

Enhance Your Practice's Social Media Marketing Strategy

The top 7 actionable strategies you can
implement in your practice today.

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There's no question social media is a powerful marketing tool for today's dental practice. Implementing the right strategy not only keeps current patients engaged, it also helps you reach potential new patients who might not have heard of your practice otherwise—at a much lower cost than traditional methods such as radio spots and newspaper ads.

Even so, some dentists are hesitant to embrace this emerging marketing method. If you're among them, maybe it's because you just don't have the time necessary to invest in a social media campaign, or you simply don't understand what it can do for your practice. Whatever the reason, it's a mistake that could be costing you big.

Social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, continue to grow in popularity. In fact, millions of people in the U.S. visit Facebook and Twitter every day, where they ask for recommendations and share their experiences with family and friends. And more small companies—including dental practices—are turning to Facebook business pages to reach users in their area. If you're not among them, potential new patients will wonder why, and assume you're either out of touch or have something to hide. They'll shake their head in disbelief (because who doesn't have a Facebook page these days?) and then move on to the next dentist on their list.

Many dentists also rely on word of mouth to attract new patients to their practice. While this is still a great method, patients typically won't call and make an appointment based on one referral. They'll Google the practice first, spend time on the website and then move on to the practice Facebook page. If they find consistent branding, useful information and an active social media presence that includes photos, images and engaging posts, they'll be much more likely to pick up the phone and schedule that first appointment at your practice.

These days, creating a practice website, while a great first step, just isn't enough. You also need to develop a robust social media presence. Yes, establishing and maintaining an effective social media plan takes time and dedication, and might even require the help of an expert, but it is well worth the effort.



78%

of adults
use social
networking
sites.

Not sure how to begin? Start with these 7 proven strategies to elevate your social media presence, reach more potential patients and ultimately grow your practice.

Strategy No. 1: Share valuable content

You can't share just anything via your social media platforms; the content must be engaging and useful to your audience. This can include important updates about your practice, such as promotions or new weekend hours, or educational blog posts that drive traffic to your website.

When sharing updates about your practice, be sure to include images in the post or Tweet. Followers are more likely to share shorter posts that include images than posts that only have text, and shares expose you to more potential new patients and followers. Videos also enhance user engagement, but remember to keep any videos you post to less than 2 minutes and be sure they offer valuable content. Use the videos to answer FAQs about specific services, for example, or to provide an overview of your practice and your philosophy of care.

Keep in mind your posts shouldn't be limited to information about your practice. Fans might get annoyed and think your page is too promotional—which means they could opt to block your posts or stop following you altogether. To avoid this, share content from other sources, such as local and national newspaper articles about dental health topics. This keeps your content relevant and engaging. Learn about the demographics of your audience and share stories that might be relevant to their daily lives. If you're mostly trying to reach Baby Boomers, articles on retirement plans might be useful, while Millennials might be more interested in articles about landing that first job.

It's also important to keep your posts consistent. It should feel like they're coming from the same voice, whether you're sharing a magazine article or posting before and after photos of a successful cosmetic case you recently completed. You might even want to establish a list of words to use in social media posts as well as a list of words to avoid. Always keep posts conversational and positive.

Don't be afraid to share posts highlighting how you're giving back to your community or volunteering your services in underserved areas. Patients are more likely to share these types of posts, expanding your reach while also bringing more awareness to the need in your community and beyond. Just remember to obtain permission before posting photos of any patients to your social media platforms.



Posts should be engaging and relevant to your audience.

Fact:

Shorter Facebook posts get two-thirds more engagement than longer posts.

Tip:

Post on **Facebook** one to three times a week, **Tweet** once or twice a day, and reply to comments on both platforms. Be sure to have a balance between posting original content and sharing newsworthy articles from other sources. You can also post about the latest trends in dentistry or about places in the community that fans will recognize—as long as you keep the posts professional and positive.

Strategy No. 2: Post polls and ask questions

Remember, engagement is key on social media, and what better way to engage your audience than by asking them questions? The right questions can spark conversations that make your page relevant and even fun.

Quick fill-in-the-blanks will entice followers to respond, as will polls. People will not only be curious about poll results, prompting them to re-visit your page, you'll also gain valuable feedback that you can use to grow your practice. Here are examples of some questions you can ask as part of a poll:

- What time of day is best for your dental appointment?
- What cosmetic dental services are you most interested in learning about?
- Do you use a manual toothbrush or a power toothbrush?
- What types of reading materials would you like to have available in the reception area?

To help get more responses to poll questions and to encourage engagement in general, you can also offer incentives. Tell your followers that everyone who participates in a poll or who shares their beautiful smile on your Facebook page is eligible to win a dental-related prize, such as a free whitening treatment or an electric toothbrush. You can also try this tactic to get more likes, reactions and shares.

Regardless of how you try to engage your audience, be clear about the action you want. State in the text that you're running a contest, for example, and anyone who comments on or shares the post is eligible to win.



Use polls to gain valuable feedback and encourage interaction.

