



RUNNING A DENTAL PRACTICE IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

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Introduction

Finding new patients shouldn't be like pulling teeth.

EXPECTATIONS ARE CHANGING FOR MODERN PRACTICES

It's a basic law of advertising your business: put your sign where the people are. If your dental practice is on a street with lots of foot traffic, you put out the sandwich board like your neighbors do.

If everyone flips through the yellow pages, you place a listing there. And if it turns out that everyone pops into Facebook dozens of times a day, well, their friendly neighborhood dentist needs to pop up too.

How does social media differ from the common conception?

Most of us have a pretty good idea of what social media is about – connecting with friends, finding out about events, and sharing your thoughts in the public domain. We have a pretty good idea about the business use-case, too – lots of big businesses spending big budgets on ads. Who succeeds here? The TV shows, fashion icons and pop singers, video games and fantasy football leagues. The things that people already talk about with their friends.

There's no room for a healthcare service. Right? Well, not quite. Social media showcases nearly every aspect of people's lives, and for every star-studded topic, there are hundreds of pocket communities and local pages. Is dental care a 'popular' topic? No. But it is a topic relevant to every social media user's life at least once or twice a year.

You can't just dip your foot in

Just because dental care is relevant doesn't mean all you have to do is show up. It's likely that at least a couple other dental clinics in your area are already pushing hard on social media, and if you don't work to stand out from them, you'll get lost. Combine this with the need to balance community management, response time, and overall message tone, and it's easy to see how social media management can become a full-time job.

[To do social media right, you need to understand it.](#)

Why Do I Need Social Media?

1.5 billion people use it for a reason.

THE MODERN WAY TO DISCOVER INFORMATION

Regardless of which networks they use, people have flocked by the millions to social media as a tool for discovering and deciphering the world around them. Why tune into news stations when you can “Like” a news outlet’s Facebook page and let articles automatically appear on your Wall? Why subscribe to a weekly email when targeted Instagram ads are going to let you know when a retailer’s sales happen anyway? Why look at flyers and billboards around the city when your friends will invite you to local events with a mindless click? And for that matter, why risk using a new service provider as a walk-in client when you can ask your whole network who they trust?

The Recommendation Network

For small businesses, the most important practice that social media users engage in is sharing their experiences with friends. People want their friends to like and do the same things as they do - it always feels better to be part of the trend.

If an experience was good, an active social media user is likely to post about it. “83% of online respondents in 60 countries say they trust the recommendations of friends and family” when it comes to brands, products and services, according to the [Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Report](#) released in 2015. These recommendations don’t all come from person-to-person chats. More often these shout-outs happen on social media.

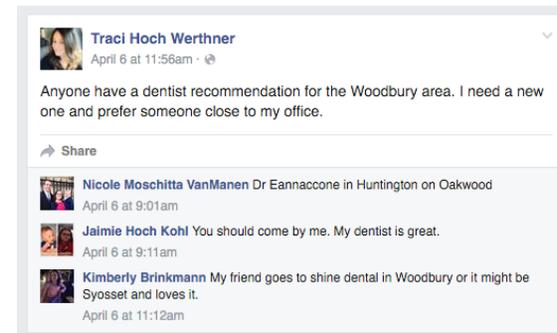
“83% OF ONLINE RESPONDENTS IN 60 COUNTRIES SAY THEY TRUST THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY.”

Scenario 1: Moving to a New City

Sarah moves to San Francisco. She has a job lined up and most of the basics, like her apartment and internet service, are ready to go. What she took for granted were all the essential offline services she uses, like a reliable dry cleaner, an inexpensive car wash, and of course, a good dentist. There are dozens of dentists she could find by searching online. But she doesn't have to rely on search when she already has local friends, plus a bunch of new coworkers she added on Facebook. She types up a simple phrase and posts it for her 1,000 friends to see. "Hey, just moved to San Fran, need a good dentist. Anyone know one?" Her friends jump in to comment with the names of their dentists, and the dentists who have Facebook pages get their pages tagged automatically when the friend begins typing in the name of the practice.

Scenario 2: The Satisfied Customer

On her friend's recommendation, Sarah tries out a small dental practice, "BLANK Family Dentists." The entire experience is beyond her expectations. The practice had a sign in the lobby encouraging patients to share their experiences on Facebook. And Sarah, something of a big-time sharer anyway, Liked the page - and wrote a post saying, "Just had my first cleaning at BLANK Family Dentists in SF - professional and friendly, will be coming back!" She even tagged the practice's location too. Now her friends will all see her recommendation and the practice can keep it on its page as well.



