



The Trifecta: Using social media effectively

For more on this topic, go to www.dentaleconomics.com and search using the following key words: *social media, public relations, community involvement, trifecta, Kristie Nation*.

Are you striving to **GROW YOUR PRACTICE**, but think that current methods of connecting with your patients and their communities are not productive enough?

Then it's time to start taking advantage of the "trifecta" — the three highly accessible, easy to use, and extremely effective tools that can put your practice in front of your audience with a minimum cost and effort. This **practice-building** method consists of social media, public relations, and community involvement.

Social media has become the preferred method through which most people keep in touch with one other, with current events, and with local businesses. Facebook is no longer the domain of the young and bored; half of online adults ages 50 to 64 and one in four seniors have now joined the social revolution.*

But most practices are not capitalizing on social media, let alone the other two components that make for quick and effective practice building.

Public relations (PR) used to focus on the press and publicity. But in the online world, public relations has more to do with *engagement* and *relationship building*. Modern PR is all about promoting the activities that occur outside the practice to improve your image, strengthen existing patient loyalty, and encourage new patient growth.

In the past, formal PR services were used sparingly due to the expense involved. A PR firm could charge \$1,000 to \$2,500 per release or event. Online services, such as PRWeb, now allow even small practices to create and distribute effective, search engine friendly press releases for a fraction of that cost. All you need is something great to say about your practice!

Ironically, this is where most practices run into difficulty. I am asked at nearly every conference, client meeting, and interaction: "What are we supposed to talk about?" The answer lies in your community.

Community involvement (CI) is a relatively new concept for many practices; most have some type of internal marketing program but few have a plan for CI.

Patients and the community that they are part of are not that interested in your credentials. They are much more likely to "Like" your practice on Facebook, interact by posting comments — and in turn — refer their families

and friends if you are involved in a current community activity or event.

Popular causes include Give Kids A Smile, the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life, local church involvement, and donations to community organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, blood drives, patient appreciation or free dental days, health and employee fairs, and local sports teams or organizations).

So, how does the trifecta of social media, public relations, and community involvement work to bring local visibility to your practice? There are three logical steps:

① **Community involvement:** Agree to sponsor a local sports team (youth soccer, Little League, high school football, or senior bowling).

② **Public relations:** Create a press release about the sponsorship, focusing on information about the team, why you chose to sponsor them, how many years you have sponsored them, and why "giving back" to the community is important to you and your practice.

③ **Social media:** Post a picture of the team on your practice's Facebook page. Include the team's schedule (as well as patient/staff participation, if any). Follow the team's season by posting scores and pictures and Tweeting about victories via Twitter. You can even post videos on YouTube.

Hold a staff meeting and introduce your commitment to the community. Ask each team member to identify at least two community events in which your practice can participate. At the next meeting, create a 2011 community involvement calendar.

Assign someone to create a press release using PRWeb and contact a local media representative. In addition, have your social media "specialist" post event details, updates, links to news stories, and pictures on the appropriate social networks. Then sit back and watch your practice grow! **DE**

**Older Adults and Social Media, Pew Research Center, August 2010 <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx>.*

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