5 new Facebook profiles are created every second

Every 60 seconds

510 comments are posted on Facebook

Strategy No. 3: Enhance your profile on your social media pages

Once you set up your Facebook Business page (which must be done from your personal account) you also need to complete your profile. The details in your profile should match the information on your practice website, and should include hours, contact information, location, a short description of your practice, and photos. Be sure to include a link to your website as well to make it easy for patients to get there from your Facebook page.

When setting up the page, remember to choose local business as your business category. This helps enhance geotagging, which lets your audience know where you're located. Geotagging becomes especially important if you opt to purchase Facebook ads to promote your practice. These ads let patients in your area know about your business, and can include a promotion or coupon. Adding Facebook ads to your budget can help expand your reach to a targeted area—which means more potential new patients for your practice.

For consistent branding throughout channels, your professional profiles on Facebook, Twitter and any other social media platforms you opt to leverage should match the information on your website.

This also includes images, such as practice photos and headshots of you and your team members, design elements and colors. You can also share the same posts on both Facebook and Twitter, though keep in mind the 140 character count is in play when you send out a Tweet.



Tip:

Tweets with images or video are more likely to be shared, as are tweets with 120 characters or less.



Did you know...

According to HubSpot, content with visuals garner 94% more views and is 40 times more likely to be shared on social media than text alone.

Strategy No. 4 Respond to everyone

This advice might seem daunting, but it really is critical to a strong social media presence. Remember, you're trying to build relationships through your social media platforms; that won't happen if you don't respond when followers engage with your posts.

If someone comments on your post, always take the time to like it, and respond with a comment when possible. This validates your audience and encourages them to keep engaging with your posts. Answer any questions you receive in a timely manner, whether they're posted to your page or sent to you in a private message. Facebook now has a feature that lets people know how fast businesses respond to messages, making it even more important to reply as quickly as possible.

Now let's talk about online reviews. Receiving a positive review is a great boost for your practice and will likely help you get more new patients in the chair. Thank patients for taking the time to write reviews and let them know you're glad they had a great experience at your practice. If the review isn't already on your page, share it with your fans as well. Tweet a link to the review on Twitter and encourage followers to share.

Unfortunately, patients don't just take to social media when they have a good experience at a dental practice; they write negative reviews as well. Of course this can be damaging to a practice, but arguing with the patient online will only make the situation worse. Politely (and quickly) respond to the patient and offer your apologies. Make it clear you are working to correct the problem, then take the conversation offline as soon as possible. This illustrates you can handle these types of situations professionally, and that you truly care about the patient experience at your practice.

Times an expert can help

Experts can help you optimize your social media efforts as well as manage your accounts, and they can also help you handle difficult situations that come up. For example, just about everyone has a smartphone nowadays, and that means unhappy patients can take video or pictures while they're still in your practice and post them, along with negative comments, in real time. While this is rare, it can be very damaging, and is a situation that warrants help from an expert so you know how to handle the situation in person, as well as the best way to respond online.



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I like
Like Reply 1 · September 2 at 8:52pm

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View more replies

View 8 more comments

Respond to all comments on your social media pages to show you're engaged.

Strategy No. 5

Reserve your practice's name across all social media channels

This goes back to keeping your messaging consistent. The practice name should be displayed front and center on all your social media platforms, as well as your website. This also includes logos and images of you, your team and your practice. When coming up with a handle for your Twitter account, make sure it relates to your practice and is recognizable. No matter which platform your patients are engaging with, you want it to be clear the content being shared is coming from your practice.

And of course keep in mind any platform with your practice's branding should be used for professional posts only. You should never share your personal opinions or personal photos on these sites. Keep it to relevant information that will engage your audience and encourage them to share your posts, ultimately broadening your reach so you can gain more fans and grow your practice.



Tip:

Include social media buttons on your website to make it easy for patients to get to your social media accounts.

Strategy No. 6

Search hashtags on social media to see what you should be posting about

It can be difficult to determine exactly what kind of content your followers will find interesting enough to engage with or share. An article you might think is worthy of a re-tweet might get no response at all, which can be frustrating. If you want a better idea of what works and what doesn't, perform a hashtag search to see which dental-related topics are getting the most responses. You might find articles on whitening are popular this week, or that clear aligners are getting the most love.

#TeethWhitening, #DentalQuestions and #Dental are examples of hashtags you can try searching. And when you Tweet an article that's related to whitening, for example, don't forget to include the most relevant hashtag so your post comes up in searches as well. Followers will be more likely to share your posts, enabling you to go beyond your network and reach their followers with your message and practice branding.

Hold an Ask Me Anything (AMA) Event on Twitter

This offers dentists a great opportunity to reach out to their followers and answer questions they have about the practice or dentistry in general. You'll have real-time conversations with current and prospective patients during the AMA, giving you insight into their concerns and perceived barriers to care. It's also a great way to start building connections with followers and earning their trust. Try to hold an AMA right before benefits expire, because this is when many people are actively looking for dentists.

