

The Art of Endearing (Not Off-putting) Photos that Showcase Your Best Dental Work!

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We all know how a smile speaks 1,000 words without its “wearer” saying a word. So, it stands to reason that one of the most powerful tools that dentists have to [market their practice](#) is compelling “before” and “after” photos. These photos showcase examples of your work – skill, talents, artistry, technical capacity, and so on. Furthermore, [algorithms](#) are increasingly rewarding content that is visual in nature with higher search rankings. These rankings make it easier for consumers to take to the keyboard and find you. In its 2023 Marketing Trends Report, HubSpot assessed three such “visual” types of content:

- Videos
- Images
- Infographics

Notably, this type of content topped the list of “media formats” assessed by the global customer relationship management firm, resulting in the highest Return on Investment (ROI) for those businesses surveyed in the [latest trends report](#).

Accordingly, marketers are responding in kind by leveraging these dynamic, visual media formats into their overall strategies. And, with the smile as a front-and-centre facial feature, dental practices and their corresponding services lend themselves particularly well to leveraging such types of content. Photos can be particularly beneficial to demonstrate how cosmetic and/or restorative procedures performed by you or your team transform the overall aesthetics of the smile and face. These images also present opportunities to demonstrate one's clinical and artistic skills.

Businesses in other industries and, indeed, in different types of medical practices or disciplines may not benefit quite as tremendously from images. Their services may not be as complementary to the likes of “before” and “after” photos. For dentists and others in fields that are associated strongly with the cosmetic or aesthetic, using such imagery simply makes sense.

However, not all types of photos are created equal. You must be thoughtful in the images you select and how those images are selected, and objectively assess the quality of such media.

Quality photos launch your practice forward

So, what separates a high-quality photo from one that leaves a lot to be desired? Well, this distinction transcends the obvious. Of course, clear, non-blurry images free of strange or unflattering shadows are essential. After all, when showcasing your services and unique talents and level of skill, poor photos will not convey the “truth” of your work. It can make exceptional results following everything from teeth whitening and veneers to full-mouth rehabilitation not look as outstanding as they actually are – and you and your practice deserve better than that!

Basic fundamentals regarding photo aesthetics are just a starting point. Beyond that, ethical dental practices assess their content for its [authenticity](#). Consumers of health care and products and services, in general, crave “realness.” Provide them with photos of **actual patients**. As a successful practitioner, we know you have many satisfied “fans.”

When approaching these patients with the “ask” about documenting their transformations or journeys to better, healthier smiles, just be sure they know how you will use any images and content featuring them. That way, there is no confusion or potentially sticky legal situations that arise regarding [patient privacy](#). Odds are in your favour that these patients

will be more than happy to show off their results and sing your praises in this manner. Do not assume everyone will jump at the opportunity, though.

It is generally advised to:

- Avoid stock photos whenever possible. Instead, use pictures, video, and other media featuring patients, staff, real partners and community members. Always keep in mind that you have a large base of “brand advocates” at the ready. Why not harness their awesome results and satisfaction with your work to attract more patients like them?
- Be aware that today’s savvy healthcare consumers can easily “sniff out” photos and other disingenuous content. Often, stock photos featuring paid models can come across as a “little too perfect” and misleading.
- Take great care and be wary of stock photos marketed as “authentic” or “unfiltered.” A near-cottage industry has developed online promoting collections of images that are designed to appear more candid and less out-of-touch than the traditional “model-perfect” stock collections. They are still just that – stock photos dressed up with different (and more approachable) marketing terminology.
- Mind your demos. Account for both one’s existing patient base and those aspirational, quality future patients. If you want to attract more families, for instance, do not limit the photos on your site to one age group or to a series of photos of individuals. Those featured should look like our neighbours, friends, family members, and others with whom we interact on a day-to-day basis. Ideally, these groups will represent those whose smiles are authentically highlighted and showcase your best work – not a random stock photo model!
- Do not rely on fakery. We understand that there can be a fine line between altering lighting or incorporating editing to improve upon a “bad” photo of an actual patient versus amplifying and altering an image in such a way as to elevate your results further or make a “before” and “after” transformation look more dramatic than it actually is. When employing the latter practice, you do not accurately or ethically demonstrate the true power and effects of different dental treatments, services, and products.
- Specifically, avoid manipulative lighting, makeup, wardrobe, angles, posture, positioning, and other “tricks.” These tactics can result in after photos that do not accurately convey the actual patient’s appearance, the genuine improvement upon the starting or “before” photo, and/or the actual results or outcomes from your service or treatment.

- Patients have never been smart and clue-y about tricks that may be employed from the get-go or in the “post-production” process. They can spot these manipulations from a mile away. Even something as seemingly simple as a “before” photo featuring a messy-haired woman with no makeup and an after photo featuring the same woman with a tremendous “glow-up,” fresh from the salon hairstyle and professional makeup application, turns potentially loyal patients off. The contrast between the two is not only stark but suggests an apples-and-oranges comparison because obvious variables have been changed.
- Additionally, be mindful that employing such tactics is distracting. You want patients to focus on the smile transformation and not be confused by ancillary, “glamour” items and characteristics that leave a bad taste in their mouths instead of endearing patients to you.

We recommend **standardization** whenever possible! By that, try to set aside a place with good lighting and is generally “photo-friendly” (to minimize truly “bad” photos that are hard for visitors to your site and socials to see clearly). This dedicated space should also have a background that is not distracting and should be featured in all similar types of photos. Likewise, maintain consistency in how patients are photographed here, including the angle with which they are shot and how close the photographer is to the patient when shooting.

As needed, advise the patient to generally maintain the same “look” and not to have any overly drastic changes in their appearance. So, there is consistency between the “before” and “after” photos, and visitors/site users will not assume they are being fed marketing fakes.

Of course, the previous point is particularly critical for those dental practices whose services extend beyond the teeth, gums, and smile. As [more dentists](#) expand their offerings by segueing into cosmetic facial services like Botox® and dermal fillers, photos may take on a different form. These services to transform other parts of the face may necessitate the incorporation of wide-shot photos rather than close-ups. So, more of the face is actually shown in these images. These examples underline the importance of maintaining awareness about the impact of makeup, fake tan, hairstyles, and other modifications on the appearance of photos that showcase your treatment outcomes. You need to make sure all facets of the photo-taking process are controlled to maintain consistency between pre-treatment and post-treatment images.

Additionally, to make the process of standardizing and retaining consistency as easy on the patient as possible, you may simply place protective coverings or other available and sterile

garments on hand over the patient. This ensures that the photos do not convey any dramatically different (and potentially distracting) clothing choices.

Better yet, consider making the most of other tools and media formats! With proper patient permissions as relevant, key steps in the treatment process may be recorded and posted as videos. You can then show the results from the treatment as they are revealed. The immediate and noticeable differences can be seen in “real-time” by the would-be patient seeking information about a specific service and your office’s capabilities.

This approach is both disarming and dynamic, as there is minimal room for manipulative editing or presentation techniques, and the process itself is engaging and actionable. By incorporating videos, you get brownie points from visitors to your website and from the algorithms that help you to better show up in searches. So, it really is a win-win. Also, be sure to harness the other satisfied patients around you – your staff! It may make sense to walk viewers through videos featuring employees undergoing certain procedures. This has the added benefit of further engaging staff in the process and in the office’s operations, which heightens morale and provides a steady source of enthusiastic and willing participants to showcase your work.

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.