



## HOW-TO

# Six Offline Marketing Skills to Use for Online Success

If you're like most dental practices, you're using traditional direct marketing and trying to determine how best to leverage digital channels — after all, you use email, Facebook and LinkedIn — but you've likely never managed a digital program from start to finish. Then you hear it: “We really need to step up our digital presence with a new website, a social media plan and some mobile marketing.” Suddenly, you're flung into a world of millennials who speak in HTML5, UX, and responsive design. It's enough to make a dentist-turned-marketer crawl inside an envelope and never come out.

Hold on! It may sound scary, but there's no reason to panic or go back to school. Based on your direct marketing experience (direct-mail, ads, etc), you already know and follow the same principles that will make your digital program succeed. In fact, online marketing has the same objective — to develop relevant, engaging, two-way relationships that motivate prospects to become and remain customers. Do the following tips sound a bit familiar?

### 1. Know your audience

Who are you speaking to? What are they interested in? How do they use the Web? How and when do they use their mobile devices? Defining a persona or patient profile can help you develop your overall online strategy. Talk to a sampling of your target audience in person while they are in for an appointment. You'll get insights on what really makes them tick and how to best communicate with them. Patients will only interact with your site or respond to your SMS messages if the content and offers are relevant and interesting to them.

### 2. Define and communicate your USP/POD

Determine the **unique selling point** for your business/product/service that addresses your audience's pain point(s) or needs. What is the one thing you can say that your competition can't? Focus on what differentiates you — maybe it's how you work with your patients, or a unique way you solve problems. Ask your current patients why they chose your practice. Make sure your **point of differentiation** is supported by your content and is easy to understand. Like direct marketing, digital marketing should support and enhance your brand. It should speak in the same voice and incorporate the same visual elements (logo, colors, typeface, etc.). Ideally, your USP/POD is defined on the first Web page your prospect sees. Craft your headlines and subheads so your audience can easily scan through needed information and supporting points.

### 3. Create a great experience

Ultimately, all great marketing communications tell a story — what, why and how a prospect can become a customer. Online, a good story will make it easy for your audience to find and react to relevant information. Keep in mind, the story is not what you want them to see — it's what they are interested in (see #1). Throughout the project, a good Web design team will present you with a site map, content strategy, layouts, and a working prototype of the site so you can see how the “story” is coming together. You can even have the prototype tested by a select group of patients to see if they are able to find needed content. Usability testing can be especially valuable for e-commerce sites.

#### 4. Encourage two-way communication ... and action

In direct marketing, a response is when a potential new patient indicates interest in your offer by mailing back a form or calling an 800 number, and conversion is the percentage of responses that become sales. In Web-speak, a response and a purchase are both considered conversion. That's because digital marketing is both outgoing and incoming — for example, you can send a targeted email blast that refers prospects to your site (outgoing), or patients can “discover” you through search or links from other sites. In both disciplines, getting a potential patient to raise their hand is the single most important objective of your communication. Whether you provide online forms, a Business Reply Card (BRC) and/or an 800 number, make sure your call to action is easy to find, read and fill out. Once a potential patient has responded, you have a lead. And that opens up the communication line between you and your potential patient.

#### 5. Keep them talking to you

Every direct marketer (and sales person) knows that nurturing leads is an essential part of developing a strong customer base. It is easier and more cost-effective to convert a patient that's already shown interest (through a response) than it is to keep finding new ones. Whether the sales cycle is long, or the potential patient is interested but not quite ready to commit to your practice, a nurturing program keeps them talking to you. It's also an opportunity for you to demonstrate your expertise, responsiveness and commitment. As with direct marketing, offering a relevant monthly newsletter or ongoing information is an excellent way to nurture leads. Include a blog on your site, keep it updated at least weekly, and encourage readers to share and participate in the conversation. Is your practice on Twitter or Facebook? If not, consider getting involved in the social media space. One of the best ways to find out what patients want and need is simply to listen to them in social media.

#### 6. Data is your friend

Testing is a central tenet of direct marketing. It is also very important to analyze the results of your online marketing and refine your design and content on an ongoing basis. Small changes to design can lead to unexpected improvements — or depression — in response and conversion. You can also look at where your leads are coming from and what devices your users are viewing it in. With online tools such as Google Analytics, you can test landing pages to see which get the best conversion, just as you can test mail pieces.

