



SOCIAL MEDIA

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Millennials, social media, and your practice

Does your practice do an acceptable job of reaching out to millennials? After all, they aren't just the parents of pediatric patients; they might be your patients, too. They live, breathe, and communicate on social media, and if you hope to stay relevant, you have to connect with them using their preferred media channels and tactics.

On average, millennials spend 18 hours per day consuming media—often in multiple formats at the same time, according to a study conducted by Crowdtap, Ipsos Media CT, and the Social Media Advertising Consortium.¹ Instead of browsing the newspaper during breakfast and checking basketball scores on the radio, the millennial generation is completely plugged in—with television, social media, video streaming, music, email, texting, and more at their fingertips on a variety of devices designed to keep them engaged.

Unsurprisingly, engaged they are, with an average of 5.4 hours a day devoted to user-generated content, such as social media.¹ Dental practices that ignore or underutilize platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are missing out on a hefty slice of what should be a heavily targeted demographic.

Tips for reaching millennials:

Go mobile: According to the Pew Center, half of all millennials report using cell phones as their primary devices for Internet access,^{2Ref} meaning your website needs to be mobile-friendly and easy to access.

Use social media: Millennials seek peer input when they look for information. Using platforms like Facebook to kick-start conversations can provide a valuable source of user-generated content (therefore deemed unbiased and trustworthy) that millennials will quickly latch on to.

Be visual: According to Wideo, millennials are more visual than almost any generation so far—with nine out of 10 using social media sites, eight out of 10 posting photos to the web, and one out of three Pinterest users being a millennial female.^{3Ref} Facebook and Instagram are the most popular sites used by this demographic, and image-based posts are ones with which millennials most frequently interact.^{4Ref}

Why is your online presence so important? It's not about just building a practice brand; it's about being there in a real and positive way for your millennial patients—whether they are existing or new.

More than 40% of consumers overall say that information found via social media affects how they deal with their health.^{5Ref} As health-care professionals, dentists have an ethical responsibility to ensure that accurate, responsible, and easy-to-understand information is available to those who use the Internet as a resource. (Mediabistro)

An incredible 90% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 say that they would trust medical information shared by people on their social media networks.^{6Ref} Infographic Archives reports that 60% of social media users are more likely to trust posts by medical professionals than posts made by any other group. (Search Engine Watch)^{7Ref}

Nearly 20% of smartphone owners now have health-based apps on their phones.^{8Ref} The number of health-based apps for iPhones alone exploded from under 3,000 apps in 2010 to more than 13,000 apps in 2013.^{9Ref} Could this mean your dental practice should look into developing an app based on your specialty? Perhaps! (Demi & Cooper Advertising and DC Interactive Group)

Nearly 60% of physicians now agree that social media can be a positive and useful tool for helping the patient community—from staying connected, to disseminating information, to answering direct questions from millennials who are more connected and proactive about their health than ever before.^{10Ref}

Social media can help your practice attract new patients, increase referrals, grow trust in the community, and create a positive reputation. All of this hinges, however, on doing social media correctly. Being present, listening instead of shouting into the void, and preparing to deal with each interaction as a chance to hear, help, and heal is key.

It doesn't have to happen overnight, but you should be thinking about ways to attract millennials—even if your specialty is geared toward older patients. The millennials will eventually be those older patients and by showing them now that you speak their language, you can set yourself up to serve their generation as faithfully as you served the one before them. **DE**

REFERENCES

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