



What social media will and won't do for your practice

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BECOME one of the most important marketing channels in today's highly competitive digital media landscape. However, if you are planning to make it a significant facet of your dental practice's marketing plan (as you should), you need to know what you can expect.

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA WON'T DO FOR YOUR PRACTICE

Social media isn't a magic wand you can wave to watch all of your marketing issues dissolve. Using social media properly takes dedication and a willingness to devote time and effort (or money to pay for someone else's time and effort). Even with an excellent social media plan that incorporates all of the best practices, there are some things your campaign is just not going to achieve.

1. Social media *won't* act like a traditional advertising platform to generate a dozen (or more) new patients per week.

Social media is a long game, and it takes time to establish your practice's "face." Even after several years of diligent effort, you may not see the majority of your new patients come directly from social media platforms in a trackable way. (You are likely, however, to hear new patients saying that they sought you out on social media to learn more about your practice.)

2. Social media marketing *won't* always translate to a "neat and tidy" ROI, and there are benefits that can take months to show up.

Learning how to track your social media efforts and determine success takes time and constant reevaluation.

3. Social media *won't* send your practice website catapulting to the top of search engine rankings for generic terms.

Early predictions suggested that social media would replace search engine optimization (SEO) or at least become a major part of search algorithms, but this hasn't really happened. However, your social media profiles are very important for searches conducted for your practice name (and this probably represents the majority of your online traffic).

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA WILL DO FOR YOUR PRACTICE

Social media is digital word-of-mouth marketing. It's peer-to-peer discussion in a friendly, easy-to-access digital format. It's a whole landscape of reviews and ratings. When done properly, social media can provide you with the perfect approach to branding, visibility, marketing, and even customer service.

1. Social media *will* provide a place to talk to people about your practice.

If you don't talk about your practice online, someone else will. Controlling social media accounts in your practice's name and in your name lets you direct the conversation and keep it both positive and professional. If someone says something unflattering, you can be there to hear it and respond appropriately.

2. Social media *will* boost your practice's online profile and ensure that people see positive results first when they search for you.

The first page of search results should always start with your practice website and then be filled with account pages controlled by you.

3. Social media *will* provide the ideal place for current patients to sing your praises.

Facebook's review system allows you to get feedback from social media users in a clear, easy-to-understand format. Learning how to ask for and engineer positive feedback remarks is an important component of becoming Facebook-savvy.

4. Social media *will* let you learn about and respond quickly if there is an issue.

Twitter is one of the first places many people turn when they are unhappy. You can be quickly alerted if someone feels that he or she was not adequately served by your practice. You can immediately and publicly reach out to offer an option for private contact to resolve the problem. (The only thing that impresses potential patients more than a practice with no complaints, which could be viewed as suspicious, is a practice that handles complaints with honesty, transparency, and respect.)

Should your practice use social media? Yes. Should you take the time to determine what goals it can and cannot achieve? Yes. Build a solid campaign based on social media strengths, and you won't be disappointed! **DE**

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