

Does Your Dental Practice Have a Social Media Strategy?

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Marketing management for any product or service can no longer afford to ignore the role of social media. According to a recent survey report released by Social Media Examiner, about 90 percent of marketing managers recognize the importance of social media marketing to promote their businesses. However, many businessmen and professionals tend to get frustrated quickly when they see that social media related efforts are not leading them anywhere and show no visible results.

The challenge with social media marketing is that it requires a dedicated and meaningful effort over a significant period of time before the results can start to show. Experienced social media managers realize that to make any strategic marketing gains through social media, they need to invest at least 20 to 25 hours a week or more on a consistent basis. Most small businesses and professionals such as dentists are not in a position to invest so much of their time to cultivate social media.

Outsource Social Media Marketing

In an increasingly complex and competitive online environment, it makes compelling business sense to let outside professionals manage your social media strategy. The potential rewards in terms of direct and personalized communication with local patients and SEO benefits to drive a higher traffic of locally targeted audiences to the dentist's website make the entire effort worth it. Apart from improving search engine rankings and generating local exposure, social networking helps a dentist discover various industry influencers and potential business associates over a period of time.

Professional social media marketing experts can help a dental practice choose the right social networks or channels and build a cohesive social networking strategy around those channels. It is important to analyze which social media channels are leading to the most effective local leads or sales for the den-

tist, and then the entire marketing effort can be optimized around those channels. Monitoring and measuring results becomes as important as the various social media promotion activities in a highly dynamic social media environment. According to Social Media Examiner, the number of businesses that hire professional help to support their social media marketing efforts doubled from 14 percent in 2010 to 28 percent in 2011, and the trend continues unabated.

Choosing a Social Media Marketing Professional

Medical and dental professionals are typically hesitant about the idea of letting their social media activities be handled by an outside company or individual. It is critically important for a dentist to associate with a reputable firm that already has extensive experience in managing Internet marketing and social media campaigns for dentists. The dental office manager must engage closely with the social media strategist at every step of the way to ensure that the dentist's vision, philosophy, mission and goals are in conformance with the social media strategy and execution.

A good social media professional will understand that accuracy and reliability of information that is disseminated over the dentist's networks is of paramount importance at all times. The dental office manager cannot have a laid-back approach and allow the hired professionals to carry out activities and commu-



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nication that may not be in the best interests of the dental practice. Social media communication should be friendly and conversational in its tone, and the language should be reader-friendly so that potential patients can identify themselves with the practice and feel satisfied with the online social engagement.

Popular Social Media Networks

The dental office manager in consultation with the hired social media professional must choose the most appropriate social networks.



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These networks will constitute the core of the social media strategy to promote the dental practice locally. It is usually a bad idea to become over-dependent on a single social network and hope for optimal exposure and results from that network. The fact is that different people have different social media choices, and it helps to have a dynamic mix of networks woven into the overall social media strategy for the dental practice.

FACEBOOK

With more than a billion active users globally, Facebook is the most prominent and obvious choice for social media marketing. The two-pronged challenge in Facebook marketing is to gain a substantial number of fans for the dental practice page, and to achieve a high level of engagement from those fans. With low levels of engagement, even a large fan base remains ineffective from the point of view of marketing and business promotion.

The goal of the Facebook marketer must be to find innovative ways to keep the fan base growing, while keeping the fans constantly engaged and motivated to comment, question, share and post on the network in order to enhance familiarity with the practice and widen its exposure to the fans' respective networks. Content that includes videos and images usually elicits better responsiveness from the Facebook fans.

TWITTER

Many small businesses and professionals are using Twitter marketing to great effect to boost their online exposure and publicity. The key to success on Twitter lies in being responsive and listening as much to the followers as one would wish them to pay attention to one's own tweets. When Twitter is used as a one-way street to blatantly market your dental practice, it will rarely succeed in its goal.

The right way is to engage with others within the network and create conversations. Using the Twitter search functions, it is possible to reach out to the targeted local community of tweeters who can be potential clients for the business. Most importantly, regular engagement over Twitter can help improve the SEO value of the dentist's website. The messages on Twitter should include locally opti-

mized keywords, and the bio should include the website address of the dentist.

GOOGLE+

Google+ has rapidly emerged as a strong social networking option to promote your dental practice locally and improve your website's search rankings at the same time. The new "Local" tab of Google+ is designed to be a game-changer for small businesses and professionals with local operations.

Google will index the data available under the "Local" tab. In other words, it will help boost Google's ability to better rank businesses and professionals in localized search results. To maximize the SEO benefits for the website, it is a good idea to link the website from the Google+ Local page.

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PINTEREST

Many social media consultants are advising their clients to use Pinterest as a key part of their social media marketing strategy. It is coming up as an effective way to improve search engine optimization and drive targeted traffic to the website. From a dental practice point of view, a collection of authentic "before and after" images can be pinned on the Pinterest network.

Alternatively, this social network allows pinning of images from other websites as well as re-pinning images that have already been put up by other Pinterest users. In combination with other networks such as Facebook and Twitter, it is possible to expand the expo-

sure of existing followers and fans to the images pinned on the Pinterest network.

LINKEDIN

Many marketers continue to remain under a mistaken impression that LinkedIn is primarily an intra-company network for HR purposes. However, the fact is that LinkedIn is constantly engaged in the process of reinventing itself and it is now enabling companies and professionals to promote their products and services very effectively.

Readers can easily navigate the LinkedIn page to learn all about services and procedures offered by the dental practice. New services and special offers can be promoted prominently on the company homepage, which gives a good marketing opportunity for a dentist to highlight any new offers or new treatments.

TUMBLR

Tumblr is a unique hybrid between a blog and a social network. The good thing about Tumblr is that any write-up on the network receives excellent search engine exposure. Unlike the postings on Facebook, the search engines will index the content posted on Tumblr. The network commands almost 17 billion page views a month for its hosted blogs.

User engagement on Tumblr is relatively higher than most other social networks. A dental social media marketing strategy can effectively employ blogging via Tumblr to achieve the twin goals of increased exposure and better search rankings. According to comScore data, more than half of Tumblr readers are in the age group of 25 or below, which makes it a good medium for dentists with a younger target market.

The dental social media strategy can also include image and video marketing, using networks such as Instagram and YouTube. The options are numerous, and all it requires is a focused and committed approach to channelize the immense communication power and reach of social media to maximum effect.

Dental office managers who are looking for very affordable but effective, engaging and personalized marketing solutions to promote their practice can reap rich dividends with a carefully built and professionally executed social media strategy.