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Is this platform right for my practice?

A LITTLE OVER A DECADE AGO, social media marketing started its rapid ascent, and companies began going online in earnest. Social media was becoming the new word-of-mouth, and not participating in the conversation meant not being able to control it.

“FREE” DOESN’T ALWAYS MEAN “FREE”

A big draw of social media initially was that it was presented as a free way to connect directly with consumers. However, even before the pay-to-play setups that now dominate the social media landscape arrived on the scene, social media wasn’t really free. While there was originally no charge to share your posts with your followers, and post reach was organic, early social media still had costs in the time and training required to use each platform successfully.

Today, with most social media networks doubling as advertising platforms, deciding which ones benefit your practice—and which drain resources with little or no return—is a priority. Tracking each social media platform on which you are currently active and analyzing which platform gives you the best ROI can help you choose the right platforms for your practice.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOUR METRICS ARE TELLING YOU

The key to analyzing social media metrics effectively is being able to recognize and assign real value to every interaction, even those that aren’t tied directly to actions that generate specific cases or new-patient visits. This is the only way to get a clear picture of what social is doing for your practice.

One social media platform might not be delivering direct returns, such as a verifiable 50% increase in full-mouth reconstruction cases, but it could be generating invaluable brand visibility and goodwill for your practice. If you end up with Twitter followers who feel comfortable asking direct questions about insurance coverage, specific services, or scheduling via tweet or direct message,

that open line of communication could be even more valuable than a video ad on Instagram.

IS YOUR PRACTICE LEVERAGING VIDEO?

Video posts are starting to dominate social media feeds. The popularity of easily consumable video content is skyrocketing; in 2018, for the first year ever, YouTube was rated as a social media platform in Pew Research’s annual social media scorecard and instantly topped Facebook as the most-used social channel.¹ Twitter, which had held second place for years, dropped to seventh overall, with visual platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat moving up the chain.¹

Have you considered adding video content to your social media plan? Roughly 95% of brand executives surveyed say live-streaming video will be a crucial part of their 2018 marketing strategies, and 91% say they have experimented with Facebook Live.² Dental practices have been slower to adopt video due to concerns about privacy and perceived cost of production.

Privacy concerns are valid and should be kept in mind if videos are shot in the dental office. Patients, especially minors, should not be filmed without express written permission. However, many engaging videos can be shot in a dental office with no patient involvement, including “meet your doctor” or “meet your hygienist” videos, videos showing a staff member getting dental imaging or a prophylaxis, or brushing and flossing demos.

While hiring a film crew to come in and shoot a professional video series can be expensive, there’s no reason practice staff members cannot produce short, fun,

and shareable video content using today’s high-quality, camera-equipped smartphones that you approve before posting to social media.

When creating videos, consider the platform, as a 30-second video that is well received on Twitter (where the optimal video length is around 45 seconds) will not be watched or shared as much if posted on Facebook (optimum length: 15 seconds) or Snapchat (5 seconds).³

After evaluating your current social media participation, exploring the potential of video content, and assigning values to previously overlooked metrics, you should be in a good position to determine which platforms are right for your practice, from both advertising and community-building standpoints. Online and offline efforts should always go hand in hand, and the true goal of social media marketing should be real-world interactions that result in patient acquisition and retention. **DE**

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