

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BLOGGING

GO HAND IN HAND

BY KRISTIE NATION

In the world of online marketing, content and interaction work in tandem to attract and keep the attention of your audience. The three most valuable tools you have at your disposal are your blog, and the top two social media platforms – Facebook and Twitter. Used together, these three comprise the foundation of your online presence and allow you to reach out and (more importantly) allow others to reach in.



YOUR PRACTICE'S BLOG

Your blog is the platform on which your most solid, informative pieces of content can be shared.

- **Frequency.** Blogs should be posted a minimum of once a week, twice if possible.
- **Length.** Well-crafted blog posts should run between 300 and 600 words. If they are too long, you will lose the audience's interest. If they are too short, you will not be able to provide true value. Make it easy to subscribe to and find your blog, so patients will receive automatic notifications when you post fresh content. Add images. Online readers are heavily dependent on visual cues to keep them engaged.
- **Format.** Tell stories. Using the vehicle of a story to deliver information remains the most effective way to pull readers in and allows them to connect emotionally with what you're saying. Get permission from your patients to use their stories — both clinical and community — in your blog, and your readership will rise dramatically.
- **Purpose.** Use your blog to answer questions or address concerns, creating posts that address the "Best way to ..." or "The benefits of ___ vs. ___." Dedicate a page of your blog to frequently asked questions, and leave the comments space open so readers can "Ask the dentist." (Of course, you will have to monitor this closely so queries are promptly answered.)

FACEBOOK

According to a report from BIA/Kelsey, small- and medium-sized businesses (a bracket that includes most dental practices) are steadily increasing their social media budget by as much as two points per quarter. The two most used networks are Facebook and Twitter. Your practice's Facebook page can be leveraged for higher patient/practice interaction using these simple guidelines:

- **Be brief.** Keep your posts at approximately 250 characters.

- **Ask** people to like your page, comment on a post, or answer a poll. Calls to action result in nearly 10 times more interaction than just hoping people will hit the "like" button.
- **Reward** those who interact with you with recognition ("*Shout-out to Adrienne Walker on her best answer to our latest survey!*"), or with tangible rewards such as providing a coupon or running a giveaway.
- **Participate daily.** Unlike a blog, Facebook must be updated at least once a day — more if you have strong interaction and need to respond to inquiries.

If used properly, Facebook can be a powerhouse that drives new patients to your practice. The No. 1 thing to remember is to monitor your page daily so viewers do not get discouraged and leave if they ask a question and it is not promptly addressed.

TWITTER

Twitter gives you 140 characters to get your point across, so use the characters wisely.

- **Hashtags.** Don't piggyback on just any trending hashtag but keep your eye on current trending keywords in case one pops up that is relevant to your practice.
- **Take the time** to Tweet several times a day or automate several Tweets so you maintain a presence throughout each day.
- **Connect your networks.** Anytime you post to your blog or Facebook, a corresponding message should be posted to Twitter.

Your blog, Facebook page, and Twitter accounts form the three points of a triangle that should surround your main website at all times. These three platforms should be geared to create interaction on the platforms and drive traffic to your primary point of patient contact — your website. By adding social marketing to your practice's overall marketing plan, you will benefit from this fast-moving digital word-of-mouth. **DE**

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