Social media is used to share opinions and recommendations.

Virtual Presence is Virtually a Requirement

The above scenarios demonstrate the good that can come from having your practice on social media. But what happens if you're not there at all? What kind of message does that send?

Not a positive one.

If your practice is a mystery online, you send a negative signal to potential patients. Sure, you have a website, but you need to be found where people are looking. Not being found online would be the same as not having a sign outside your building.

"Why don't they have a sign? Can they not afford one? Maybe this isn't a very popular dentist, they must not be very good."

The line of thinking gets even worse when it comes to social media.

"Why aren't they on Facebook? Are they afraid to have patients say bad things? Does no one like them? How can I even tell if they're good if I can't read some reviews?"

If potential patients look for dentists online and you aren't there, but nearby competitors are, your prospective patients won't think twice about you. You aren't on their minds at all. They're too busy weighing the pros and cons of some other practice. Don't let that happen.

"THE AVERAGE AMERICAN SPENDS 40 MINUTES A DAY ON FACEBOOK."

Learn About Your Patients

When you hang a flyer at a community center, as one might have in the past for cheap advertising, you learn very little. You can't see who's viewing it or who decides to respond. And, if someone does respond, you have to ask "how did you hear about us?" to learn that it worked, assuming they remember.

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. Plus, the people who interact with you can give you instant feedback - positive or negative - by commenting, Liking, Sharing, and Retweeting. If someone sees your flyer and doesn't like it, you'll never find out. It's like drilling teeth in the dark.

Show Up at Their Party

Above all other reasons, you should use social media to market your practice because that's where the people are. According to **NBC News**, the average American spends 40 minutes a day on Facebook. That might not sound like a lot, but that time frame includes countless individual moments idly opening and scrolling through their Walls, responding to comments and sharing their experiences. The same statistics showed that 1 out of every 5 minutes on a mobile device is spent on Facebook, meaning you can reach current and prospective patients wherever they are. With so many daily opportunities to reach out to your audience, there's no question that social media should be part of your marketing strategy.

"1 OUT OF EVERY 5 MINUTES ON A MOBILE DEVICE IS SPENT ON FACEBOOK."

Which Social Media Channels are Right for Your Practice?

The answer isn't always "just Facebook".

There are so many different networks out there. Depending on your practice, audience, and strategy, you could use any combination of networks to get the word out. Find out who uses these platforms, and how to succeed with them.



FACEBOOK

This is the quintessential social network, with users both young and old from virtually all walks of life. Since Facebook serves as a hub for many other social channels, this one is a must have.

Facebook is built around a few key tools:

The status update is your basic entry for sharing observations, news, photos, and videos that your followers can then Like and Share with their own friends and followers. It's about giving

people what they want and what they can use. There are no limits on length or medium.

Comments are the conversation threads underneath every post that allow you to hear the voice of the people. It's also a place to offer public customer service when concerns or questions come up.

Reactions are the new add-on to Likes. They are a series of emoji symbols to express love, laughter, shock, sadness or anger towards different Facebook posts.



Reactions allow users to express different emotions toward a Facebook post.

The events platform is a simple way to create and share any promotional events. It allows you to collect RSVPs tied to real names, link to ticket seller websites, and show event information like time and place.

Your business profile should include your physical address, phone number, website URL, hours of operation, and some photos of you and the building to help cement it as a real place.

What does success look like?

You should aspire to have an increasing number of followers, at least a handful of Likes, Reactions, and Shares per post, and reasonable engagement on the channel. When you post a poll, people respond in earnest. You should notice your practice getting tagged in conversations around dentist recommendations, and of course, there ought to be positive reviews up and down the page. If you've really succeeded, you've turned your followers into a family.