Tips for using Hashtags on Twitter:

- ▶ Hashtags can't include spaces or symbols, so capitalizing the first letter of each word is a common practice.
- ▶ Hashtags are used to categorize posts. Twitter users can search a specific hashtag to find posts about a particular topic. To get more attention for your tweets, use relevant, trending hashtags that users can search on Twitter.
- ▶ It's also a good idea to encourage patients to use a particular hashtag when they tweet about your practice.

Strategy No. 7

Use dashboards and analytics to measure your success and make updates

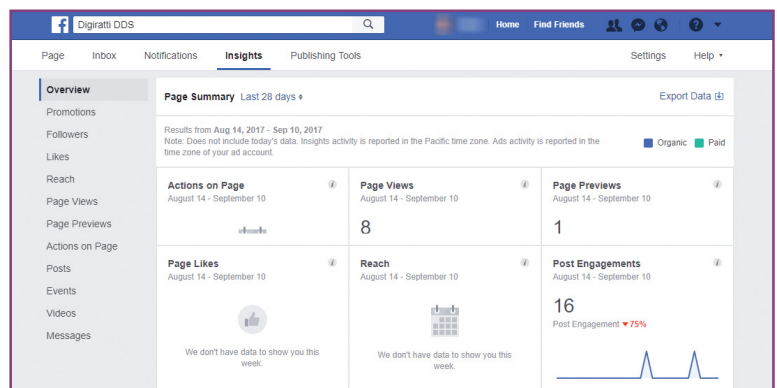
One of the beauties of social media is you can track what's working and what isn't. Try doing that with a flyer you hang up somewhere in the community. It's next to impossible. And while it can take some time to really dig deep and analyze your social media efforts, honing in on what works best will make the time you spend on Twitter, Facebook and other sites much more effective.

Every social media platform comes with tools

to measure performance. Taking note of which posts are liked and shared is one of the easiest ways to gauge how certain topics fare, but that's really just scratching the surface. You can get more in-depth information by looking at the click-thru rate, or CTR. What is that, exactly? It's when a visitor clicks or taps on one of your posts to end up on another social media channel, or better yet, your practice's website. The CTR is one of the most vital metrics to track and improve.

It's also important to keep in mind it's not just about the topics you're posting. When you post matters, too. Look at your data to see what days and times your audience is most active, and then target those times to share updates. If your audience seems to be night owls or to have more free time on the weekends, that doesn't mean you need to have someone working those hours. Schedule posts ahead of time and reap the benefits when you're not even in the office.

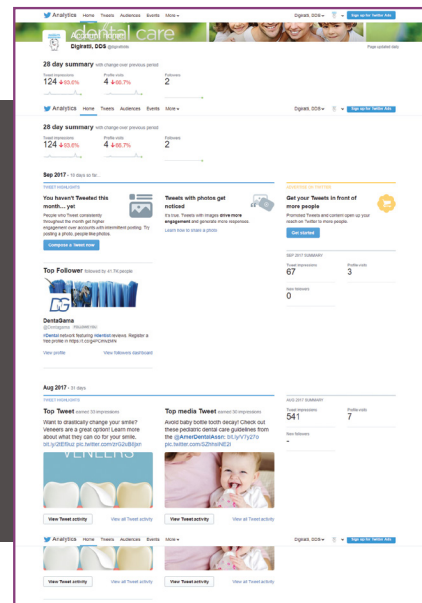
Of course, you can't just analyze your data for one week and call it done. This is an ongoing commitment, and it's critical to see how trends change over time so you can constantly improve your strategy. Built-in tools that you can access from your dashboard will deliver these analytics as simple line and pie charts, enabling you to compare and gauge your results. You'll know exactly what your social media efforts are doing for you, whether it's drawing in new fans, engaging followers or actually attracting new patients to your practice.



Use analytics on your page to see what types of content your audience enjoys most.

Fact:

With social media, data of all kinds is recorded and tracked. You can learn how many people come to your practice's website from your social media profiles, and measure the difference over time to see how well your strategy is working.



Make social media work for your practice

Social media marketing isn't just a fad. It's here to stay and will continue to grow, and that means now is the time to really up your game. Posting on Facebook and sending out Tweets a few times a year simply isn't enough. You need a long-term plan designed to engage your audience and gain more followers, because that is what will attract more patients to your practice.

Social media is about building relationships, and it will take some time and effort to develop a strong community of fans—and loyal patients who feel more connected to your practice. Don't give up because one social media platform didn't give you the results you were after. Keep trying and testing until you find the network that works best for your practice.

While this might all seem a bit overwhelming, social media is simply something you can't ignore. The good news is, you don't have to do it on your own. You're a busy dentist with patients to treat and a practice to run. You don't have a lot of down time to spend posting photos on Facebook, and neither do your team members. Companies like ProSites can help.

ProSites offers a variety of packages, depending on your practice's needs, and can create and help manage your social media accounts—taking the guesswork out of what you should and shouldn't post, while getting you the best results possible. You'll be able to leverage this low-cost marketing method to significantly grow your practice, while you stay focused on the dentistry.

**To learn more about how ProSites can help,
visit www.ProSites.com or call (888) 932-3644.**

