

# IN SOCIAL MEDIA, THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME!

BY KRISTIE NATION

At the time of this writing, the New Year has just rolled around, and predictions for social media in 2014 are plentiful. Many will have been proven or disproven by publication time, but there are a few strategies that will always hold true when it comes to marketing. This is true no matter what channel or vertical you choose to take advantage of for your dental practice branding and engagement.



## WHAT'S BEEN CHANGING

The things that change are mostly driven by third-party platforms, as they alter their TOS and offerings.

- **Facebook** changed its algorithm several times in 2013, culminating in algorithms that reduced the number of “fans” who actually saw posts from business pages (in an attempt to force business owners to pay for views) and a surprising swing back to favoring text posts over images and videos for maximum exposure.
- **Twitter** also pushed harder for promoted posts, restricted the reach of the average Tweet in a similar attempt to monetize the platform. TweetChats also came into vogue as a way for companies to drive engagement, and dentists can now conduct live Q&A sessions with followers.
- **Google+** synched with YouTube over the past year to make Hangouts more visual and productive, and the site continued to gain ground with the young, hip, tech crowd. As more women join G+, it becomes a more attractive venue for dentists seeking to connect with a prime demographic.
- **LinkedIn** added “Product Pages,” making it easier for dentists to promote special services and brands available in their offices from Invisalign to Zoom teeth whitening. Dentists with a following on LinkedIn can easily promote such products to their networks via these pages.
- **Pinterest** grew more than 125% in 2013, and one in five women on the Internet now have a Pinterest account. Again, this is heartening for dentists looking to target the demographic most likely to seek medical advice and information on the web.

## WHAT'S STAYING THE SAME

Among the things that stay the same are the basic strategies of marketing. The tools may change but the methods remain familiar.

- **Headlines** are still one of the most important parts of marketing. Online they gain even more importance since capturing interest during the first five seconds of a viewer’s attention is vital. The key to great social media headlines is to include action words to provoke readers to “do” rather than simply “view.”
- **Pay to play** is back on the table as many platforms move toward a more blatant advertising model. On Facebook, in particular, dental practices can plan on investing actual money, as well as time in order to be seen by the widest possible target audience.
- **Word of mouth** is stronger than ever in an age of online employee advocacy and user reviews. Practices that leverage this enthusiasm on social media platforms do better than those who relegate testimonials to a single page on their websites.
- **ROI** is harder to analyze on social media than in other types of marketing but your practice can still use AB testing and set a value for results (such as contact made for a new appointment) to make the success of each campaign measurable.

## ONE MORE PREDICTION FOR 2014

LinkedIn expert Viveka von Rosen suggests that in 2014, traditional, digital, and social platforms will be provided with a dashboard to launch and manage all channels effectively and authoritatively from one place. “Fusion” marketing will become the norm, and the three types of branding will be forever melded into one cohesive unit. If this happens, dental practices may be able to consolidate marketing budgets and direction under one roof.

If your practice is not yet leveraging social media, 2014 is the time to start. Regardless of how the trends are leaning by the time of this column’s publication, one thing is for certain. The more things change, the more they stay the same! **DE**

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