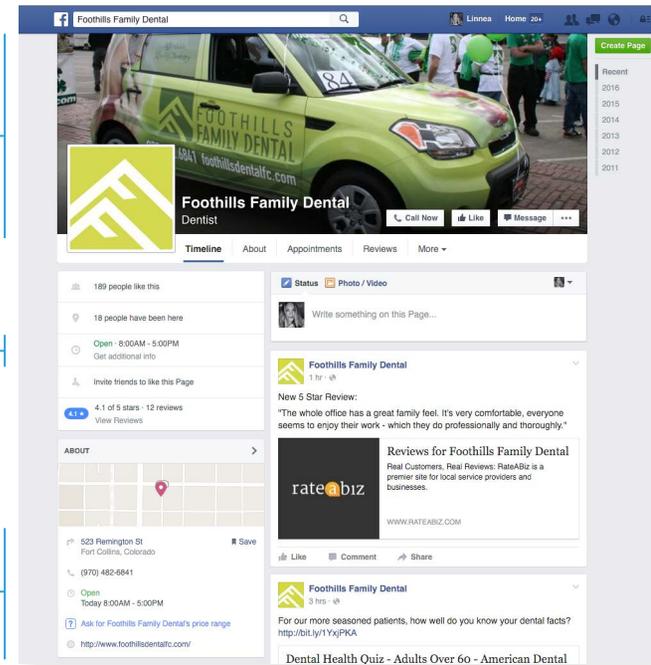
Photos

Hours of Operation

Address

Phone number

Website URL



Make sure your practice's Facebook page is thorough and accurate.



TWITTER

Twitter is a quickly evolving conversation. Stay topical, clever, and nimble. It's the highest risk and reward platform, because topics there can be seen by everyone if not marked as private.

Twitter is built around some basic functions:

Tweets (1) are the famously short little thoughts that millions produce and update in real time. They are only 140 characters, including spaces.

Hashtags (2) are words or phrases that include the “#” sign, like: #TwitterFacts. They cannot include spaces or symbols, so it's recommended to capitalize the first letter of each word. 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.

You can also encourage patients to use a particular hashtag if they're going to tweet about your practice. A good set of hashtags can be the difference between a snowball effect and yelling to an empty room.



Keep up the conversation with tweets and hashtags.



Twitter's functionality makes it easy to reach new patients.

Retweets and Favorites (3a) are the ways of engaging with tweets. Retweets are when a user shares your exact tweet with their followers. Favorites can mean someone “likes” your post, or wants to save it to reference later.

Replies (3b) function like comments on Facebook.

When someone replies to your tweet, it's best to replying.

Follower (4) is the name for someone who is tuned into your Twitter account. If you post useful or interesting content, you'll collect genuine Followers with time.

Your business profile (5) should include a picture of you, with a quick snippet of information about your practice, location, and website URL.

What does success look like?

You should aim for an increasing number of Followers, and decent engagement in Sharing and Favoriting on your tweets. Don't tweet more frequently than once or twice a day, but do respond when someone replies to your tweet.



INSTAGRAM

Instagram is the place for beautiful images and short videos. It syncs up nicely with Facebook and Twitter, so you can cross-post your photos on multiple platforms at once to maximize visibility. Instagram is primarily a mobile platform catered to a younger audience. The tools of Instagram include:

Posting photos and videos. Show people things they want to see – pearly white smiles, beautiful patients, quick procedural videos of, infographics about flossing, and your office and décor.

A simple photo editing suite lets you doctor your photos and make collages with color correction, enhanced lighting, borders, depth of field and more. You can also select from dozens of preset filters that do all the work for you.

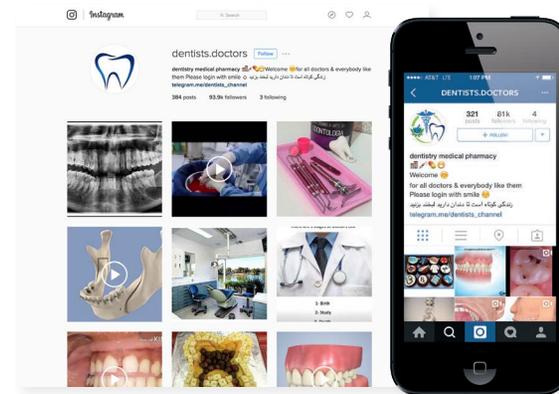
Hashtags function exactly the same as on Twitter. Use them well and get new followers.

Like, comment, and share are the ways to interact on Instagram. Followers can Like a photo, share the photo on their individual Facebook or Twitter pages, or comment on your photo.

Your business profile gets one image and a string of text that is best used to share your practice's website.

What does success look like?

Grow your network of followers, get some likes and nice comments. Instagram is a supplemental social network.



Use Instagram to showcase your work and give patients a look into your practice.



