



BUSINESS MATTERS

Dentists: Are You Prepared to Succeed in Social Media?

Social media can be a powerful way to bolster your practice. The volume of traffic can be outstanding, the potential to engage with valued patients is amazing, and the barriers to entry are relatively low. But it's not for everyone. Before jumping in feet first, there are several key things to consider.

1. Is your target audience using social media?



Are the people you want to reach communicating on social channels? Which ones? Unless you're a social media guru, it's tough to know. If you want to reach the decision maker of the household when it comes to healthcare decisions, this is often the family matriarch. Facebook is a great platform to reach. If you're targeting millennials (late teens – early thirties), be aware that they're flocking in droves from Facebook to Twitter and Instagram. (They consider Facebook for "old people.") Take the time to listen to your marketplace before you invest time or resources. What are they talking about? Where are they talking? What do they want to know? How can you add value? One way to help answer these questions would be to survey your patient base for a month or two when they are in the office for recall appointments.

2. What do you want to accomplish?



There are many reasons to embark on a social media journey. Your goal may be brand awareness, patient education, customer service, lead generation, or any combination of these. Make sure your objectives are clear, because they will dictate staffing and tools. Write a social media strategy (it doesn't have to be long or fancy) and use it to frame your content development. Before you start, create at least three months of content, so you can keep things current and new.

3. Do you have the resources?



One of the greatest misconceptions about social media is that it's free. It's not. Sure, you can set up accounts and pages for free. However, a lot of work is needed to properly support them. Social media demands time, money and commitment. You need to consistently provide fresh, relevant content. Not just any content, thoughtful content that forwards your practice and meets your strategic objectives. It might be best to assign someone in the office to be "Chief Social Officer"—in charge of creating content and keeping your platforms updated. And if you're not prepared to dedicate time and resources internally, there are companies in dentistry out there that you can engage to develop a social media strategy for your practice and manage the content.



4. How will you measure success?

Don't get hung up on the number of likes and followers you have. Instead, turn your attention to more pertinent metrics that align with your strategic goals. For example, if your goal is to increase awareness of your practice and patient engagement, you might measure comments and shares. If you want to drive traffic to your website, you'll want to look at clicks and conversions. If customer service is your focus, you might compare the number of inquiries resolved by social media to the number of inquiries handled by phone. Without the right information, you won't know whether your social media investment is paying off.

Consider these points before determining whether social media is right for you. Getting into social media just because everyone else seems to be is not a valid reason. Make sure it is a good fit for you before you become one of the many companies who says, "We tried it but it just didn't work." There's a right way and a wrong way to go about it. If you don't do it the right way, you are better off not doing it at all.