Are you looking for cost effective ways to expand your online presence? You are not alone: Every day, greater portions of marketing budgets are being dedicated to online efforts because that is where patients are spending more and more of their time. However, the greatest challenge with online marketing is how fiercely dynamic it is. Some common concerns I often hear are:

1. How will we know if someone is saying something negative about us online?

2. How can we increase online positive reviews, testimonials, word of mouth and referrals?

3. What online marketing can we do that won’t cost a fortune?

4. How do we track what’s working?

Finding the negative and positive

Let’s begin by addressing negative reviews... To help monitor if someone has said something negative about you online, you can use the free tool Google Alerts. Many dental practices encourage patients to post testimonials or comments on public review sites. Meanwhile, one of the most common concerns doctors share is: “How will I know if a patient says something bad about me online?” Let’s face it. Even the best practice is susceptible to an occasional rant. Google Alerts is a terrific solution (visit www.google.com/alerts). Enter a variety of search terms, including your name, and simply provide your email address to receive updates. These alerts are a cyberspace monitor who is watching out for your best interests. This solution won’t cost anything, yet it can prove invaluable.

In addition, make a note in your calendar to have a staff member do thorough searches for you each quarter on the major search engines. Searches of the doctor’s name, and practice name, should be performed regularly on Google, Bing, and Yahoo for example. Often practices will run across something surprising patients? Have lovely umbrellas you could offer patients when they leave their office and that should be enough to surprise and delight your patients? For some of you this may seem obvious. However, I think many practices—even the most successful ones—can almost always find at least one new thing to enhance.

In 2007, OPRO was granted the UK’s most prestigious business award, the Queen’s Award in recognition of outstanding innovation.

‘I think many practices – even the most successful ones—can almost always find at least one new thing to enhance’
The most important thing to keep in mind with both Facebook and Twitter is that they are systems, (although social media may seem like a task that can be done “whenever you have time”), it will only prove cost effective if you are organised. Here are a few tips to keep in mind for Facebook:

1. Determine who in your office will be responsible for asking patients for Facebook “likes”
2. Determine if you will offer incentives or hold a special promotion
3. Determine how much time you want to dedicate to these tasks each week
4. Schedule in specific days / times to handle this marketing
5. Repeat, repeat, repeat. If asking for patient “likes” does not become a habit in your practice, your Facebook community will perish

Marketing on Facebook can provide your practice with amplified exposure. For example, a patient who shares your practice with their Facebook friends could potentially share hundreds of links that lead to your practice in a single day. Nowhere else do you have the power to reach so many people so easily; however, without an organised system and habits in place, you may find yourself wasting a lot of time in cyberspace.

Likewise, when and if you decide to use Twitter, be sure to follow these tips:

1. Utilise a good profile picture
2. Utilise a good profile page
3. Utilise a good profile description
4. Utilise a good profile link
5. Utilise Twitter Gold

Social Media 

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to. Photos work better than logos in attracting people’s attention.

2. Complete your entire biography section on your profile – this is your free ongoing opportunity to share information about your practice with others.

3. Be genuine and honest about who’s doing the tweeting for your practice. If it’s the receptionist, then say so.

4. Set off on Twitter with the intention of meeting people. If you attempt only to go out and “get” followers, you will miss the point of networking.

5. Don’t feel you have to follow everyone. Focus on meeting people in your area – those businesses who may refer to you or people who may become patients.

As a dentist that is part of a business community, it is important to follow local people and businesses first. There is little benefit to a dental practice in having 5,000 followers if only 100 of them live in your region. Get to know others tweeting in your area. Ask them questions about their business – in turn, they will take an interest in you and your practice.

Another cost effective social media tool is YouTube. Although there are excellent options to invest quite a bit in well done videos, a cost effective way to use YouTube is to open your own YouTube channel and create your own videos. You can also upload any videos or footage you may have on file. Often practices will have a copy of a video clip, interview, or patient testimonial they could upload.

Video can work 24 hours per day and seven days per week for you. In fact if you were considering dedicating a portion of your marketing budget to video, I’d say you were making a wise choice. YouTube is the second most popular search engine in the English speaking world. One of the biggest benefits video has to offer is the fact that it can be syndicated. Your video can be shared on sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, your website and more. Once you handle the initial task of sharing, your videos will be populated all across the web like multiple pieces of online real estate representing you. Here are a few tips to keep in mind if you plan to implement video in your marketing:

1. Make sure the video representing your practice has adequate audio. One thing people won’t put up with is shoddy sound.

