A new era in digital orthodontics

By Jeffrey T. Kozlowski, USA

A true straight-wire appliance would necessitate a patient-specific appliance based on an individual’s anatomy. Now, with advances in computer software and digital scanning and fabrication, that idea is a reality and a practical consideration for your practice. Customized Insignia™ is the first true straight-wire appliance. It involves two components: customized appliances—brackets, wires and placement gauges—and 3D real-time virtual treatment planning software. The 3D software enables clinicians to design the patient’s final occlusion on-screen before initiating treatment, then prescribes the fabrication of patient-specific appliances to achieve the planned result. This concept is quite different from how clinicians customarily practice orthodontics. Traditionally, we choose appliances with specific torque values to have certain effects, then react to those effects by repositioning brackets and making wire bends to guide the teeth into the desired positions. With Insignia, we begin with the teeth into the desired positions and in their ability to make changes directly to the 3D models without relying on an operator’s interpretation of instructions.

Insignia does not determine treatment mechanics nor prescribe tooth movements and it allows clinicians to use the mechanics and adjacents of their choice. As doctors modify the desired final outcome in the Approver software, they can view “in real time” how the changes affect the opposing occlusion. Once the clinician finalizes the ideal setup, the Insignia software engineers the customized brackets, wires and precision bonding placement gauges to the exact prescription required to deliver the designed end result accurately and efficiently.

My experience with Insignia is with both the customized passive self-ligating appliance (Insignia custom SL) and Insignia using stock Damon® System appliances. The Insignia software can be used to fabricate patient-specific conventional twin brackets and aligners as well. You can also use Insignia software with stock appliances (Orthos®, Inspire ICS™ and, as I mentioned, Damon®). The difference between customized Insignia and Insignia using stock brackets is the third-order customization (torque) that is engineered into the customized brackets. This difference saves considerable treatment time and effort over using a “best fit torque” stock appliance. Having treated with both customized Insignia SL and Insignia using stock Damon brackets, I can attest to the superior value of the customized appliances.

The Clinical Evaluation My initial experience with customized Insignia SL began in 2007 when I conducted an extensive clinical evaluation by treating 41 patients to completion. The only limitations on the selection criteria were that patients have no missing or impacted teeth, no pending restorative needs, and must not exhibit poor oral hygiene. The criteria were limited in these ways simply because it wouldn’t have been feasible for me to coordinate the ancillary procedures from across the country. At the time, I was in the process of opening my new office in Connecticut and the clinical evaluation was to be conducted at Ornato in California—nearly 3000 miles away. For operator consistency, I played the roles of doctor and assistant, performing the diagnoses, treatment planning, initial bondings and wire changes, providing all mechanics for 100% of treatment. Full records were taken of each patient, including PVS impressions and iTero scans (Imaging Sciences, International, Hatfield, PA) for diagnostics and treatment planning using the Insignia interactive Approver software. Based on my previous experience with Damon System appliances, I estimated that treatment time for the 41 patients would average 17.5 months.

While I wouldn’t recommend selecting this many patients to begin treating with customized Insignia SL for the first time, I am convinced that the best way to learn Insignia is to submit cases regularly. Regular case submission allows the clinician to relate what is designed in the digital environment to the clinical experience and final results. This positive feedback loop of learning will help the clinician design each successive Insignia
case with a higher level of understanding and accuracy and hence be more successful with its application. My experience has been that clinicians who recently submit Insignia cases are more successful with it than those who start only a few cases and wait to see how they work out. My skills improved substantially through the first 10 to 20 cases, and like using any other new appliance, it takes a bit of time to learn the nuances. I also strongly recommend doctors initially select easier cases, and then add more challenging cases when they become familiar with the software and clinical protocols.

