



Social Media – Why all the hype?

by Howie Horrocks & Mark Dilatush

Good question. There are individuals, new websites, and new companies being developed almost daily – all geared toward selling dentists on the benefits, setup, and management of social media. We have seen entire dental meetings organized around social media as the core topic. We would like to use this space in *The Profitable Dentist* to clear the air.

Relevant Recent History

Remember Y2K? Remember all of the individuals, websites, and new companies that emerged – all geared toward making sure a dental office was Y2K compliant?

Remember Hipaa? Remember all of the individuals, websites, and new companies that emerged – all geared toward making sure a dental office was Hipaa compliant?

Sarcastic humor alert! How did we ever survive without using these people?

OK, you get the point.

What are the real promotional benefits of using social media to promote my practice?

Let's start here. Before you embark on spending time, energy, or dollars on anything – it is nice to understand the end game (WIIFM – What's in it for me?)

Social media *can be* an effective public relations tool

Social media *can be* an effective internal (existing patients) promotion tool

Social media *can be* used as an effective direct response advertising medium

Social media *can be* used to enhance the competitive search positioning of a dental website.

Social media as a public relations tool

The more local people you gather to become a part of your social media group, the better. The ability to distribute public relations information in a fast, inexpensive, professional, and efficient manner cannot be equaled by any other medium. Imagine your practice

establishes a community candy buy-back program for Halloween. How do you let everyone know about the program, how the program is going, and the results of the program after the event? Using traditional mediums (print, radio, television), your opportunity for exposure is hit or miss. With social media, it is guaranteed. We guarantee if you set up a social media presence for your dental practice, you will have the ability to instantly connect and distribute your message. There is a challenge with using social media as a public relations tool. The challenge is collecting enough followers or friends to make it pay off! Your existing patient base is the place to do this. A simple high speed computer kiosk at the front reception area and a doggedly consistent request for your patients to connect with you is what it is going to take. If you are thinking that surrounding non-patients are going to become your friend or follow your Tweets just because your practice has a social media account, you will be disappointed. The bottom line here is to gather non patients through the daily interaction of your existing patients. Your existing patients will, in time, expand your circle of influence.

Social media as an internal promotion tool

The fastest way we can communicate the power of social media for internal promotion is for you to imagine it is 10:30 on a Tuesday morning and your 4:30 two hour appointment calls and cancels. If you have a ton of Twitter followers as patients, it takes less than 5 seconds to alert everyone. You can imagine the following Tweet: “4:30pm today! Dr. Smith’s patient had to reschedule. First caller gets that appointment! 555-4356” (or something like that). A Tweet like this gives the impression that Dr. Smith is highly regarded and his time is of significant value. This example is both public relations and direct response internal promotion.

Another great way to use social media with your existing patient base is to introduce them to unique treatment options. Before we go any further, by “unique” we do not mean unique in your mind. We mean “unique” in the consumer’s mind. To give you an example, over 95% of the dentists and dental teams in the country are familiar with and understand what clear aligners are and what their benefits are to a dental patient. Unfortunately, less than 25% of the dental consumers are familiar with clear aligners and what their benefits are to dental patients. So when we say “unique”, we are talking about the majority of consumers – even your own patients! To be sure, your own patients have absolutely NO idea of the breadth and scope of your treatment offerings. They only **know** what you have physically done to them. They may know *of* treatment you have provided a family member of theirs. So, line up some of the new treatment options from the last 20 years. It could be clear aligners, it might be six month ortho, it might be snoring cessation, it could be Botox, Kor Deep Bleaching, it might be implants, it could be CPAP alternative (sleep apnea), heck – you can even promote the technology you have implemented (intra-oral camera, digital xrays, cad/cam dentistry). Build (write) an announcement for each and post it to your blog once a month. When you do, tell it to cross post to your website, your FaceBook account, and your MySpace account, etc. Will you get a flood of phone calls from new patients if you do this? Nope. But, you will achieve two objectives. You will educate your existing patient base so they can refer patients who need you. And, you will keep your dental practice in the minds of your

existing patients at equal intervals throughout the year (top of mind awareness). Both of these will increase your internal referral rate.

