The 11pm Test: The After-Hours Path 87% of Sydney Practices Don't Have

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A patient in pain lands on your website at 11pm. In our June 2026 audit of 969 Sydney dental practice sites, 87% scored below adequate on what happens next — making the after-hours path the single most-failed signal we measure, and the cheapest competitive edge on this list. What a good path looks like, and how to build yours this week.

The 11pm test

> General educational material for practice owners and managers — practice operations and website guidance, not clinical, legal or financial advice.

Here's the test: it's 11pm. A patient with a throbbing tooth searches, finds your website, and lands on your home page. **What happens next?**

For most practices, the honest answer is: nothing. The page shows office hours that ended at 5pm, a phone number that rings out or hits a full voicemail box, and no hint of what an urgent patient should do. So they hit Back and try the practice up the road.

This isn't a rare failure. In our June 2026 audit of **969 Sydney dental practice websites**, **87% scored below "adequate" on their after-hours path** — by far the most-failed signal of everything we measure. Which is exactly why it's worth fixing: the bar is on the floor, and the patient standing at it is the most motivated patient you'll ever meet.

What "an after-hours path" actually means

It does **not** mean being open at 11pm, employing an answering service, or promising emergency care you don't provide. It means the website *answers the question the patient is asking*: "what do I do right now?"

A complete path has three layers — you need at least one, and the first is mostly wording:

1. Tell them what to do (one honest box of text). A visible block — home page and contact page — that says what an urgent patient should do tonight. Even if your honest answer is "we open at 8am, book the first emergency slot online and here's how to manage tonight", that *is* an after-hours path. The patient who knows they're booked for 8am stops searching. The one staring at a closed-hours table keeps shopping.

2. Let them book while you sleep. If you run online booking, make sure urgent/emergency appointment types are bookable out of hours and the booking link is visible from the home page — not buried behind "Contact". In our availability monitoring, practices on observable booking

systems routinely take bookings overnight; the chairs fill while nobody's at the desk. This is the empty-chair leak in reverse.

3. Say when severe symptoms mean "don't wait for us." One sentence directing facial swelling, uncontrolled bleeding or trauma to emergency care protects patients and shows a regulator-grade duty of care. (If you're considering an AI chatbot to handle any of this triage, that's a different decision with real boundaries — see the AI receptionist guide before switching anything on.)

What good looks like (steal this structure)

> **In pain after hours?** Book the first emergency appointment online — we keep 8am slots for urgent cases: **[Book now]** Can't see a time that works? Call **(02) 9XXX XXXX** and leave your name — we return calls from 7:30am. **Facial swelling, uncontrolled bleeding, or trauma?** Go to your nearest emergency department now.

Four lines. No new staff, no answering service, no technology you don't already have. The whole job is: decide your honest after-hours offer, write it down, put it where the 11pm patient will see it (home page, contact page, and your Google Business Profile description), and make sure the booking link works at midnight.

The checklist

1. **Decide the offer** — held morning emergency slots? Online booking 24/7? A monitored voicemail? Pick what's true.
2. **Write the box** — the four-line structure above, in your words. No promises you can't keep.
3. **Place it** — home page (visible without scrolling on a phone), contact page, Google Business Profile.
4. **Test it at night, on a phone** — tap the booking link at 10pm; ring the number; read the page as a stranger in pain would.
5. **Check the hours everywhere match** — website footer, GBP, booking system. Mismatched hours at 11pm read as "this practice doesn't have its act together."

Find out where you stand

Our free booking-path check walks your site like that 11pm patient — booking visibility, tap-to-call, form friction, and the after-hours path — and scores you against the 969 Sydney practice sites in the audit. Two minutes, no patient data. And if you want the revenue picture, the leakage calculator turns your missed urgent enquiries into a monthly number.

The maths of this one is simple: nearly nine in ten of your competitors fail the 11pm test. You can pass it by Friday.

Disclaimer: Educational guidance only, not legal advice. This guide is intended for practice workflow education. Do not enter patient-identifiable information into public AI tools.

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