

My (not so) big, beautiful build

Diana Ferati offers a lesson in the art of small, subtle and carefully calibrated business growth

Economist EF Schumacher, in his book *Small is Beautiful*, advocated for development that prioritises people and emphasises sustainability. Subtitled 'A study of economics as if people mattered', it challenged the idea that 'bigger is better'. Now synonymous with ethical, community-focused business practices, it certainly embodies the style of growth that has influenced Dr Diana Ferati's practice ownership.

Diana is a strong advocate of this philosophy – expanding only when demand dictates. This approach has helped her evolve Floss Dental Care, a boutique clinic housed in a Victorian building in Northampton, into the family-focused dental powerhouse it is today.

The organic growth of her 'magnum opus' is largely thanks to her ability to respond swiftly to change. It's been a journey that has been both measured and successful.

She took over the reins of the clinic 10 years ago. As a young mum working as a dental associate, Diana nurtured a dream of owning her own dental practice one day. When the opportunity to purchase Floss Dental Care arose in 2015, she seized it. The small boutique dental practice was operating below full capacity, but she managed to turn it around.

Reimagining the clinic, she transformed it into a fully operational business, creating a warm and relaxed setting complete with a tranquil courtyard garden and a pleasant outlook from the waiting room. Patients were provided with excellent patient-centred dental care and outstanding customer service. Business boomed and grew organically via word-of-mouth. A decade later, she was ready to expand as demand continued to increase.

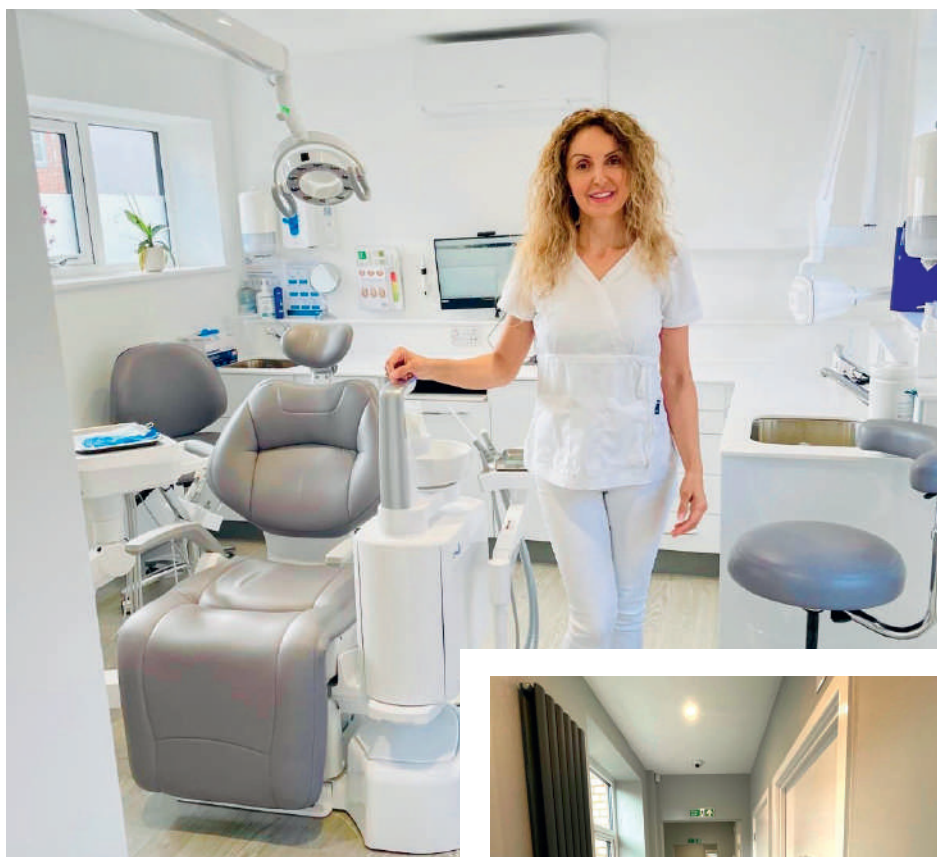
'I was busy in a good way,' she says. 'Since 2015, the practice has seen increasing business, leading to a growing patient base. I was disappointed that we were turning away potential patients. We needed to meet demand, but it created a catch-22 situation: the onus was on us to expand, but I wondered if I could afford and manage it.'

However, the ultimate motivation was the demand itself – and the desire to deliver care to a community in need.

'We simply needed more capacity to treat everyone, so I decided to take what I felt at the time was a risky step.'

