

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR PRACTICE

SEVEN STEPS TO SOCIAL SUCCESS

BY KRISTIE NATION

If you have not yet brought your dental practice into the age of social media, you're missing out on one of the strongest forms of community outreach and word-of-mouth marketing that exists.



Social media is used by 67% of U.S. adults who spend time online (with the 18 to 49 age bracket close to 80%). Studies show that more than 70% of adults online use the Internet to look for medical-related information. One in four of these use social media specifically to gather recommendations and reviews for service providers.

Perhaps you have already embraced the idea of social media and are actively participating on social networks, but cannot see any measurable benefit to your practice. If this is the case, you just might be doing social media wrong.

Here are seven steps to consider when launching a social media campaign. Ignoring any of these steps can derail the process and devalue your efforts. When done right, social media can be a powerful tool. Done wrong, it turns into an exercise in futility.

STEP 1: JOIN UP

To be part of the conversation, you have to be present where it is taking place. This means joining social networks. Do not fall into the trap of thinking you have to be a member of every social network, but do not put all of your eggs in one basket either. While Facebook is still the most powerful social site, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube can be part of your social media plan.

STEP 2: STOP SHOUTING

Too many people across all industries make the mistake of seeing social media as just another advertising medium. It does not work that way. If you went out for a walk and saw a group of people in your neighborhood, you would not suddenly yell, *"We are one of the best dentists in town! Call today for your appointment!"*

Why not? Because here's what would happen — Everyone would look uncomfortable. Some would probably leave the gathering, while others would simply ignore you. Most would feel embarrassed on your behalf. *If you would never do this in "real life," why on earth would you do it online?*

Think of social media as your online community. Instead of a sales pitch, offer some real conversation. You can introduce yourself as the local dentist. Just don't talk shop the entire time, but comment on the weather, the local ball team, and the community fundraiser. This gets you accepted by the group. Then when people need a dentist, you will be the one they call.

STEP 3: GET INVOLVED

To be part of the online community, you have to be part of the local community. Participating in local events also gives you something to talk about online. Sponsor a local youth team, volunteer to give a school presentation, get involved with your church or chamber of commerce,

attend health fairs, and create a patient appreciation day. Everything you do can be talked about on your Facebook wall or be tweeted.

STEP 4: COORDINATE YOUR EFFORTS

Public relations, community involvement, and social media all go hand in hand. When you and your staff team up to participate in a 10K run for a local charity, you should issue a press release to announce your involvement.

Then you can spread the word on your social networks by talking about it on Facebook, tweeting about it leading up to the run, and sharing pictures and video of the event via Instagram and YouTube.

STEP 5: STRIKE A BALANCE

Remember how we said you cannot use social media just for advertising? This does not mean that no marketing should be done. A good rule of thumb across all social media is to hit a 20/20/40/20 ratio:

20% of your content should be entertaining. This is your chance to pull people in with humor and charm. Funny videos or memes associated with your industry, inspirational quotes, crazy obscure facts — anything within the realm of good taste is appropriate.

Another 20% of your content should be informative. These posts should be compact nuggets that people can understand and/or implement right away, such as facts, steps, statistics, tips, or answers.

Forty percent of your posts should be interactive. Use polls to test the water with a new service or prod-

uct, foster a discussion of interest to your viewers, ask questions, or request help or feedback. Don't forget to respond to comments or questions on your page, and pop in to visit pages of referring dental practices or other business associates.

The final 20% of your content can concentrate on conversion. Remember, online networking should be just like in-person networking. Approach each opportunity as if you are at a community networking event.

You do not get people to like you by wearing a sandwich board with a bunch of technical dentist stuff on it. Your average patient is not a dentist. He or she is a member of the community in which you practice. While the latest X-ray and implant technology may be fascinating to you, your neighbor may be more concerned about whether you will think he's a coward if he asks for anesthesia during a routine cleaning.

You can always say, "Hey, be my fan on Facebook." But a more effective way is to let the person know you just posted some new information about conscious sedation for stressed patients on your wall (stressed is a much more acceptable word than frightened), and that he or she should check it out. Once people see how informational and interesting your page is, they will follow without having to be asked.

STEP 6: AVOID THESE THREE COMMON MISTAKES

Don't leave a social media policy out of your new staff member packet. While you should not control your employees' personal lives, you can and should make clear how posts to your practice's social media accounts should be handled. Having everyone involved in your social media efforts is a great idea, but only if everyone is on the same page.

Don't get into online fights. If someone says something negative about your practice, take five minutes to breathe, and then respond calmly and try to take the conversation offline via direct message, email, or phone. Handling an angry patient appropriately can sometimes yield more positive press than always doing everything right.

Don't forget to say, "Thank you." Whether it is a response to a nice comment, a shout-out for the patient who brought in a gift, kudos to the visitor who suggested a better way to present data, or recognition of employees who showed up for a community event, a simple tip of the hat goes a long way.

STEP 7: MEASURE YOUR RESULTS

Most social networks have methods in place to help you analyze the ROI of your efforts. Facebook has a built-in analytics system that allows you to see who you are reaching with each post. Pinterest just revealed its analytics to show which pins are most popular and which result in click-throughs to your website. Several online tools exist to track Twitter activity, and you can always use site analytics to track from where traffic on your website is coming.

Correlate your social media activity with increased traffic to your site and appointments booked, and patterns should emerge. Here's a simple way to keep track of how your social media efforts are translating into real results:

Add together the click-throughs to your website from all of your social accounts for one month. Divide that result by the total number of new visitors to your website for the same month. This will give you the percentage of referral traffic you are gaining from social media. If you see your referral percentage rising month by month, you are doing something right.

Not participating in social media can severely limit your ability to stay competitive with other dental practices, and prevent you from being able to respond when your practice's name does come up online. Make no mistake; your name will come up. Just because you are so far away from the forest that you cannot hear a tree hit the ground does not mean none will ever fall.

Being part of conversations about your industry and your practice online puts you in a position to comment as an authority. Start using social media today to make a difference in your practice. **DE**

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