

SOCIAL MEDIA – IT’S JUST WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING!

BY KRISTIE NATION

Word-of-mouth marketing is the primary source of new patients for dental practices. Although marketing mediums have changed and expanded during the past decade, this does not change that fact. It is still about connecting directly with your community and earning the respect and recommendations of your patients one by one. The delivery method is the only aspect that has changed.

There are four points to remember when translating your traditional word-of-mouth tactics into online use:

1. Make your practice interesting. The practice that invites interest is the one that goes the extra mile. Your waiting room may be gorgeously appointed and your equipment state-of-the-art, but if your competition steals the limelight with a well-publicized Halloween candy buy-back program or a school supply drive, you’ve lost your advantage.
2. Focus on the benefits. Too many practices emphasize the features of their respective offices without explaining what they do for patients. Tell patients how a feature provides a positive benefit to their life. If they understand this, they can pass the information to friends and family.
3. Don’t just tell — do. True marketing depends on showing people exactly how sincere you are. So back up your words with actions. Ultimately, your practice is not what you *say* it is; it is how people *feel* about it.
4. Stay on the ball. Social media has one great advantage as compared to traditional word of mouth. You can actually fix problems instead of watching them catapult you into a reputation nightmare. Sometimes a complaint that seems to be handled professionally and promptly online impresses potential patients more than a string of compliments.

Face-to-face tactics are still fundamental. The most popular marketing tactics to attract new patients include personal networking, community events, and local charitable activities. But online tactics, such as content marketing, search engine optimization, and social media marketing, have reached near equal levels of importance.

Facebook is being used by dental practices at an ever-increasing rate as a platform on which to create opportunities for word-of-mouth engagement. Sadly, nearly half of these practices do not understand how to measure results, and they end up thinking social media is a waste of time.

There are three items to remember about measuring social media effectiveness:

- Simply counting “likes” and “followers” does not equal social media success.
- Return on investment for social media cannot be calculated the same way as for other media, such as television or print advertising.
- Results must take into account the exponential nature of social media.

Focus on getting people to go from your practice to your Facebook page. Satisfied patients are your best advocates, and encouraging them to visit your online platforms and interact with the community is the pinnacle of online word-of-mouth marketing. Eventually, the traffic will start to flow the other way as well!

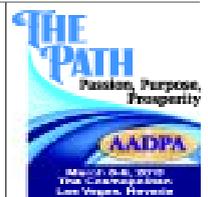
It takes more than displaying a Facebook icon in your website header to get patients to take action. The icon promotes Facebook, when what you really want is to promote the community you have built on Facebook.

Invite patients leaving your office to post on your Facebook wall about their experience, or better yet, send them an email follow-up after their visit with a direct link to your practice’s wall and a request for feedback.

Don’t make it too complicated. Too many options make it difficult for many people to make decisions, and they’ll leave without engaging at all. Ask a simple question — “How did you like our waiting room?” Then let them advertise how nice it was to be offered a cool bottle of water and a fresh cup of coffee.

If you use social networks such as advertising platforms, your efforts will be in vain. But when you use social media properly, as the new word of mouth, your practice will benefit. **DE**

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