

IS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVE?

ELEVEN
STEPS TO
SUCCESS
IN 2012

BY KRISTIE NATION

You have determined that your practice needs to be visible online. You understand the need to participate in social networks. But do you understand how to accomplish these goals in a way that brings you more patients, and also helps care for the ones you already have?

Social media without clear direction is just online chatter. Focusing your activity in order to produce results means identifying a few key factors:

1 IDENTIFY WHO YOUR MARKET IS. Do you cater to pediatric patients? Patients with fears or anxiety? Patients in search of jaw pain relief, or patients looking for cosmetic solutions?

2. IDENTIFY WHERE YOU WANT THEM TO GO. Usually this will be your practice's website, where more information will be available (phone, address, new patient forms, FAQ).

3. IDENTIFY WHY THEY SHOULD CHOOSE YOU. What makes your practice the best choice?

Do you offer a variety of specialties under one roof? Do you have superior amenities?

4 IDENTIFY WHAT YOUR GOALS ARE. You probably would not say "no" to some new patients. But wouldn't feedback and testimonials help a lot, too? Don't limit yourself.

Once you know who you are targeting, where you want them to go, and why they should choose you above all others, you can move on to the next phase. Figuring out what you want is not enough. You have to figure out what your patients want.

5 UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR TARGET PATIENTS WANT.

The answer: information. Facebook is a great tool for disseminating information, so use it.

6 UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR TARGET PATIENTS VALUE.

This is customer service. The way you treat people can make or break a practice.

Here's an example:

Amanda needs to make a dental appointment for intermittent tooth pain. She calls four dental practices. The first three ask brusquely if she has insurance, and tell her they cannot see her for at least three days. The fourth expresses concern and sympathy for her pain, lets her know it's not uncommon, finds her the first available appointment, offers to put her on the list to be called first in case of a cancellation, and provides information about payment options. Which practice does Amanda choose?

7. UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR TARGET PATIENTS NEED.

While not all prospects make an appointment immediately, 70% of them do eventually choose a provider. Creating memorable interactions will help them remember your brand when they need it.

Once you've identified who, where, why, and what, and understand what your target patients want, value, and need, you can begin the social media process.

8. CREATE AN ONLINE PROFILE. This means developing your brand and logo so you have a continuity of image across all platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

9. CREATE CONTENT. Adding a blog to your website is one of the best things you can do. You can promote your blog posts on your Facebook and Twitter pages. Use video content and provide plenty of images of your office, your staff members, and smiling patients.

10. CREATE BUZZ. Ask questions, post polls, and engage with your patients. Ask for feedback and reviews of your website, your practice, and individual staff members.

Consumers depend on social media to give them information, share advice, and provide them with answers. If you do not participate, your competitors will. Engaging with your patient community has never been easier. If you build it and promote it, they will come. This brings us to our final step.

11. BE HONEST. Nothing kills a social media campaign faster than avoiding an issue. If you do receive negative feedback, don't dance around it or try to push it under the rug. Step up, apologize for any misunderstanding or mistake, indicate you want to make things right, and then take the conversation offline and into private email or phone contact.

Social media for your practice should be interactive, transparent, and above all, effective. These 11 steps can set you on the right track for achieving your goals in 2012! **DE**

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