In late February, 2008, in a one-chair operatory at Ormco’s Insignia manufacturing facility in Glendora, California, I bonded all 41 patients over a five-day period. This intensive week of bonding proved to be my first insight into the potential efficiencies of Insignia’s direct view/in-direct bonding process. After just the first few patients my bonding technique using the placement gauges significantly improved and during the balance of the week, the bonding appointments averaged less than one hour, including preparing the teeth, bonding the brackets, placing bite turbos, engaging the teeth, bonding the brackets, placing brackets correctly, but without the help of a clinical assistant! We all know the importance of placing brackets correctly, but few of us can consistently and quickly place each bracket precisely where it needs to be. With Insignia, you design the final occlusion and the customized appliances will be fabricated with custom torques, custom bases (in-out) and custom wires. You specify your bracket positioning preference (e.g., center of the tooth, more gingival or more incisal) so that the custom appliances are designed to your specifications; thus, it is possible for your Insignia SL appliances to clinically match the placement of your direct-bonded appliances.

To transfer the Approver-designed appliances to the mouth, Insignia provides customized placement gauges that place the brackets in the right spot with out need for adjustment (Fig. 4). The position built into these brackets is matched by the accuracy of the placement gauges that offer the benefit of a direct view with the precision of planned indirect bonding.

The major challenge in conducting this clinical evaluation was logistics. Managing treatment from so far away was a daunting experience at first; however, the process reinforced the importance of good clinical decision making and its impact on clinical efficiency. Gone was the luxury of shortening patients’ appointment intervals to accommodate case management alternatives when we needed to make clinical decisions based on how a patient responds. It was thus incumbent upon me to create mechanical systems that would withstand the eight-to-ten-week appointment cycle of my West Coast trips.

At six months, the first patient finished treatment and by December 2009, after just 21 months, the 41st patient had his appliances removed. To determine the value of customized Insignia SL, for my own practice, I initially compared the results of this evaluation with my previous seven years of experience treating patients with direct-bonded Damon System appliances. This comparison helped me evaluate customized Insignia SL with what I used to do in my office—direct bonding. These 41 customized Insignia cases treated in an average time of 12.5 months—a full five months (26%) shorter than my estimate of 17.5 months (Fig. 5). I based the estimates on my previous seven years of experience with the Damon System appliance but before I had had any experience with Insignia. In my opinion, this difference alone attests to the efficiency of customized Insignia SL treatment. Another value indicator was the number of repositioned brackets needed to finish the customized Insignia SL cases, which was 30% less than my cases with direct-bonded stock Damon System appliances. After completing the evaluation, I compared the results with comparable patients I later treated with Insignia using stock Damon appliances. This second comparison assisted me in placing a value on the patient-specific customized torques of the customized Insignia SL appliance. The 41 customized Insignia SL cases in the evaluation finished in 22% shorter treatment time (at 12.5 months) than the next consecutive 41 cases using Insignia with stock Damon brackets that I treated in my private practice (16.1 months). The average number of appointments needed for the 41 customized Insignia SL cases was 10.2 versus 8 appointments for the 41 customized Insignia SL cases.

In terms of quality, a subjective evaluation I grant you, I feel that my customized Insignia SL cases finish with quality that equals or exceeds my direct-bonded Damon System cases or my Insignia cases using stock Damon brackets yet in less time and with significantly less effort. I have felt confident enough with the customized Insignia case results to have shown them in presentations around the world and have been so pleased with the results that I now treat 70% of my cases with customized Insignia SL appliances. I still treat 30% of my patients with direct-bonded stock Damon appliances, primarily those who start treatment in late mixed dentition, but for all those cases for which customized Insignia SL applies, it is now my appliance of choice.

This article highlights a few of the patients I treated in the clinical evaluation, demonstrating the quality of the results and efficiency of treatment.

About the Author
Dr. Kozlowski obtained his DDS degree in 1996 and a certificate in orthodontics at State University of New York at Buffalo in 1998. His practice, Kozlowski Orthodontics, has locations in New London and East Lyme, Connecticut. He has lectured extensively all over the world, including for the AAO and its various constituent societies and universities and study clubs as well as annually at the US Damon Forum and European Damon Symposium. His topics include efficiency and excellence in orthodontics, early treatment and facial esthetics. He has also been published in several orthodontic journals, including Seminars in Orthodontics and the Journal of Clinical Orthodontics.

A fitness advocate, he has completed five Ironman Triathlons, more than a dozen Half-Ironman Triathlons and numerous marathons and endurance cycling events, including the grueling Mt. Washington Bicycle Hill Climb seven times. He and his wife, Amy, a pediatric dentist, have two children: Amelia and Jake.