

Social Media in Practice

Jodie Tisson, Digital Marketing Channel Executive at Denplan, looks at how DCPs can make the most of social media.

I think it's fair to say that social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have become incredibly popular in recent years. Many of you may already be members of these sites in your personal lives, but social media can also offer practices an effective way of increasing patient numbers and maintaining patients.

In fact, a recent survey by the British Dental Trade Association (BDTA) found that 59% of the dental professionals surveyed said that they use social networking sites as a means of connecting with friends and colleagues and sharing information¹. It's also a great way of increasing traffic to your website, as the more networking you do, the higher your ranking will become on search engines such as Google. And the best thing is – most social networking sites are completely free!

Denplan has recently launched a number of social media ventures and the following sites are a great place to start for any dental practice interested in getting started.

Blogging

A blog is a type of website which features regular entries from you and your team and it's probably the most established social media outlet. Blogging is a great way to get your latest business news, events, products and services out to your patients and colleagues and blogs are also picked up really well on search engines. They can be set up in a matter of minutes by using certain web services and are the ideal way of getting into social media. Just remember to tell all your visitors and colleagues about your blog, or indeed, any other social media you decide to undertake.

¹ [BDTA Research: Attitudes Towards Social Networking – May 2010](#)

Facebook

Facebook users can add friends and followers and keep them updated with regular messages. You can also update your personal and business profile for free, to notify colleagues about your latest news and join networks of other people with similar interests. This will not only help you communicate regularly with your customers, but also keep you up-to-date with real-time news from your peers and associates.

Twitter

Twitter enables its users to send and read messages known as 'tweets'. Tweets are like online text messages of up to 140 characters and can be great for driving traffic to your website. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow open access. You can also search for mentions of your business, follow other companies and competitors, and even use the site to deal with customer enquiries and questions.

Other options

If you'd rather ease yourself into social media, a great place to start is by adding your company profile to websites such as Wikipedia or Linked In. These are free sites and you can simply add your company details and a short description of your products and services. These sites can be subject to editing by anyone, so you need to make sure you check your page regularly.

Measurement

It's also important to know that all the effort you are putting into social media is paying off. There are a few websites out there which will monitor your brand name for free. However, these can sometimes be unreliable and work best if you have an unusual or distinctive practice name. There are companies which will monitor your online profile more effectively, but this can be expensive.

Simply noting the number of interactions and comments on your social media sites each month can give you a good idea of what messages were well received and the kind of thing your followers are interested in – and it’s a great way of getting feedback from customers. Even if you get some negative feedback, this should be viewed as constructive criticism and an opportunity to improve. You can also respond to these comments and any other questions or queries in order to help put people’s minds at rest.

Social media in practice

Spicer Road Dental Practice in Exeter is one business which is pro-actively using social media and has already benefitted from it. Valerie Joslin, Practice Manager at Spicer Road says: “We’re now using a few different types of social media to advertise and promote the practice, including Twitter. One of our practice principals, Jonathan Moulding, has a personal Twitter account and a separate one for the practice.

“We’re also using a local business, ‘Best of Exeter’, which not only creates flyers and online company listings, but also produces a ‘Handy Little Blue Book’, which offers Exeter residents a guide to recommended businesses in the local area. Best of Exeter also promotes the practice with regular Twitter updates, posting testimonials online and helping us to grow the business by recommendations from real people. It also has regular meetings to allow ‘bestof’ members to network in a social setting. It’s early days, but we’ve already had some interest from patients as a result of our social media activity, so I think it’s well worth the effort!”

It’s clear that undertaking an effective social media strategy requires a lot of work, so it’s not something to take on lightly. However, with the world of social media continuing to grow, it’s a good idea that DCPs take advantage of this tool and utilise the benefits it can bring.

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