



PRACTICE

SOCIAL MEDIA

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Do I have time for social media for my dental practice?

MANY DENTISTS are initially attracted to social media because they get the impression that it is free. But nothing is really free, and it's important to remember that there are two forms of currency when it comes to marketing: time and money.

Social media done right requires at least one or the other, and it works best when both are devoted on a regular basis. As anyone in a service industry knows (especially when it comes to health care), word of mouth is the best form of marketing that exists. In fact, in a 2014 research study by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 85% of respondents cited word of mouth as an important factor in choosing a health-care provider, beating out provider referrals by a slim margin and provider-ratings websites by a hefty margin.¹

Dental practices can benefit from social media because social media is really just online word of mouth. However, word of mouth—whether on or offline—always requires a consistent time investment.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES SOCIAL MEDIA TAKE?

An initial time investment to set everything up, plus an ongoing time investment of up to 10 hours per month, can be expected if you're truly committed to incorporating social media into your practice.² This includes content creation, content distribution, monitoring and networking, community building, and analytics and measuring results.²

A hit-or-miss approach in regard to social media posting is a guaranteed way to fail, so having a marketing plan in place is imperative to ensure a solid ROI.

WHAT ABOUT MONEY? DO I HAVE TO SPEND?

Your return on investment can be enhanced significantly when given an assist in the form of ad spend. A term formerly devoted to describing dollars set aside for television, radio, newspaper, and magazine ads, ad spend is now relevant to social media too, with thanks to the “pay-to-play” format adopted by many social platforms.

You don't have to spend money on social media, but it could be just as effective as other forms of advertising when it comes to ROI.

THE MOVE FROM ORGANIC TO PAID SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook originally provided automatic “organic reach.” That is, most people who liked your practice's Facebook Page would see your posts. In 2012, however, Facebook's algorithm changed so that only around 16% of a Page's

posts were seen by people who followed that Page, and in 2016, that figure dropped to a disappointing 2%.³ Other social platforms quickly adopted similar plans.

These updates were designed to push Page users to depend on “paid reach” to get their content in front of viewers. Most dental practices find a happy balance between content they publish for their existing fans, and content created to reach potential patients.

Paid options, such as the option to “boost” a post to reach a wider audience and the ability to create customized ads that target specific demographics, help boost the signal for both kinds of content.

THE BIGGEST SECRET TO SOCIAL IS VISUAL CONTENT

The best thing you can do for your practice when it comes to social media is post visual content. A 2016 industry report found 60% of marketers currently use video, and 73% plan to increase their use of video.⁴ There are inexpensive ways to create and leverage this kind of content using Instagram and Snapchat with a smartphone.

Video and other forms of visual content don't have to involve a massive commitment of time and money. There's no need to create flawless masterpieces of cinematic perfection; in fact, an engaging Facebook post can be created in 10 minutes or less and used for either organic or paid promotion of your practice.⁵

The bottom line with social media for dental practices is that investment is required for return—just like it is with any other form of marketing. **DE**

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