions to which they have to search out the answers. The questions revolve around orthodontics, general oral health, and the practice itself. The child comes to their first appointment with the card, having put their "detective" skills to work. Rudman is proud of the program his staff created and how it engages the practice's young patients early on.

Not only does Rudman strive to treat his patients like family, he strives—without much effort—to make sure they have a good time. "We like to have fun. We like to joke around," he says. At the end of the day, it isn't hard to imagine his patients leaving with a smile on their face. **OP**

Alison Werner is the editor of Orthodontic Products. She can be reached at awerner@allied360.com.

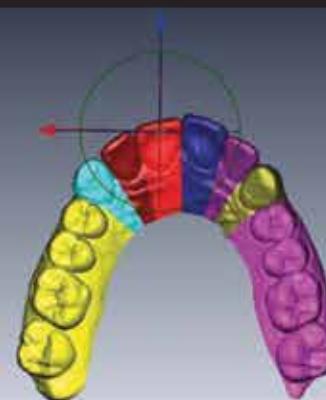
➡ You can see a slide show of Rudman, his practice, and his team with **Orthodontic Products'** interactive edition.

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