

PERIO VS ENVY AND CELEBRITY SMILES

Written by Shaz Memon



Shaz Memon suggests it is far better to promote your practice with the benefits of a healthy smile than pique interest with celebrity lifestyles

Dentists rarely get a good press, and we have a chequered history to thank for that. A profession that has its roots in the barbershop and a poor record of movie portrayals hasn't helped – neither have, more latterly, the 'no-win no-fee' doom mongers.

And, with some of the media happy to leap on this dentist-bashing bandwagon, little wonder the profession faces an uphill struggle trying to reverse negative trains of thought.

Suffice to say, it is a daily battle. Dentists are sometimes forced to defend the integrity of the job and their own professional reputation whilst promoting the dental practice and the services it offers. For many, walking this marketing tightrope between safe ethical advertising and illegally overblown promises is best left with marketing experts well practised in this unique balancing act.

MARKETING WITH INTEGRITY

Dental marketing requires a wealth of experience and an aptitude for promoting a practice brand ethically and the consequences of falling foul of the GDC regulations are made very clear. 1.3.3 of Standards for the Dental Team states that, 'You must make sure that any advertising, promotional material or other information that you produce is accurate and not misleading, and complies with the GDC's

guidance on ethical advertising.'

Unfortunately, the digital opportunities for consumers can mean that the information with which they are equipped are not always from reliable sources and, because the internet is the start of most patient journeys, marketing is a chore made ever more burdensome thanks to the profession's very own 'fake news'. Another day and another new patient turns up in the chair with unreasonable expectations based on inaccurate data – and managing this problem requires open and honest communication not just in your dental marketing, but in the surgery, too.

Patients rely on your professional integrity when choosing a dental practice and nobody can afford to raise hopes that cannot be fulfilled. In more serious cases, an inappropriate choice can put health at risk and may result in a fitness to practise investigation or even a criminal record.

Earlier this year, a clinical dental technician was struck off for, among other charges, claiming to be a 'specialist dentist' in a brochure and declaring he run the 'most advanced denture clinic in all of Manchester'. As the GDC told him, 'Your conduct was therefore dishonest.'

Alarming and despite the regulators clamping down, there remain a number of

dental practice websites out there today that persist with claims, such as 'Dr X is the Best Dentist in London for xxx', 'Dr X specialises in xxx' and 'We are experts in xxx.'

This is particularly a problem with unsupported or neglected websites where a web designer, not au fait with the regulations that govern dental marketing, may have helped put together content.

You cannot claim superiority over any other dental practice by saying you are the best, nor can you say you are a specialist unless you are on the specialist register – and the websites saying as much are ticking time bombs if not resolved immediately.

ATTRACTING PATIENTS

So, how best to attract patients safely, legitimately and creatively without falling foul of the GDC or ASA?

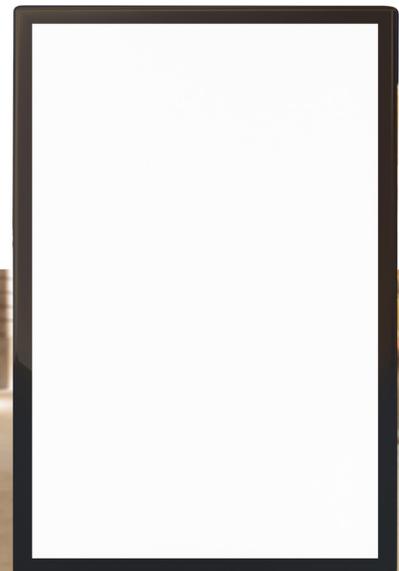
Traditionally, marketers have used the power of envy to entice consumers – and ▶

Adverts for your practice have to abide by advertising rules as well as the GDC's own standards

SHAZ MEMON

Shaz Memon is the creative director of Digimax and Digimax Dental and has worked with leading dental and non-dental names. Digimax Dental uses non-dental industries to infuse creative expertise into dental marketing. Some of Digimax's clients include House of Fraser, McDonalds, Formula One, James Caan and Caffè Concerto. Shaz specialises in offering bespoke, creative, high-end design solutions that encompass branding, website design, top Google rankings, e-marketing and more - just for dentists.

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ENHANCED

CPD

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To discuss methods by which dentists can promote their practice and treatments ethically, with oral health messages as the main focus.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Correctly answering the CPD questions on page 74 shows the reader understands how using oral health in marketing, rather than claims focused around lifestyle, celebrity and looks, resonates with patients and avoids the possibility of legal difficulties.

VERIFIABLE CPD HOURS: 1

TOPIC: Practice management

GDC DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: B

Focusing on oral health messages rather than tempting promises also reduces the risk of being hit with litigation

dentistry has been no exception. We all want what other have, don't we? It may be an amazing lifestyle, exotic holidays, an expensive watch – or even an attractive smile with straight white teeth.

But, according to a recent study using envy as a selling point can backfire for brands if the consumer's self esteem is low.

In effect, brands that want to expand their reach and broaden their appeal would be wise to carefully consider the self-worth of the individuals they're targeting, or risk alienating them. Debunking the sales myth, study co-author Darren Dahl, a professor of marketing and behavioural science, suggests, 'While this strategy can sometimes work, our findings suggest that when marketers use envy to sell products, they could also end up with a bunch of sour grapes instead of sales, and potentially damage brand relationships.'

Good oral health has become a hot topic of late and offers an alternative to the selling of aspirational lifestyles to get patients through practice doors – any dentist would be ill advised to ignore the theme of 'health and wellbeing' as part of their on-going dental marketing strategy.

Firstly, the interests of your patients should always be uppermost. Drawing their attention to - and educating them in - the dos and don'ts of good oral health care, nutrition and lifestyle habits is essential.

Ensuring they remain dentally fit is often dependent on their frequency in the chair and key as the foundation for any complex or cosmetic treatments you offer. Inevitably, this maintenance of healthy mouths boosts profits for practices, too, so a positive step for everyone.

PROMOTING PERIO

Award-winning specialist periodontist Reena Wadia is a regular blogger (reenawadia.com) and, in her summary of How to Avoid Periodontal Litigation in General Dental Practice, a Dentinal Tubules presentation by Dr Ian Dunn, she quotes these alarming figures of the top UK claims in 2015:

- Perio 44.7%
- Implants 28.8%
- Implants and perio 5.5%

Translated to the real world, even the 'riskier' specialities, such as maxillofacial surgery, had fewer claims than perio – with the average award for a perio case standing at £25.6k and the largest award so far being £170k.

Putting periodontal care at the heart of your practice is therefore also important for your own self preservation as well as the preservation of your patient's teeth and gums. Using this in the marketing of your practice may persuade even the most reluctant of patients to attend regularly, especially if you put an emphasis on your gentle, non-invasive approach to care. Once in the chair, there is also an opportunity to upsell to other treatments.

The body of evidence for mouth-body links continues to grow, so including up-to-date research on your own practice website is also important if you are to demonstrate a forward-thinking approach.

And take note - a new investigation by the Oral Health Foundation suggests celebrity endorsements are likely to have little effect on consumer buying habits when it comes to oral health products - with brand power a key selling point. In fact, recommendations by a dental professional were rated important by 23% of those surveyed.

So, stay true to your brand, act ethically and focus on inspiring patients by educating them about the importance of high quality oral health care rather than undermining their confidence with tales of the 'rich, fit and famous'. ●



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