

# Earn Your Patients' Trust Before They Walk in Your Door

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As a dentist, you face a unique challenge. A large percentage of the population is actually afraid of you. Even those people who don't have severe anxiety are likely to feel a little nervous before a dental appointment. Furthermore, many people are suspicious of expensive diagnoses and wonder if you are trying to sell them a treatment they don't need.

Your challenge is to overcome these misgivings and earn your patients' trust—and do it before you ever meet them. Today's technologically savvy dental patients do their research, visit your website, check social media, and read reviews. They are likely to form an opinion about you and your practice before they even pick up the phone. If your website and promotional materials fail to convey a message of trustworthiness, they probably won't call.

## Five Things Your Website Should Include

Your website is the hub of your online presence. It should describe your services and provide other essential information, but it should also establish credibility. Check your site for these trust-building elements:

- **Dentist biography:** Include information about your training, experience, accreditations, education, and professional memberships. A little personal information such as your hometown, hobbies, family, and pets will make visitors feel like they are getting to know you.
- **Team:** Many offices add short biographies of all of their staff members, which is excellent for personalizing your website. If you have a high turnover or a large staff, this may not be practical. However, you can still include a page describing your employees and their dedication to patients.
- **Photos:** At minimum, you need a photo of yourself accompanying your biography. Individual pictures of your team members, or a group photo, is a nice touch as well. When you participate in a charity event, or have an event in your office, be sure to take pictures. These are great additions to a news page or blog.

- **Testimonials:** Patient reviews are one of the most influential factors in converting leads. Encourage patient feedback, and request permission to post it on your website. Video testimonials are excellent, especially for cosmetic cases. (Always check applicable laws before adding reviews to your site.)
- **Awards:** Have you been named a “Top Dentist” or received an award for excellent customer service? If so, make sure that your website visitors know about it.

## Get Social

What will happen if a prospective patient searches for your practice on Facebook? If you have an effective social media strategy, that person will find an appealing profile with quality content and high ratings. If you aren't on Facebook, that person is likely to find one of your competitors instead.

Your practice should have a professional presence on several social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Once established, you will need to keep those pages updated with fresh content and respond to questions or comments. This can be time consuming, so it is advisable to designate a social media manager on your team or hire a service.

## Become an Authority in Your Field

How can you set yourself apart from a dozen other dentists in your neighborhood who offer similar services? You need to convince patients that you are the best. Of course, if you say that, they aren't likely to believe you. Instead, show them.

Continuing education is a great way to boost your résumé. Focus on training with highly reputable institutions, courses that offer certification of some kind, and fellowships that are applicable to your specialty or niche. When considering education, you don't have to always be the student. Share your knowledge by conducting workshops, giving lectures, or teaching classes. The dentist who knows enough to teach other dentists is naturally considered an expert.

Another great way to establish yourself as an expert, and get free brand exposure, is by working with the local media. Journalists frequently turn to doctors and dentists for expert opinions when covering health news. Learn who the local health reporters are, and work to establish connections with them. Send out media kits with your background, areas of expertise, and contact information. If you are already on file, you might be the first one they call.

## Make Reputation Management a Priority

Reputation management is more important than ever. A bad review can go viral in a heartbeat—and so can a good one. Monitor your reviews on Yelp and other popular sites. If you notice a negative one, contact the patient and attempt to resolve the issue. You can increase the number of favorable testimonials by asking satisfied patients to review your practice. You can simply mention it during their appointments or in a follow-up email or phone call.

Beyond patient testimonials, you can build your reputation and brand awareness through community involvement. This can include supporting local charities, volunteer work, contributing to neighborhood rejuvenation projects, and sponsoring, participating in, or even hosting community events.

Whether you are issuing a press release or approving an advertisement, try to pretend that you are a stranger with no knowledge of dentistry. Ask yourself one simple question: “Would I trust this dentist?” Use the answer as your guiding light to present the most credible and professional image possible.

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