

WORD OF MOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA – IT'S NOT ONE OR THE OTHER

BY KRISTIE NATION



There's a common misconception that social media is the same thing as word-of-mouth marketing, and an even bigger misconception that social media has replaced word-of-mouth marketing. When you add the fact that many people do not even understand how word-of-mouth marketing works, yet want to plunge into social media as "the new and improved version," you have a recipe for failure.

WORD OF MOUTH VS. SOCIAL MEDIA

While social media may have a few things in common with word-of-mouth marketing, the latter can be so much more. In both cases, the goal is to have people talking about your practice. But face-to-face commentary still beats online interaction hands down. In fact, a phone-to-phone conversation still edges out social recommendation when it comes to brand credibility.

With more actions taken based on offline conversation, it is apparent that word-of-mouth marketing has not died or been replaced. Nor is it less in scope than social marketing. The actual water cooler and dinner table still exist, and people interact heavily in person, with conversation being more memorable than online interaction.

This is not to say that social media isn't powerful. It is! But word-of-mouth marketing is still an immensely useful tool and should not be overlooked. It's not a matter of choosing one or the other, but of using each method in a way that best benefits your practice.

WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING TIPS

Here are a few common mistakes dental practices make with word-of-mouth marketing.

1. Assuming that people think dentistry is worth talking about. Yes. A patient's dental health should be a priority and worth talking about. But bringing up a posterior crown replacement over coffee is not as easy as you think. Patients are much more inclined to share an "experience" with your practice that wasn't procedure-related.
2. Forgetting to ask what patients think. Getting testimonials is very easy. All you have to do is ask! Don't wait to ask on Facebook. Catch your clients on the way out the door and ask them to fill out a card, or use their email address, with permission of course, to follow up a few days later with a link to a local review site.

3. Making it difficult for people to talk about your practice. Make things easy for patients to talk about you. Give them plenty of products and freebies to make sharing about you easy – stickers, hats, CDs, or even something exotic and hard to find anywhere else. The SAS shoe company makes shopping at its stores a luxury experience just by carrying a hard-to-find brand of chocolate truffles and distributing the truffles to customers. People talk about the chocolates, and this leads to conversation about the comfort of the shoe brand.
4. Neglecting an important word-of-mouth source — your staff! Happy staff members are loyal staff members. Loyal people advocate for the things in which they believe. Show them how to share effectively, give them tools to make sharing easy, keep them informed about what to share, and recognize and thank them when they do share.

Social media is a great way to create buzz and get people talking about your practice online. It should never be ignored. But translating this into ROI can be difficult at times. Word-of-mouth, though, has been proven to be at least eight times as effective as other types of media in one vital area — increasing sales.

Make your dental practice worth talking about — both on- AND offline. Create opportunities for your patients and staff to share about you. Give them something worth talking about. Did you dress your team in red, white, and blue during the Summer Olympics in London? Did you hand out medals for bravest patient, most interesting tooth fairy story, and best flosser? Don't just deliver great service. Deliver a great experience, and get people talking! **DE**

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