PINTEREST

Pinterest is very much like Instagram – image heavy and supplemental. It skews toward a female user-base, and starts capping out for people in their 40s. Since it is primarily used to collect creative ideas for later, like interior decorating and fashion, use it to show off the best teeth and office décor you can. Pinterest’s tools include:

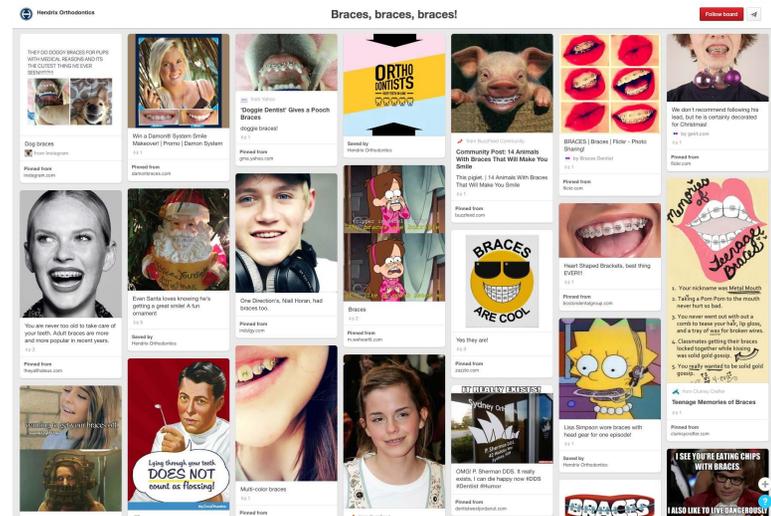
Post and hashtag exactly the same as you would on Instagram.

The benefit here is that you can link your images to another place, such as your Facebook profile or your practice’s website. So, if someone clicks on a set of teeth or braces they like, they’ll wind up with more information about you, and potential to become a patient.

Pinning images into different collections, called Boards. This lets users gather various things they find of interest.

What does success look like?

Again, just grow your followers, and get pinned on popular, relevant boards. Pinterest is a supplemental social network and all about image.



Pinterest Board: “Braces, braces, braces”



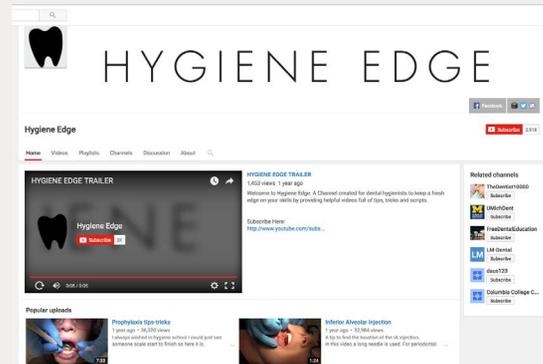
YOUTUBE

The world's most popular video streaming website offers a cheap platform for some of your best content. Videos are more engaging than any other form of content, and when done right, have broader reach. YouTube's tools include:

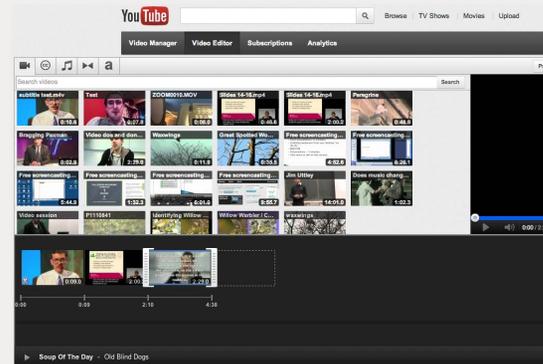
Posting videos (1) of virtually any length and topic. With short how-to videos, video tours of your office, before-and-after patient spotlights, and educational content, you can offer comfort and trustworthiness to prospective patients. Plus, you can embed YouTube videos anywhere, like your website, or Facebook and Twitter.

Simple editing tools (2) including transitions, video clip trimming and rearranging, and a royalty-free music library let you turn raw footage into a decent video within YouTube's site. You don't necessarily need other editing software.

1



2



YouTube has tools that make it easy to post and edit videos that promote your practice.