2. Consider who will star in your videos. Will it be you, a team member, or a patient sharing a testimonial?

3. What will your videos say? Think about providing content about frequently asked questions, such as:
   • How long will my braces take?
   • Will my gum surgery hurt?
   • What can I expect at my child’s first pediatric dentistry visit?

4. Will you make the video yourself or hire someone in? While you may invest more to hire a professional, it can be well worth it if you are looking for the best in quality.

5. Remember even if you decide to “do it yourself”, you can benefit from a bit of professional editing by allowing them to add your logo, music and a bit of polish.

Video and marketing with sites like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter can give practices a competitive edge. Do research before adopting one or all of these tools. They can all be relatively inexpensive and extremely effective, however not without forethought.

How do we track what’s working?

Now that you are aware of several free or cost effective tools you can use, it’s important to address the question: “Why are you doing that and what is not?” Another great free tool from Google that you can use is Google Analytics. Google Analytics is a free service that will help you with tracking. The service generates detailed statistics about the visitors to your website. Ask your webmaster to set up Google Analytics for your website. You’ll have the option to log-in or get reports regularly emailed to you. Google Analytics can track visitors from referring sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.), search engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc.), as well as key words, display advertising and pay-per-click networks. In addition, you’ll find it interesting to see which web pages are most often visited and how much time is spent per visit.

If you are actively marketing on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, another way to track what’s working is to interview patients about where they found you. One option is to add these choices to your patient registration or intake forms. For example: “Who referred you to our office?” Because of the ever increasing budgets that are being dedicated to online marketing, many offices are implementing a patient interview process to literally ask patients: “Have you seen our Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.”?

This gives patients a convenient option to specify exactly where they found you, and it also serves as a reminder of your presence in these platforms.

As valuable as a personal referral remains, online word of mouth will continue to grow in volume and power. It’s important to follow local people and businesses about you and your practice. Unisue the tools above to help monitor your online reputation. Continue to strive for testimonials, positive word of mouth, and referrals. In turn, social media can help to amplify and put word of mouth to work for you. Remember to track your efforts, check your Google Analytics reports, and never lose sight of the importance of interviewing patients about exactly where they found you. Once you have these systems in place, your practice will be well positioned to attract new patients while at the same time allowing you to manage successful marketing initiatives.

DENTAL TRIBUNE United Kingdom Edition · September 12-18, 2011

About the author

Rita Zamora is an international social media marketing consultant and speaker. She and her team actively co-manage dozens of dental practices’ social media programs. Her clients are located across the United States and internationally.

She has been published in many professional publications. Rita is also Honorary Vice President to the British Dental Practice Managers Association. Learn more at www.DentalRelation-shipMarketing.com or email rita@rita-zamora.com.
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Mandibular incisors can be vulnerable to early loss due to their inherently weak periodontal support and high prevalence with respect to periodontal disease. What are the most common treatment options for missing mandibular incisors? Aside from removable prosthetic options, the restorative options for a fixed prosthesis include a conventional bridge, a resin-bonded bridge (Maryland Bridge) and implants. For a case in which one or two mandibular central incisors are missing, a three- or four-unit bridge has often been the treatment of choice. A resin-bonded bridge, in these cases, can be a reasonable alternative to a conventional bridge; whereas implant treatment, more often than not, is not suitable due to insufficient space. When more than two incisors are missing, the implant option may become the first choice for most clinicians these days.

Preparing mandibular incisors for bridge abutments is an extremely delicate procedure that often leads to root-canal treatment due to pulp damage that might occur during the procedure. Even without the risk of pulp damage, it is still quite a challenge to recreate natural contour and shade on such tiny dentition.

Dental implants have, in many cases, become the treatment of choice for restoring missing teeth and have been documented to have a high degree of success. With implant therapy, the preparation of healthy teeth adjacent to the edentulous area can be avoided. An additional advantage to the implant restoration is the maintenance of the alveolar bone, which otherwise would undergo resorption with other restorative options, hence, often complicating aesthetics.

What's happening in the real world? Are we comfortable enough placing implants in the mandibular anterior region? In spite of understanding both the disadvantages of conventional fixed bridgework and the advantages of implant restorations, we often make the treatment choice for missing mandibular incisors in favour of the bridge. Why is that? What hinders us from providing an implant option for patients in such cases? Restoring mandibular incisors with implants can be one of the most difficult dental treatments to perform due to the limited amount of bone and interdental space. Placing implants in...