

# SOCIAL MEDIA FOR DENTAL PRACTICES:

## N O L O N G E R O P T I O N A L

BY KRISTIE NATION

Social media is a billion dollar business. Facebook alone has a user base that would rank third in population if it were a country. Twitter sees 340 million tweets posted every day.

Practices that harness the power of social media reach an audience far greater than the number influenced by traditional advertising. Unfortunately, few practice owners understand this power or its possibilities and miss out on the benefits.

With social media, the person exposed to the message has the ability to instantly repeat it in the same or a different format to a new audience, and the chain continues.

In contrast, a person watching a TV commercial experiences the message, and the chain then stops there with that one person. This model of marketing is becoming obsolete. Once a new and exciting tactic that was untested by most practices, social media is fast becoming mandatory.

Social media done right has five major benefits that can be set as goals for your practice:

- Brand recognition
- Product/service familiarity
- Targeted potential patients
- Increased appointments/profitability
- Patient loyalty and trust

Social media is, above all else, a series of conversations. How to jump into a conversation or start one that will entice others to join is the hardest part for those used to traditional marketing. Instead of talking AT people, you are trying to talk WITH them.

Your patients use social media as a place to find information from peers, first and foremost, and those who provide a strong sales “pitch” are viewed with suspicion.

Social media has four major functions that operate to achieve the five goals/benefits:

1. Monitor what is being said about dentistry in general and your practice in particular.
2. Respond to the questions, concerns, and needs of potential and existing patients.
3. Amplify your response so it reaches a wider audience.
4. Lead potential patient behavior by providing expert guidance without sales tactics.

It can be difficult to quantify the “bottom line” financial impact of social media. This makes many dentists uncomfortable and unwilling to devote resources to something they

do not understand. A practice owner must realize that social media can ultimately be tied to an increase in three areas — patient acquisition, patient retention, and case acceptance.

Social media shouldn't be an afterthought to your practice's marketing program. It should be a linchpin. To achieve this, you need to do three things:

1. Develop a clear framework for evaluating the potential of social media for your practice and come up with a budget.
2. Invest in training for those on your team responsible for handling social media.
3. Create a performance plan to help define goals and keep your practice on track.

Once these steps are taken, you can concentrate on three more tangible steps:

1. Create content based on industry information, patient questions, and patient feedback. (“Six things our patients say they love most about our practice ...”)
2. Tie social media into the day-to-day operation of your practice (have a Twitter account dedicated to customer service or add daily summaries to Facebook, such as “17 cavity-free patients seen today!”)
3. Increase employee interaction with patients (“Want to ask our hygienist a question? Post questions for Tracy here!”)

Social media is not an option. It is the BEST way to create buzz, build your practice's brand online, target potential patients, and convince the world that you are the best at what you do — not only technically but also personally.

The bottom line is that you simply cannot afford to treat social media as just “an option” anymore. Your practice's health depends on your ability to monitor what is being said about your practice, to respond appropriately, and to show potential patients that you are accessible, respectful, compassionate, and intelligent. There is no better medium to achieve these items and more than social media.

Stop avoiding the inevitable. The social world awaits you, and you have work to do! **DE**

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