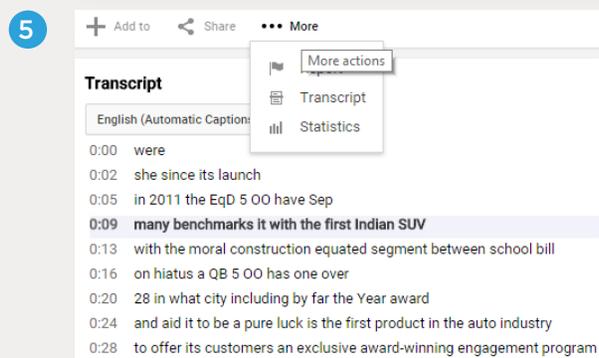
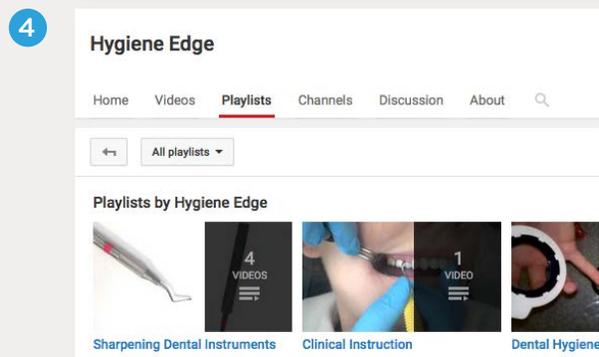
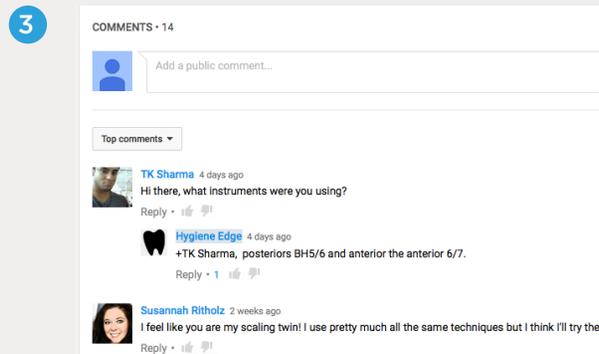
The comments section (3) allows discussion and questions about the topics. These can be great places to communicate your expertise and professionalism.

Playlists (4) let you group different categories of your videos together, so you can make digestible series for your subscribers.

Video transcripts (5) help your videos get discovered by people searching YouTube and Google. By uploading a “script” of the video as a text file, the contents of your video become discoverable by search algorithms. This means the more times you mention “dental care,” or another relevant term, the greater the chance it will show up when people search that topic.

What does success look like?

Modest gains in subscribers, views, Likes and comments on videos are all great indicators of improvement. What matters is that the videos improve your credibility, and get shared.



YouTube has different features that help viewers easily find your videos.



GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

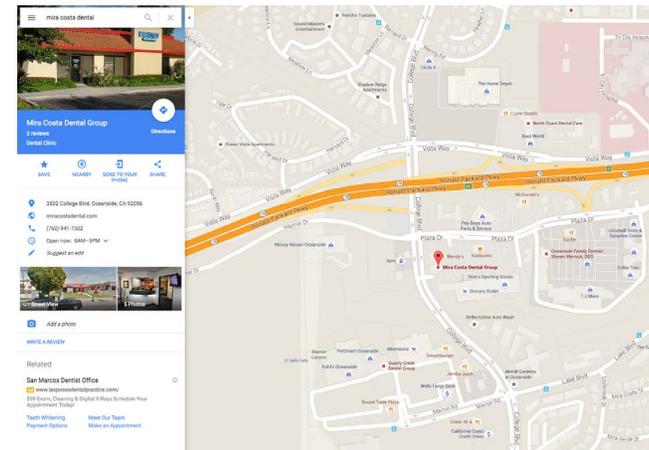
More of a database than a social network, this channel helps cement you in place with Google search, and Google Maps.

Google Maps data is fed from here. Reviews of your practice on Facebook are great for those that see them, but most people use Google to search for businesses. If they simply look for “dental practices near [my city]” the maps data will show a listing with as much data as Google can find. To get the best results, claim the business and fill in a profile with the name of your practice, exact location, phone number, hours of operation, website, and some of your services with short descriptions.

What does success look like?

Having a fully-built Google profile with images and a healthy number of positive reviews is really all you need. **Google is the first place many people look for information**, so keeping data updated is essential.

Encourage patients to leave honest reviews, and even offer incentives – the number of stars out of 5 your practice has can show up on Google search results, and help you stand out from the competition.



Claim your business listing on Google for maximum visibility.



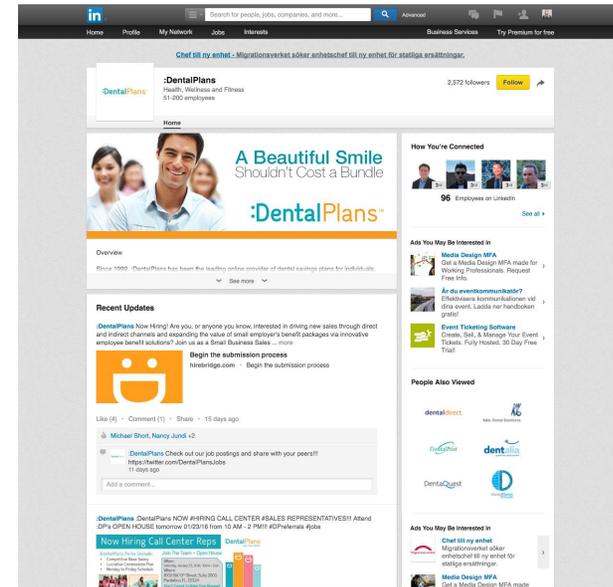
LINKEDIN

The professional's social networking site, LinkedIn, is all business. It can help you find qualified talent when you're hiring or help you reconnect with former colleagues in your field.

