

EVEN IF YOUR PRACTICE PAYS TO PLAY, SOCIAL MEDIA REMAINS SOCIAL

BY KRISTIE NATION

Social media has never really been completely free. Key social networks recently began directing their business users into a pay-to-play format that requires the users to budget funds – in addition to making a time commitment – to the platform. Should this change the way you tackle social media?



CHANGES TO FACEBOOK ALLOW FOR BETTER TARGETING

Facebook recently rolled out enhancements to the “Custom Audiences” feature. This feature specifically allows you to target the Facebook users who are most likely to use your practice – including existing patients with whom you wish to keep in close contact. You can compile the following information to create a Custom Audience:

- Patient emails
- Patient phone numbers
- Facebook IDs of patients who have already liked your page
- App IDs (for example, if you encourage patients to review your practice using an app)

Facebook allows you to upload this compiled information, and then it matches users with similar information in their profiles in order to create your Custom Audience.

Once you’ve developed a Custom Audience, you can also develop a “Lookalike Audience.” To create a Lookalike Audience, Facebook scans the platform for users who have similar characteristics to those in your Custom Audience. A Lookalike Audience can help you to identify people who are similar to your existing patients.

TARGETS IDENTIFIED. NOW WHAT?

Once you’ve decided to which people you want your posts (and/or ads) shown, you still have to create great content. As always, a mix of post types is best:

- An *image* is the best way of showing a before-and-after story about a woman whose smile has gone from hidden-behind-a-hand to proud and beautiful.
- A *text* post could be the best way to share offers and dental tips or to announce your practice’s participation in a community event.
- A *link* is ideal for pushing people back to your website, which is a primary goal for most social interaction.

CAN YOU GO VIRAL?

You’ve probably heard of things going “viral” on the Internet. A lot of times, it’s a “meme” that goes viral. While you may

think of a meme as a picture of the so-called “Grumpy Cat” with a sarcastic caption, a meme is really just an idea.

Aside from humor, useful information and actionable ideas are the most likely to go viral online, and these are the posts you’ll want to pay to promote. Don’t forget: if you see a post suddenly gaining a lot of attention on your practice’s page, you can always choose to boost it after the fact; you don’t have to decide to boost it upon the initial posting. You never know when a post might “take off” (or which post it will be), so monitor your page for signs of activity.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL: CONVERSION

Many practice owners forget that it’s not enough to simply be present on social networks. That is, there should always be a goal. As mentioned above, the goal is pushing people to your practice website with the ultimate goal of converting them into long-term quality patients.

That doesn’t mean that you should turn every post into a blatant advertisement, but it does mean that you should look at each post and ask, “If the viewer is interested, do they know what the next step is?” To make them aware of the next step, try including either of the following:

- *A call to action:* This may be a recommendation to call your practice, to click through to your website, or simply to like your page to stay up-to-date with special offers. If you invite readers to call, use a special phone number so you can identify which calls originate from your social media efforts.
- *A way to contact you directly or indirectly:* This can be as simple as making the post automatically link back to your practice’s Facebook page, or it could mean including a link to your practice’s external website.

Whether you are paying to use it or not – and Facebook is determined that, sooner or later, we all will pay – social media remains social. Staying transparent and continuing to engage users during the transition to a pay-to-play social media format are two of the current challenges that every practice must be ready to accept. **DE**

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