

Use “Social First” Digital Marketing to Win New Patients

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Social platforms are quickly becoming the gateway for brand discovery. Their use is no longer limited to fun and friendship. Social media is connecting people in new and numerous ways, not just with other people but also with digital brands.

Along with driving people-to-people conversations and brand interactions, social sites are being used more for search activities, including information on healthcare. For a large majority of potential patients, healthcare discovery begins on social sites.

In addition to searching for information on healthcare topics, patients are taking to social platforms such as Facebook to discuss various health conditions, to check for treatment options, and to read reviews. Increasingly, the decision to further engage with a brand takes place only after a patient is impressed with the social presence of the brand.

Social Media is Changing

Social media can help you build brand authority, but it does not directly impact page ranking for your dental website. Google does not use social signals in its ranking mix. However, given the crucial role that social media plays in brand discovery and engagement, dental brands simply cannot afford to ignore social marketing. The focus when it comes to social marketing should be on building brand traction by way of brand promotion: expand visibility in all the right places, and gain authority.

Social media is increasingly becoming the platform of choice for distributing content optimized for search engines directly to readers. And with controllable newsfeeds on social media and highly personalized search results, the need for highly personalized content and advertising is becoming the norm.

Furthermore, features such as Facebook's Instant Articles are pushing the boundaries of social content. Today, brands feel the need to distribute content via social channels first for the simple reason that social content enjoys greater visibility. Readers don't have to leave their social apps to read long-form or full-fledged articles anymore.

Brands are also increasingly under pressure for providing answers to user questions and for offering issue resolution in real time. For example, 72% of Twitter users expect responses from brands they follow within the hour. In fact, with client interactions on social media on the rise, dental brands might need to consider moving client services to their social accounts very soon.

Another very important aspect of social marketing has to do with the rise of social video content. Snapchat has more than 10 billion daily views for video content, exceeding even YouTube. Thanks to faster mobile internet connections and social sites such as Facebook and Periscope, live-streaming video figures are set to go up even further.

Top 3 Strategies

First, allocate a social media advertising budget. **Social media ad spending is expected to touch \$14 billion in 2018.** Brands are starting to realize that the best way to connect with target audiences is to engage with them in a space where they spend most of their time – in this case, social sites and apps. Dental brands that want to cost effectively connect with target audiences will have to strongly consider allocating a dedicated social media advertising budget.

Second, diversify your social content strategy. Social audiences want more than just simple text stories. They want compelling visuals that make your story interesting and fun. Sites like Canva make it possible for even amateur graphic designers to come up with fun and interesting social graphics that drive audience engagement potential.

Live video streaming is already making waves in the social space. As we move toward 2017, this social tool is going to become even more important. Keep in mind that video content has the potential to get you more patient engagement than images or text-based content.

Another visual tool that is increasingly playing a crucial role in digital marketing is podcasts. Both audio and video podcasts can be highly effective in connecting you with your target audiences. You can address oral health concerns or talk about new treatment options and services. The idea is to push your content in front of an “on-demand” audience.

And third, identify your target audience. Social content will work best when it is personalized for audiences that are most receptive or ready to engage. You can use the following tools to identify and understand your target audience on leading social sites:

- **Google Analytics:** Google Analytics is a great tool if you want to understand your target demographics and gain insight into their interests and behavior.
- **Facebook Audience Insights:** When it comes to user data, Facebook rules. You can track user activity, Facebook usage, and purchase activity among other things with this tool.
- **Twitter Analytics:** This is a must have tool if you want useful data on people following your Twitter account.
- **Instagram Analytics:** Instagram is offering this tool only to a limited number of account holders. But the relatively new feature helps users track impressions and clicks to the link in the bio, as well as total reach. It also determines percentage breakdowns of followers based on their gender.

Lastly, keep in mind that mobile is the new hotspot for most social activities. So, a social media strategy that is optimized for mobile audiences is a must have strategy if you want to future-proof your dental social marketing.

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