You can also use the article-publishing feature to write longer-form content to get it shared among your professional network. Stick to writing about the industry, dental best-practices, and other topics that showcase your expertise in the field.

What does success look like?

Increase the number of followers for your practice's LinkedIn page, and use your personal LinkedIn profile to connect with members of organizations beneficial to your practice, plus current and potential employees. As part of your sales process for business-to-business deals, it can help you codify relationships, take notes, and create reminders to follow up with prospective business partners.



LinkedIn is the professional social networking site.



YOUR WEBSITE'S BLOG

Depending on how you set it up, your own blog can be a sort of “micro-social network.” You can allow comments and questions under your blog posts and respond to them just as you would on Facebook. You can also promote your blog posts on other channels, like Facebook and Twitter, and embed photos from your Instagram and videos from your YouTube account. Don't forget to include buttons to allow the blog post to be shared in social media or sent to a viewer's friends. If every part of your blog is social, it has the greatest chance to be seen by people other than those who visit your practice's website.

You can write about anything you want here. If you already are active on a couple different social media platforms, it's recommended to save your longer thought pieces for your blog, and simply link to it on other networks.

What does success look like?

Use your blog to show that you are knowledgeable, personable, and professional, to help viewers make the decision to schedule an appointment with your practice. You can also use it to share advice and after-appointment care tips, to minimize patient questions via phone or email, which saves you time in the long run.

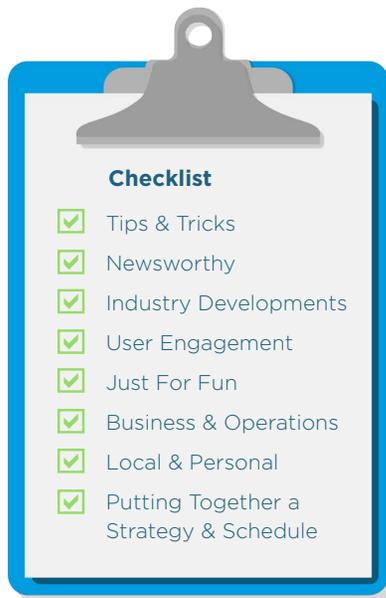


Showcase your expertise by posting blog articles that are relevant to your patients.

Content Strategy Checklist

What to post and when to post it.

Treat your social media like a publication – set expectations about what followers will get and how often. Would you expect the Wall Street Journal to one day release an all-picture issue about the editor's trip to France? Or Vogue to start releasing fictional sci-fi stories sent in by different readers? Your followers will come to you for a reason, and stick with you for that reason.



Create a cohesive strategy and schedule to keep patients and their networks of friends and family engaged, while subtly reminding them to come in for cleanings and checkups.

CONTENT IDEAS

The best way to get social media followers is to be useful, and what could be more useful than a healthcare provider who lets their patients know how to stay healthy? Write about topics like how to minimize plaque buildup, or how to promote healthy gum tissue. Pictures and diagrams are a great way to catch them and convey semi-complex information fast. It's also a great way to get your posts shared and seen by even more potential patients.

Newsworthy

If anything interesting is going on at your practice, it doesn't hurt to share. If you hold a patient appreciation event, create a promotional offer, or are going on vacation, keep your followers up-to-date.

Industry Developments

Write your thoughts on the field's developments. If new dental care techniques come to light, new technologies are being tested, or studies of interest are conducted, talk about them with a link to the source. This can also help you stand out in the dental community, position yourself as an expert and gain referrals.

User Engagement

Get potential patients engaged by creating polls. Ask questions like, "Do you prefer magazines or newspapers in the waiting room?" "Are you getting enough floss and toothpaste after visits to handle your needs?" "What time of day and day of the week is your ideal appointment?" Sometimes you can create incentives for participation, such as sending in a story for a chance to win a free cleaning or electric toothbrush. Regardless, give your readers a reason to weigh in and to talk about you to their friends.

Just for Fun

You can't run promotions all the time, and there's only so much news worth sharing – sometimes you just need to post something fun. Maybe patients took a funny picture with the giant novelty dentures in your office, and gave you permission to post it. Or maybe you saw a picture of a dog growling while having his teeth brushed.

