

Let's get social

Theresa Riley takes a look at the pitfalls to avoid when it comes to social media

Love it or hate it, there's no escaping it: we live in a world where social media exists all around us and it's very much here to stay. From Facebook fanatics to super Snapchatters, with a dash of Twitter and Instagram thrown in for good measure, if you haven't already embraced social media as part of your business marketing, you'd better get to it!

In all seriousness, these mediums are a real must for any business, and they can be especially useful for dental practices. Not only are they free resources that you can use to spread the word about the service you provide, they also have useful excellent functions like user reviews that can help to promote a positive message about other people's experiences with your business. Of course, that's not forgetting the ability for your followers to be able share your posts, thus spreading your message further than previously possible.

If you are just getting started with social media, there's a plethora of advice available about the types of posts that you should be creating. The best place to begin is by thinking about the things you like to see on your own social media feeds.

For example, share details about special offers and promotions, team images and information so that patients feel like they are getting to know you, any practice news that you might have, in-practice services such as patient payment plans and financing, as well as before and after pictures of dental work that you have carried out (with patient consent). I would also advise posting useful information about the practice, such as parking or other travel advice, opening times, etc.

So that's a few little pointers about some of the things you should be doing, which will help to get you started off on the right foot. However, there are a few rules of thumb that are worth sticking to, as bad use of social media can sometimes do more harm than good. Let's take an in depth look at some of the pitfalls to avoid.

Don't create more work for yourself

There's little point setting up a social media account if you simply don't have the time to post. The idea of establishing a wider online presence is to start building up a healthy following and to do that you need to create engagement and interaction; you simply cannot do this without consistently posting good content. These accounts need constant attention so if you have too much on your plate then try a scheduling tool like Hootsuite or delegate this task.

This is a great way to

give one (or more) of your team members some extra responsibility, but I would advise using some caution when selecting who takes this on. You don't want to spend even more time having to go through excessive training, so choose someone with a good grasp of social media.

I would also recommend defining some practice guidelines regarding your social media presence, which should fit in line with your existing business goals, ethos, ideals and personality.

Don't make it personal

Remember that these accounts are there strictly to represent your business and the work you carry out as a team of healthcare practitioners. While it's great to show some personality in order to allow existing and potential patients to see your human side, there's a fine line between mixing a little fun with your business personality and stepping into the realms of unprofessionalism.

By all means, create some light-hearted posts, just be sure to keep it relevant to your practice, and avoid sharing personal opinions or views. It can be very easy to offend someone, so always revert back to your predefined business personality and ethos and maintain a sense of decorum. Ensure this is built into your social media guidelines for anyone who has been made responsible for this task.

Don't bad mouth the competition

Following on from the point above, retain your professionalism by keeping a still tongue. Regardless of what you think about the workmanship or the service level of the practice down the road, or even if you've had to rectify dental work carried out elsewhere that wasn't up to scratch, keep these opinions safely to yourself.

Instead, focus on the great work that you do and share it – with documented and stored patient consent, of course. This speaks volumes and shows patients what they could be benefiting from if they choose the services that you provide.

Don't ignore comments

If someone has made the effort to post a comment or review on your Facebook page, has written a lovely tweet, or shared an Instagram picture about the service they have received from you, be sure to reply and thank them for their kind words. This helps to build interaction and shows that their opinion of your practice is valued. These are also great posts to share to your own feeds!

Sadly, receiving negative comments can be a part of having a social media presence, but this should not be something to fear or cause you to shy away from it completely. These situations tend to be rare but if they do arise, don't be tempted to delete the comments unless they are false or intentionally misleading.

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Instead, respond politely and request that the poster contacts you to allow you to resolve the situation. Effective management of complaints is part and parcel of running a business (and forms part of your compliance activities, too) and it's fine to show this and the way you have handled the situation.

With a little bit of careful thought and prior planning, social media can be an exciting way to promote your dental practice and reach patients in ways that have been previously impossible. It gives you a great opportunity to discuss useful features of your practice and service, such as your patient payment plan that can help patients to spread the cost of their dental care, and other areas that they may not already know about. **D**



Theresa Riley is one of Patient Plan Direct's business development managers with over 18 years' experience in the dental industry, incorporating both clinical and management positions.

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