

How to be your practice's leading light

Successful online dental marketing depends on great ideas and a big passion for social media. Dental marketing and design expert **Shaz Memon** forecasts six sensational trends for you and your team

This year, it is estimated there will be 2.77 billion social media users worldwide. With these phenomenal numbers in mind, how best to ensure your dental practice is choosing the relevant platforms and tools to reach its target audience and increase footfall? Dental businesses should consider starting the 2019 showing off what makes them special, developing their conversations with their existing audiences and users while securing relationships with new ones.

So, why not add a new skill to your role and get involved in some dental marketing...

1 'Advanced' social media marketing

Consider 2019 as the year that you help to move your dental practice's social media accounts away from just promoting generic content – a strategy with which audiences very rarely engage. Personalised, tailored marketing encourages interaction and responses and is more likely to turn into a new consultation. Be patient-specific and make sure you know your audience, using relevant keywords to entice interest.

By all means keep your scheduled tweets and Facebook and Instagram posts going, but also be prepared to engage on a daily basis to react to current trends, relevant news stories, oral health research and new dental-related studies and so on. Aim to be



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part of their conversation, too, by keeping an eye out for anyone online looking for a dental practice in your vicinity. Word-of-mouth recommendations have always been important to local businesses, so do engage online with those local to you. Retweet their offers or news and, hopefully, they will do the same. A strong support network online as well as off can boost business for everyone.

Show off the various skills of the whole team, as well as their extra-curricular activity. Dental professionals are people,

too, and very often patients can forget this! Dentistry is an alien world to many so offer them so insight with some candid and behind-the-scenes posts.

2 Live video

Speaking of candid, behind-the-scenes snapshots, live video is a great way to showcase the team.

Whether it is through Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat or Instagram, it is a great tool for practice teams to increase brand identity

and boost transparency in order to cement that all-essential trust that has already been nurtured in real-life clinician-patient relationships. Whether it's a fun clip of the team involved in some fund-raising or a 'to the camera' explanation of signs and symptoms of mouth cancer, it is important to ensure the quality is good and the delivery short and sweet. Smartphones have cameras and built-in microphones and can be a great tool for shooting high quality videos for the purposes of a vlog. The whole team can get involved – just be sure the content is appropriate and meets the GDC expectations of professionalism and social media activity.

3 Social commerce

Has your practice ever considered selling dental products to patients online? E-commerce has changed the way the world purchases goods.

According to statistics, Brits spend £800 million per year on dental cleaning products. Therefore, having a 'store' on your Facebook page adds value to the patient experience and, for those who need to top up on TePes or replace the head on their electric toothbrush, for example, you can become to a convenient 'go to' place online for patients' at-home dental paraphernalia – even for those who are not your own patients, perhaps? However, you will need to consider the realistic turnaround time between order and delivery if you are to compete with the likes of Amazon that has raised the bar with its super fast delivery service. To set you apart from this and other online stores, such as Boots and various supermarkets, find a USP. You can raise awareness of the products during your oral health education appointments and then reinforce with vlogs on your website, in your social media messages, or in your dental marketing emails that can include product recommendations.

4 Virtual reality

The importance of retail and social experiences is on the rise and virtual reality will prove to be an important tool to enhance the way we communicate with new audiences. VR headset users immerse themselves into a sensory and stimulating experience – and this is already a feature within some practices that offer patients the chance

to switch off during treatment. Indeed in a study of patients at Torrington Dental Practice in Devon, the VR experience of a local 'beach walk' discovered patients were less anxious, experienced less pain, and had more positive recollections of their dental treatment a week later, than those in the standard care condition. Marketers can now tap into a whole new audience in a way unlike ever before. Some companies such as Invisalign's Align Technology have already developed treatment software that can be used to demonstrate anticipated outcomes. With access to accurate diagnostic information, it empowers potential consumers who can 'experience' treatment even before embarking on the patient journey.

5 Automated marketing

Automation of email marketing for dental practices is more accessible than ever, giving dentists the opportunity to keep in touch with patients on a regular basis 'automatically',

developing a strong and consistent form of engagement. Highlighting any technology and treatment modalities new to the practice is easily conveyed within an email – link back to the practice website to ensure awareness of further information through an automated process. Services now offer practices the ability to set up intelligent, behavioural-based emails, with personalised messages that align perfectly with their interests – whether on your website, browsing their inbox, or out-and-about on a mobile device.

6 Online booking

Currently, online booking tools do have their limitations but they are bringing benefits to busy dental practices as they allow patients the convenience to book appointments in real-time via a live calendar and take the pressure off practice staff. Some systems complement the automated recall process within the practice, providing patients with the option to book an appointment directly from their recall text or email outside of opening hours.

GDC guidance on using social media

Social networking sites and other social media can be an effective and entertaining way of communicating.

4.2.3 of Standards for the Dental Team states:

- 'You must not post any information or comments about patients on social networking or blogging sites. If you use professional social media to discuss anonymised cases for the purpose of discussing best practice you must be careful that the patient or patients cannot be identified.'

- Social media covers a number of internet based tools which allow people to create and exchange content. It includes blogs, internet forums, content communities and social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, LinkedIn, GDUK, Instagram and Pinterest.

When using social media, you must:

- a. Maintain and protect patients' information by not publishing any information which could identify them on social media without their explicit consent.
- b. Maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships you have with patients.
- c. Comply with any internet and social media policy set out by your employer.

As a registrant you have a responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly both online and offline. Your online image can impact on your professional life and you should not post any information, including photographs and videos, which could bring the profession into disrepute.

It is important to remember that anything you post on social media is in the public domain and can be easily copied and redistributed without your knowledge. You should presume that everything that you share online will be there permanently.

You should think carefully before accepting friend requests from patients.

You should regularly review your privacy settings to ensure that information is not accessed by unintended audiences. However, you should remember that even the strictest privacy settings do not guarantee that your information will be kept secure and any information that you post could be viewed by anyone including your patients, colleagues or employer.