You're always free to share other content, so long as you've made sure the owner is okay with it. Silly distractions from a boring day are always appreciated by fans killing time online.



Post fun images to keep your audience engaged.

Business & Operations

Use social media to share updates about your practice. For example, are you hiring, or did you just hire someone? Is the office going to change hours for a holiday? All of this information is useful to patients and followers of your practice.

Local & Personal

A little local flavor can help cement you in the minds of your audience. Everyone has some hometown pride, so a quick photo of a famous building or national park you visited doesn't hurt. Stay professional, of course.

Putting Together a Strategy & Schedule

This paper doesn't cover every single type of post, nor is it all necessary for every practice. Find what you're comfortable posting about week after week that you can reliably create more of. If you mix in enough beautiful photography, humorous posts, or helpful tips, your audience won't mind the occasional promotional offers and calls for cleanings.

Remember, social media content is a [long-term strategy](#), and audience goodwill is finite. If you're not sure where to start, [just ask an expert for help](#).

Building an Online Community

Turn your “friends” into family.

SERVICE COMES FIRST

With the rise of social media, many brands have forgotten that social media friends are still just fans, and they expect service above everything else. If you don't provide your fans with something they want, they won't stick around long enough to be genuine friends. Promotions, special prices and events can be promoted on social media to snag new followers, and useful information can help retain them.

Building a community is important. Cultivating a strong community without too many promotions is useful, because [the best spokes-people are free](#). They're your real friends and don't need to be bought with giveaways.

Engage Your Casual Followers

The best friendships you'll cultivate are in-person at your practice, before, during and after service. A satisfied patient will be a great online representative for you, because their recommendation is honest, experienced, and trustworthy to their friends. Getting new leads from social media takes time.

These [casual followers](#) are your pool of prospects to advertise to covertly through content that shows your expertise and overtly through specials and promotions.

Keep them at the top of your mind when planning your content strategy – give them a reason to share, like and submit content.

Community Management Basics

Building the community is hard enough. What about managing it? Often times, followers will interact in a polite or inquisitive way with your channel. The two-way street shouldn't end with one post and then one comment – reply back to show you're a real person. For example, Like their comment, or reply to the question. Replying in a timely and professional manner is just as important as answering the phone in your office – even more important, because anyone can see whether or not you reply.

PR & Crisis Management

As a healthcare professional you know the risks of dissatisfied customers, from lawsuits to public attempts to make you lose business. Crisis management begins in-person. Provide the best care you can, honest advice, condolences and concessions for problems when appropriate, and always be there to help. You do not want issues to go public, if you can help it. If a legitimately unhappy or ill-served patient decides to take to your social media profiles to call you out, it's best to address them quickly and directly with apologies and offers to make things better.

Be sure to get them on the phone or in a private message area in as few replies as possible. You want other followers to see that you're concerned with every patient's experience, but you want to work to resolve the issue offline.

To avoid the worst that social media has to offer, [don't leave any problems unaddressed](#).

Prevent Follower Attrition

Over time, you're bound to lose followers through natural forces of boredom, disengagement or annoyance. You should never become too worried about it; after all, not every follower is a patient and vice versa. The main idea is to gain more followers than you lose over time. To slow down attrition, you need to identify its cause – some social networks let you create polls, which can be used to ask about how often you post, topics you post about, and more. Never discount the data-collection power of social media to make educated decisions.

Remember if you post too seldom, you miss many chances to interest new potential patients, but post too often, and followers will hide your content from their feed, or unfollow you entirely.

Social Media Analytics

Find out if there's growth or decay.

MEASURE ENGAGEMENT BEYOND "LIKES"

Analytics are the back half of social media marketing. It's not glamorous, but without them all your work is just activity with no assurance of results. You wouldn't just start applying fillings without updated x-rays, right?

All social media platforms come with tools to measure performance. Likes and Reactions are a good start, but that's not the most important aspect. There are many other ways that you can measure how well your social media performance is tracking.

Click-Thru Rate to Other Channels

Moving into advanced analytics means tracking your followers from one place to the next, something that not every site is equipped for with onboard tools alone. Aptly-named, "click-thru" is 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 [click-thru rate or \(CTR\)](#) is one of the most important metrics to track and improve.

Since these tracking techniques require more than the onboard tools, it's recommended that you [get help from an expert](#).



Click-thru rate is when a visitor clicks a social media post to end up on your website.

Test and Optimize Your Posts

Testing social media performance comes down to simple measurements. Test the times that you're posting, the tone of your posts, and topics you're posting about to see which get the most Likes, Shares, and Comments.

