

ADVERTISING ON FACEBOOK

- IS IT WORTH IT FOR YOUR PRACTICE?

BY KRISTIE NATION

In the past, you may have looked at social media as strictly a way to expand your “word-of-mouth” to “world-of-mouth” by using sites such as Facebook to shift your practice’s traditional marketing methods to online and increase your audience.



Using social media to advertise could be the next big step for your practice. Gone are the days where Facebook was simply a way to connect with existing patients. There is now a new form of “social” ads that makes your social media presence more likely to connect with potential new patients and result in appointments being made.

Social media advertising has exploded in the past two years and is set to nearly triple during the next four years by jumping from a \$3.8 billion industry to the dizzying figures of \$9.8 billion. That’s an annual growth rate of more than 20% (according to BIA/Kelsey’s U.S. Local Media Annual Forecast).

The majority of this growth is expected to be in local markets since Facebook and Twitter are set up to benefit small brands. A practice located in a thriving suburban area can easily reach local consumers online, even without a vast budget and a dedicated full-time marketing person.

While using social media as a tool to reach the local community, the potential for advertising on Facebook is encouraging dental practices to allocate advertising budgets specifically for that purpose.

According to a recent report from Marin Software, the proportion of Facebook ad budgets allocated to “social ads” has increased fourfold, from 5% in March 2011 to 23% in March 2012. Social ads are expected to account for an average of 50% of Facebook ad budgets by the end of 2012.

But traditional ads tend to turn off many consumers by alienating one of the largest consumer bases that uses social media – mothers. Moms are responsible for the vast majority of family decisions and purchases, including health and dental care, and using strong sales tactics causes them to tune out.

According to a study by Performics, mothers dominate social networking sites by being more present, more active, and more engaged than other women:

- Moms are 16% more likely to visit Facebook daily
- Moms are 26% more likely than other women to say their Facebook account is important

- Moms are 38% more likely than other women to purchase from brands they have “liked” on Facebook
- 42% of moms are more likely to say they have made a purchase as a result of a recommendation via a social networking site (with Facebook being the No. 1 site that mothers use)

Facebook’s new social ads turn traditional advertising on its nose by incorporating word-of-mouth recommendations. This makes for “friendlier” advertising that feels less invasive to moms using social networks as a way to vet potential dental practices with their peers.

Practices that already have a thriving presence on Facebook can easily take advantage of social advertising to reach their current audience and expand it.

And although the jury is still out on the success of Facebook’s IPO, the ads seem to be working. Engagement with social ads is up significantly, with click-through rates (CTR) rising 78% during the last 12 months.

This means more traffic to your practice’s website, more phone calls, and more new patient appointments. Facebook is not just about “staying connected” and getting “likes” anymore. It’s a powerful force that could drive new patients to your door.

While dental practices are local by nature and thus do not see the kind of large scale interaction of big brands, dentists can still learn lessons from major retailers that actively use social advertising such as Nike, Nordstrom, and Ford.

A Macy’s spokesperson recently commented, “Our Facebook brand page serves as a forum for rich conversation with our most passionate customers, and we continue to see great growth in fan participation and engagement.”

The flexibility of Facebook makes it one of the best advertising options available for large and small dental practices, while the advent of the “friendlier” social ads can give that participation and engagement the extra nudge needed to convert into actual new patients. **DE**

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