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'Paying to play' on Facebook: Is it right for your practice?

THINGS HAVE CHANGED A LOT ON FACEBOOK over the past 36 months. The most obvious change was the rise of paid content promotion; between July 2012 and July 2013 alone, paid reach increased by 221%.¹ If your dental practice was doing well on Facebook, then suddenly saw ROI dropping, it could be time to change strategies. If you haven't done much practice marketing on social media but are ready to start, consider allocating a budget for Facebook post promotion.

WHY DISCUSS PAID ADS INSTEAD OF ORGANIC REACH?

While organic reach isn't dead (just a lot harder to achieve than it used to be), the "pay-to-play" concept has arrived, and it's here to stay. Many people are surprised at the need to allocate advertising dollars to Facebook (*Wasn't social media supposed to be the great free branding platform?*), but the cost of promoting posts is actually remarkably inexpensive compared to traditional advertising strategies.

In fact, Facebook ads offer the lowest cost per 1,000 impressions in advertising history, averaging \$0.25 per 1,000—only 1% of the cost for TV.² And compared to simple views, paid ads are far more likely to result in action, such as calls to the practice or appointment requests.

6 STEPS TO PROMOTING YOUR PRACTICE WITH FACEBOOK'S PAID ADS

There are six steps to effectively using Facebook's pay-to-play post promotion. Following these guidelines will increase your chances of effectively reaching and converting new patients, as opposed to simply "being a presence" on social media.

- 1. Research your practice brand, the dental niche in your area, and topics that have value for your patient base.** You can use a tool like Buzzsumo to search social media for mentions of your target keywords and filter directly through Facebook to figure out what is working for your competitors and what doesn't resonate.³
- 2. Create engaging content that adheres to Facebook guidelines for promotion.** Short, timely videos are increasing in popularity; in fact, more than 50% of people who return to Facebook every day in the US watch at least one video daily, and 76% of people in the US who use Facebook say they tend to discover the videos they watch on Facebook.⁴ Videos alone accounted for 80% of all interactions on Facebook in December 2014.⁵
- 3. Choose your audience.** Thanks to the "Custom Audience" feature, you can elect to target your email list, which is great for subtly reaching out to patients you haven't

seen in a while, or you can exclude your current list if you need a fresh audience for a new-patient promotion.⁶

- 4. Control your budget.** Choose "promoting" a post via the "Ad Manager" versus "Boosting" a post. Promoting gives you more control in targeting the audience, more than making up for Boosting's ease of use.
- 5. Track your ROI.** According to a 2013 HubSpot survey, 34% of businesses either can't or don't calculate inbound ROI.⁷ Fortunately, Facebook now hosts a conversion tracker, so you can see exactly who visits your practice website via promoted posts *and* who requests an appointment. This is solid gold for measuring ROI.
- 6. Rinse and repeat.** Not every campaign will be a success. Test ads over time and pay close attention to what works and what doesn't. Eventually, your promoted posts will gain traction. You will see a tangible and beneficial ROI.

Facebook isn't the only social media platform to implement the pay-to-play advertising model. Once you've succeeded on Facebook, look to Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and even blogs or e-newsletters to publish promotable or sponsored content, increase your practice's visibility, and bring in new patients. **DE**

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