Guilt-free moves

Diana has not looked back. The team at Floss Dental Care had already grown since she took over as principal. With an additional treatment room, she could facilitate future patient growth and accommodate another dentist as well as a dental therapist.



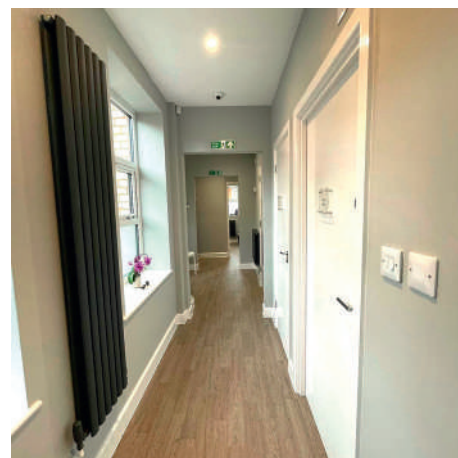
'The property was residential but had been converted into a dental practice on the ground floor and a one-bedroom flat upstairs, both of which were completed by the previous owner before 2004.'

'Initially, I had only one room on the ground floor, which limited scope for expansion. When I took over the freehold in 2022, it opened up options. I discussed the possibilities with colleagues and specialised dental architects, weighing the pros and cons of potential development.'

Meanwhile, reluctant to ask the tenant to vacate the flat, serendipity intervened.

'The tenant suddenly announced they were looking to move, so thankfully, the process was without guilt. I used specialist healthcare architects to design the project – I prefer to play it safe and never use substitutes – and, once we got CQC and council approval, we completed the refurbishment in approximately seven months.'

Incredibly, the clinic remained open throughout the process, with the project completed in two stages, starting from the top down, utilising the two doorways – to the flat and the existing practice entrance.



'We were only closed for four or five days for fitting of the new equipment, servicing and testing, with minimal interruption to patients. We had their understanding and cooperation, and they were on our side. Patients pay for a high-quality service, and they deserve a fresh, elegant environment in which to enjoy it.'

Reconstructed and refreshed

The interior of the whole property area was stripped down to the brick foundation and reconstructed, with new equipment installed on both floors, including a new Belmont Eurus S6 with its below-the-patient swing-arm delivery system, an intuitive touchscreen and advanced instrument control.

'My experience with Belmont treatment centres has always been positive. The Eurus S6, featuring a folding leg rest, doesn't appear or feel overly clinical and is appropriate for all ages. It resembles a normal chair, fostering a relaxed, conversational environment before automatically elevating the patient's legs for treatment. It's practical, comfortable, but the design is sleek, too.'

Maintaining the building's character while modernising its interior for dental use did involve some compromises, but Diana preserved it as much as possible.

In the long waiting area, stylish wood laminate flooring complements the cream-washed and exposed brickwork, enhancing the airy feel. A charcoal feature wall and black modular furniture create contrast, echoing the colour of the window fascia and external door. A Velux window in the high, half-vaulted ceiling lets in natural light, while patio doors, framed by large windows, provide a clear view of the courtyard garden, with its topiaries and a French-style wrought-iron white table with chairs.

'We refreshed the courtyard and retained some brick walls. And it makes for a pretty and relaxing backdrop while patients wait for their appointments,' she says.

The colour scheme continues up the stairs with more exposed brickwork. A large statement wall clock that greets patients as they ascend the



stairs adds a nice aesthetic touch. Overall, it feels more like a stylish home interior than a dental practice and offers patients a pleasant segue into the clinical atmosphere of the treatment rooms.

Opening up

Once the refurbishment was complete, Diana hosted an open day, and local dignitaries and officials joined patients to celebrate the clinic's expansion. 'The mayor came and we welcomed

others in the community along with family, friends, colleagues and patients,' Diana explains.

It was also a gesture of gratitude towards other local businesses, as she had utilised the skills of community builders and companies to reach her goal. 'The project simply wouldn't have been possible without the help of local tradespeople.'

She adds: 'Strong relationships are important and together we have managed to navigate the challenges of transforming the practice smoothly, with minimal disruption to the patients. As a result, we've created a positive environment for us as well as them.'

Essentially, Diana's approach to Floss Dental Care is a testament to the 'small is beautiful' philosophy. By focusing on personalised care, building community connections and growing little by little rather than prioritising quick ways to maximise profit, she has ensured consistent, patient-focused dentistry that emphasises quality over quantity.

And this incremental business development has not stopped here. At some point, when demand increases, she hopes to incorporate specialist care as well. 'There is still potential for growth, and we already have the capacity to develop a third treatment room that is fully plumbed for when the need arises. However, we will remain a small, organically grown practice with a boutique feel, which I believe is what our patients value most.' **D**

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