

Is it Time to Give Up on Social Media for Your Dental Practice?

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Social platforms such as Facebook have been a hub of society for years, and COVID-19 only cemented the trend. With a steadily growing number of users, most of whom are highly active, it appears to be a marketing goldmine. In reality, it can be a valuable part of your dental marketing plan, but it may not live up to the hype.

You have probably heard it a million times: “If your dental practice is not using social media, you need to start now.” The numbers speak for themselves: Billions of people spend hours every day on these sites. More than three-quarters of social media marketers report that it is effective .

Best of all, social media is free and simple to use. It sounds like the perfect dental marketing opportunity. So, you tried it with less than impressive results. What went wrong?

**Social media use is free.
Social media marketing is not.**

Plenty of missteps can trip up a dental social marketing campaign. However, one of the most common is unrealistic expectations. You see great numbers, hear great things, and expect a Facebook page to bring patients flooding in. Sadly, it is not as simple as it sounds.

Years ago, a business could post on its Facebook page and it would appear in followers’ newsfeeds. Facebook’s algorithm began demoting overly promotional content in 2015 and prioritizing posts from individuals or groups in 2018. The trend has continued, with the reach and performance of organic posts decreasing across social networks.

When you see big numbers reflecting social media success, there is most likely a big budget behind them, along with a lot of careful strategic planning. A large social media campaign is not wrapped around simple page posts. It likely involves multi-platform paid advertisements and possibly paid influencers. Additionally, social media marketing is most effective when coordinated with email campaigns and other strategies.

The pros and cons of paid social media advertising

Paid advertising, particularly on Google and social media, is often considered a foundation of digital marketing. This strategy can certainly generate a high volume of website traffic; the question is how valuable that traffic is to your practice.

Ads tend to be strategically placed to entice spontaneous, impulsive clicks. For e-commerce websites targeting impulse buyers – that is fantastic. However, no one “buys” porcelain veneers or a root canal on an impulse. Only a small percentage of people who click on your ads are seriously looking for a dentist, and a lot of those people are likely looking for a one-off treatment.

Much like Google PPC (pay-per-click), paid advertising on social networks can be beneficial for short-term goals. It can fill appointment slots quickly. However, it is rarely an effective long-term strategy for dental practices.

The real value of organic social media

Sure, there is always a chance you will create a fantastic post that will go viral and significantly impact your practice. However, it is an extremely small chance. In reality, most people aren’t likely to see your social accounts unless they search for you – and you might be surprised to learn how often that happens.

Today’s patients approach healthcare choices as consumers. They have access to vast information, so they shop around and research. No matter where someone learns about your practice, they will probably check several resources – particularly your website, online reviews, and social accounts – before choosing you. Patients expect to find active social profiles with professional content. In fact, according to a recent survey, 97 percent of people believe that dentists should use social media for professional purposes. What will they think if they do not find you? According to the same survey:

- Dentists who use social media are more likely to be viewed as innovative and caring.
- Dentists who do not use social media are likely to be considered more traditional and focused on in-person interaction.

As these results indicate, the importance of a social media presence can vary, depending on your practice brand and image. If you want your practice to be seen as innovative and progressive, then a lack of social presence can hurt your branding. It may be less important if you prefer to be seen as old-fashioned and traditional. However, the fact that dentists on social media are seen as more caring shows that patients appreciate the effort – which is valuable in building relationships, regardless of your branding.

Whatever you do, don’t abandon your social profiles

Keeping social accounts active does not have to be terribly time-consuming, mainly when your primary goal is branding (rather than trying to focus on lead acquisition). Posting weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly can be sufficient, providing you stick with it. What your audience expects most of all is consistency. However, if you decide to stop updating the accounts – please do not abandon them.

Facebook allows business users to “unpublish” a page, which essentially hides it from the general public. Many other social networks offer similar options. When possible, this is an excellent solution because you retain control of the username (in case you want to re-activate the page in future), but no one will see your outdated pages. Why is that important? Because most people will likely draw one of two conclusions:

- When a dental practice or other business closes, they often leave social profiles behind. Many people are likely to think that your practice is out of business when they find a badly outdated profile.
- Maybe the person knows that you are still in operation – yet your business page is outdated. This gives the appearance of inefficiency and inattention to detail, which does not reflect well on your practice.

Conclusion

Your social media strategy needs to be in line with your marketing goals and branding. Virtually every dental practice in existence can benefit from having a social media presence. Some can benefit from investing in paid advertising. Some traditional practices can get by with no social media. However, there is one thing no dental practice (or any other business) should do, and that is leave old abandoned accounts.

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.