Social media as a direct response advertising medium

This one pretty much applies to FaceBook. In FaceBook, you can create, target, run, monitor, and manage advertisements. If you have a FaceBook presence for your dental practice, when you go to your home FaceBook page, the ads show up on the right hand margin. If you create and place an ad in FaceBook, this is where your ad will appear. FaceBook collects money from you (typically) every time someone “clicks” on your ad. Normally, your ad would drive this person to a particular page on your practice website. Hopefully that page is developed properly in order to then drive the new patient to the phone to call you for their first appointment. What is intriguing about a FaceBook ad is in the targeting. Let’s say I was a dentist and wanted to offer people a more effective alternative to over the counter whitening. I could create an ad with the headline “Poor results from over the counter teeth whitening?” I cannot target people who have yellow teeth and I cannot target people who have used Crest White Strips. There is no selection criteria for any of that in FaceBook (not yet at least ☺). But I sure can target FaceBook users who live within a certain distance from my practice, are 35+ years old, and female. What I do know is that there are precious few 35+ year old females within a reasonable drive of my practice that are *happy* with the results generated by over the counter whitening solutions. This should get me some *clicks*. Once they click, they go directly to a web page on my website that explains all of the whitening options available and the benefits of each. At the bottom of the web page is an open invitation for the person to call me to see which option would be best for their particular situation.

You get the idea.

You can do something like this for nearly every dental procedure. You can have ads with headlines that drive specific need patients to your practice. Here are a few: “Hate your CPAP?” (sleep apnea), “Does your spouse snore?” (snoring cessation/sleep apnea), “Crooked Smile?” (veneers, six month smiles), “Hate the thought of braces?” (clear aligner, six month smiles) “Need perio surgery?” (lanap). Here’s the main point. The click through fees that FaceBook collects are very small. You can actually try all of these ads and statistically see which headlines are working and which are not working. Using statistical analysis, you can continue to refine your headline and ad in order to improve its performance in almost **real time**. An affordable medium that you can try, measure, adjust, measure, and quantify results in nearly real time, is a precious commodity in the advertising arena.

Using Social media to enhance the competitive search positioning of a dental website.

We saved this one for last because **this** is where all of you will receive the maximum near term benefit. Almost all dentists would like small effort/expense in exchange for the greatest short term benefit. Most of you don’t have the patience or the time for public relations to generate a return. Most of you won’t get a ton of impact by promoting from

within your own patient base. Most of you don't have enough targeted FaceBook users to promote to, using FaceBook ads. But! (you knew that was coming) Almost **all of you** want your practice website to be more competitively positioned! Here is why social media helps that effort.

When someone does a search on Google for a dentist [town name], if you have a practice website and are not involved at all in social media, the link to your website *might* come up on the first page of a Google search.

If you have an actively managed social media presence in your practice, the same exact Google search for "dentist [town name]" would likely return **multiple links to your website** on the first page of results. So, using basic math, if the majority of humans have their browser set to deliver the top 10 results of a search on their first page, it is certainly conceivable that your dental website would take up 30% to 40% of the entire first page!

The Irony

Now we take you back to the beginning of this article and our reference to Hipaa and Y2k. We just wrote 1,800 words describing the benefits (some of them) of establishing a presence for your practice on the various social media outlets. Explaining it takes **far longer** than actually **doing it!** One of the beauties of social media is that anyone can do it! Yes, you can do it yourself! You **do not need** a seminar, a book, a coach, or a jedi warrior to lead the way!

Putting it into perspective, our firm has many SEO (search engine optimization) clients. Those clients pay us to competitively position their website. Our fee premium to include the setup and management of **all** of their social media on an ongoing basis is \$100 per month. This proves that doing it properly for maximum impact is simply **not** that labor intensive.

We are not telling you this so you go grab the phone and call us to manage your social media. We **are** telling you this because there really isn't *that* much to it. We realize some dentists would just rather delegate that aspect of their overall promotion to someone else so they can focus on more productive and rewarding endeavors. We understand completely. There are areas of our business that we could technically do ourselves, but, we delegate those duties to others because our time and attention is more useful or rewarding elsewhere. We get it.

To those of you who want to delegate your social media management to someone else, our recommendation is for you to learn the basics yourself – then delegate it. That way, you will know exactly what you are paying for and you will receive value for the size of the fee. You didn't need the \$5,000 Y2K package, nor did you need the all inclusive Hipaa compliance package either.

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For those of you who want to learn more about how to promote your practices, plan to attend one of our upcoming Dental Marketing Summits. You can learn more about our Dental Marketing Summits here: http://www.newpatientsinc.com/marketing_summit/

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