

Is Your Online Presence Scaring Away Potential Patients?

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How to audit and improve content to fight dental fears

We all know that you and your friendly, non-judgmental team are nothing to fear! However, studies like [this](#) could make you wonder: *How many potential patients never make it to our office because the very idea of visiting a dentist is a panic attack-inducing prospect?* The patients you actually see are those who, while potentially uneasy about visiting the dentist, are not paralyzed by [such fears](#). You do not see this group of people because their fear is so intense that it keeps them away from routine visits. The most “dental care” they get may be at the hospital in the Emergency Room when the pain from their persistent tooth infections becomes absolutely unbearable.

These patients never get the opportunity to experience your “brand” of warm and inviting dentistry, nor do they get a chance to acquaint themselves with today’s dentistry – which may be a far cry from what older patients remember as children. And we all know it is those childhood experiences that can have such far-reaching impacts on adult patients’

perceptions of dentistry. These traumatic experiences do not simply go away. Traumatized children carry these negative memories with them well into adulthood.

So, what can we do to attract those people who are the most “resistant” to dental care? Since they do not experience our stellar [in-office communications](#), we must rely on our online communications to attract them and to get them sufficiently comfortable and trusting as to contact us. By reading this article, you are taking the first steps toward attracting a new population of loyal patients who likely really need your care. Treating these patients and instilling trust among them can also help to remind you and your team of the collective “why” – what inspired you all to enter the field in the first place.

There are generally two ways to look at content that inspires trust and a sense of calm among the most fearful individuals:

- **The *type of content*** – Here, we are referring to topic choice. If you have not inventoried existing content to account for dental fear, now is the time to do so. Likewise, if it has been a while since you audited your content, what are you waiting for? Objectively evaluate for content within social posts, website articles, and blogs that explore the issue of fear or anxiety, if not directly, then on the periphery. Such content may promote, for instance, comfortable or spa-like amenities – aromatherapy, weighted blankets, massage chairs, etc. Or, it may be an opportunity to highlight or further spotlight the likes of “painless” technologies for administering dental anesthetic and any capabilities that your office may have related to sedation dentistry.
- **The *delivery of and word choice within the above types of content*** – Here, you will further scrutinize the articles, posts, and other communications isolated when inventorying or auditing the content related to acknowledging and addressing dental fears. *How* you communicate is just as important as *what* you communicate, if not more, because word choice, in particular, can either foster trust and peace of mind or it can trigger fear. We encourage you to take the same care when selecting the words to describe procedures, services, or office amenities as you might when speaking with patients in the “offline” setting. When face to face with an obviously apprehensive patient, it is unlikely that you will fixate on the experience of pain. Instead, you will likely talk about all of the benefits of the procedure and how much better they will feel without even mentioning the “P” word.

With an understanding of the content relevant to this particular segment of patients, you and your team can then identify both bright spots as well as blind spots. The “next steps”

may involve:

- Building up existing content.
- Refining the content to make it more “friendly” and inviting for *all* prospective patients.
- Starting from scratch with new content.

The following suggestions both represent additional ideas for content, as well as fresh methods and approaches to content that instills trust:

- We always emphasize *meaningful* and *helpful* content. You can tell when your content is valued because [metrics](#) like the amount of time visitors spend on respective pages or your website as a whole will go up accordingly.
- *What do we mean by “meaningful content”?* What you provide visitors on your site or social pages should be practical, actionable, and generally, something that the individual can apply right away to help them overcome, in this case, challenges to getting the dental care they need.
- Specifically, we encourage dentists and practice administrators to consider adding or building upon content that introduces the reader to helpful relaxation techniques. These options could include walking them through breathing exercises or methods to release muscle tension.
- Video is an effective tool for patients with fear to learn exercises and techniques. By having a team member demonstrate some of these exercises in videos posted on your website or YouTube channel, you also support the overall health of your digital presence. After all, multi-media and visual content is considered among one of the top disruptors to conventional search engines, right alongside [Artificial Intelligence](#). The benefits here are two-fold; you both endear potential patients individually while also helping additional populations to find you in the first place (as improvements to these key indicators help boost your search rankings).
- When discussing helpful content, updated or fresh posts, articles, videos, and audio should reflect the latest techniques, technologies, and treatments. We know how quickly the technology and our understanding of the science evolves. So, educating our online communities about the truth behind treatments like root canal therapy or even simple fillings is essential. If these individuals have not been to the dentist in decades, they may remember outdated ways of doing things or limited options for the likes of dental materials. It could be said that such credible information is all the more critical in a digital environment characterized by the overabundance of [medical misinformation](#).

- Naturally, the above bullet point transitions well into updating your onsite capabilities as a means of further promoting any technologies or services that you may have that your competition *does not* have. In fact, these more focused steps to communicate to fearful individuals could represent the jumping-off point to a more comprehensive [website refresh](#) or overhaul. You may be surprised by the amount of outdated, now obsolete, or irrelevant information on your website.
- Prioritize updating and aligning this information to modern industry and current practice/brand realities. Otherwise, if this information remains in a prominent place on your website, no less, it can send the wrong message to everyone – not just those who are being targeted with content that revolves around the issue of easing dental anxieties and fears. You may be telling visitors to your website that you are a “dinosaur” and do not stay on top of the latest understanding of dentistry and the latest available products and tools. This, of course, could not be further from the truth. But if all these readers see is a website that does not accurately portray who you are and who you are today, then they will never be moved to contact you. They will choose the nearest dental office to you that appears to be current and “cluey” and take pride in their organizational image.
- Keep in mind that practising care and avoiding “triggering” words online, for instance, is not an exercise in obfuscation. Instead, there is no need to worry further an individual who is already suffering from dental paralysis. You are not being misleading; you are just exercising care in how you acquaint or reacquaint the would-be patient with modern dental treatments and techniques. By swapping out the likes of “pain” for “tenderness” or phrases like “getting you to feel better,” you are no less accurate, but you are practising discretion and being a sensitive partner in your patient’s oral health journey.

Online communications can be the vehicle to either put the brakes on or stall your practice’s traffic or accelerate it by both endearing existing patients and adding new ones to the fold. Ensure that what you provide for all to see aligns with your vision, mission, and goals for the practice. In such a dynamic business and healthcare environment, strategies and goals are an always-moving target. By staying on top of the type of content and how you deliver it, you can overcome some of the biggest challenges dental practitioners face, partly due to long-held misperceptions about dentistry.

And just as we may call you to action, *always* call your patients to action in everything you provide online. Let those who have not seen the dentist in years, if not decades, know you are here to help. You want to hear their concerns. Only then can you understand how to address and resolve their unique fears.

About the Author:



Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of [Ekwa Marketing](#), has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing – Lila, by clicking <https://www.ekwa.com/msm/> or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.