Creating the best posts requires a lot of testing over time. However, it isn't just about finding the optimal posts isn't just about seeing what kind of text and images people seem to like more. It's also about [posting at the right time](#). Dive into your data to see what time of day and days of the week your followers seem to be engaging with your posts.

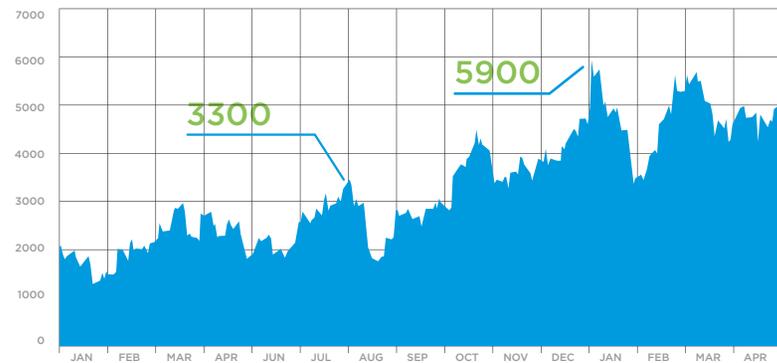
You can learn a lot about your fans that way – do they seem to enjoy your content more on weekdays or weekends? Lunchtime, or the evening? Work hours, or right before bed?

As you learn more, you can begin scheduling your posts for maximum impact, even setting them to post automatically. Then analyze the data, change things up, and get even better performance next week.

Analyzing Trends Over Time

As any data scientist could tell you, it's not just about performance this week, but every week, month, and year. Built-in tools will deliver your analytics as simple line and pie charts that you can compare to gauge the results of your efforts to draw in and engage followers and most importantly, turning them into actual patients.

Through all the effort you can put into social media as an end unto itself, never forget the ultimate purpose – [getting more business for your practice](#).



Use built-in analytics to track your social media efforts.

Social Media is the Best Practice for Your Practice

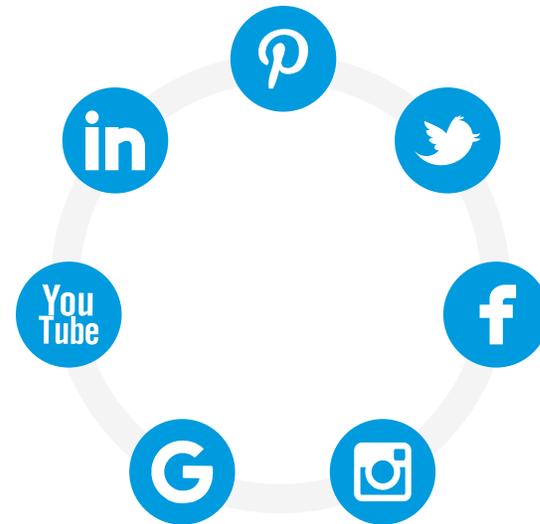
And it's not going anywhere.

Don't mistake social media for a passing fad - it's the new standard of discovering, absorbing, and sharing information. Facebook might not always be king, but an entire generation is growing up with these tools in their pockets, using them as naturally as they walk and breathe.

But there's a difference between social media success and just scraping by. With all the options, considerations, and maintenance you've read about, you can probably guess that it's at least one full-time job to do it right. Whether you need to figure out how to get started, or want ongoing strategy and management, help is available.

ProSites® is the author of this guide, and can help you become even more familiar and successful with social media, tailored specifically to the unique needs of dental practices. Contact us today for more information on using social media to make your dental practice a success.

[Request a demo >](#)



About ProSites

ProSites helps dentists accelerate practice growth and acquire new patients through innovative online marketing solutions.

We take a consultative approach and create tailored marketing strategies that support your practice goals through our comprehensive suite of online marketing solutions.

- **Dental website design.** We communicate your expertise through professional designs, educational content, interactive features, and free upgrades to ensure that your website is always up-to-date.
- **Search engine optimization.** Our clients are on the first page of Google more than 11,000 times for the most important search terms in dentistry. We help you climb to the top of search engine results pages and get noticed by prospective patients.
- **Pay-per-click.** As verified Google partners, our team knows exactly how to create successful, cost-effective pay-per-click campaigns that deliver measurable results.
- **Social media management.** We will manage your entire social media presence with engaging posts and branded profiles that encourage followers to like, share, and connect with your practice.
- **Marketing ROI.** We track your marketing efforts through to your practice management system, so you can see which marketing efforts are bringing you the most profitable results.



Discover why ProSites is trusted by 7,000 dentists for their online marketing needs.

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