

GETTING SOCIAL: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ATTRACT YOUR TARGET PROFILE AND ENGAGE YOUR GENERAL PRACTICES

By Naomi Cooper, Marketing Consultant, Pride Institute



Everyone is talking about it - Social Media. From Facebook to Twitter to LinkedIn, and from YouTube to the blogosphere, it's hard for the orthodontic team to know what's relevant, where to start, and how it's ultimately going to improve the bottom line of the practice. It's important and almost difficult to fathom the size of the opportunity and to grasp just how many new patients you stand to lose or general practices you'll fail to influence by not joining the conversation. Here are the facts: as of January 2010, 120 million people in the U.S. and over 400 million people worldwide are on Facebook. That's right, this means that 40 percent of the U.S. population is on Facebook, and according to Facebook's statistics, half of its worldwide membership - 200 million people - visit the site on any given day. I think we can all agree that a practice marketing opportunity like this doesn't come along everyday.

In "Web 1.0" (the original Web), content was king. That meant that your practice needed a static presence on a single website, preferably with dozens (if not hundreds) of informative articles about the types of orthodontic services and procedures offered in your practice. Now, with "Web 2.0" (the Social Web), conversation is king. This is significant because it means that it's no longer enough to have a single website that discusses the features of your practice and the services available. Why? Because social media raises the bar by enabling an entirely new kind of Internet experience for your patients and prospective patients and referring practices: two-way conversations with you, the orthodontic professional, that actually become the content (called user-generated content) and replaces the one-way consumption of static, manufactured content from you.

“THE MOST POWERFUL WORD OF MOUTH HAPPENS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA.”

Dr. Ryan Haygood, a private practice dentist from Shreveport, LA has leveraged the power of social media extensively to feed his two fast-growing dental practices. “Online social networks have taken consumers who were once seemingly unreachable and made them part of a connected group,” says Haygood. “The potential for marketing to a target audience of patients through social media is limited only by a dentist’s ability to create content and the desire to spend time building relationships online.”

If social media marketing simply requires taking advantage of these online communities where dental professionals and patients can both easily move between the role of audience and author, it follows that it’s critically important for orthodontists and their teams to be a part of these conversations because one thing is certain: they are taking place – with or without you.

“The social media phenomenon has created an information flow that is diminishing the importance of traditional web search,” says Mark Olson, vice president of marketing and business development for Smile Reminder. “Every day our ‘friends’ online feed us information and recommendations about everything from a good movie to a good dentist, and we tend to place more trust in those recommendations because we have a greater connection to the source.”

What does this mean for you and your team? Orthodontists and staff should utilize these existing online communities to increase their practice’s exposure, create a new level of communication with referring practices, find new patients and have existing patients generate referrals by actively recommending

you to their friends and family on social networking websites. Today, some of the most powerful word of mouth happens through social media, not just through the old-fashioned grapevine.

“Social media marketing is extremely effective for orthodontists because unlike other avenues, they can directly target a specific market segment and truly become known as the local dental expert,” according to Drs. Richard and David Madow of Reiserstown, MD, well-known speakers in the dental industry who are also known as “the Madow Brothers”. “Facebook, blogs, YouTube and Twitter allow us to dispense information, communicate with current and potential patients and GPs, and even fill last-minute cancellations.”

So, where to begin? First, understanding the purpose of social media is critical. No, it’s not just for college kids sharing party photos. In fact, according to Quantcast, 32% of Facebook users, 38% of Twitter users, 46% of YouTube visitors and 79% of LinkedIn members are over the age of 35. Ivy Bean (who recently passed away), age 104, has over 55,000 Twitter followers and tweets from the care home where she lived in Bradford, England.

Next, determine your social media strategy. If you’re looking to target a specific demographic group and are considering establishing a presence on one of the major social media sites, consider first whether your target profile is actually using that site. How can you find out? One of the amazing things about the Internet is the wealth of data that is readily available. For example, the statistics in the last paragraph come from Quantcast, (www.quantcast.com) a valuable and free resource that provides a comprehensive demographic breakdown, as well as website traffic numbers, for any site on the Internet. Do your homework, and if the group you’re looking to target is using a specific social media network more than others, that should be a major factor in helping you decide where to focus your energy. For example, if you’ve decided to target high-income, stay-at-home moms, Facebook may be the way to go – Quantcast

pegs 55% of Facebook users as female -- and 48% have children. Plus, not only do 30% of Facebook users have incomes between \$60-100,000, but an additional 32% have incomes over \$100,000.

On the other hand, if your practice is in an urban business district and you're looking to target high-income professionals, LinkedIn might be your best bet. Quantcast states that 69% of LinkedIn members have incomes over \$60,000, with 31% making between \$60-100,000 and 38% making over \$100,000. And 47% of LinkedIn users have a college degree, with another 28% holding graduate degrees as well.

Once you've established your target market and determined your strategy, it's time to think about the tactics you're going to use to attract your desired audience of patients and what your GPs are looking for as well. Do you have an advertising budget? Some social media sites allow you to advertise, and these messages can be targeted by geography, affiliations, activities, interests, relationship status, income and even company size. Do you want to depend on creating compelling content to attract new patients? Think about what's important to your target patient and how you can be of service by providing relevant content to meet their needs.

For example, if you've decided to target moms on Facebook, think about what kind of content you can provide to answer their questions about their kids' oral health, about orthodontic services that might be appealing, or new technology you've added to your practice to keep yourself providing the best possible services to your patients. Perhaps they'd be interested in the new staff you've added to ensure the highest quality of care and level of customer service, or services available in your office to help save them time, like online appointing or online health history forms. Focus on what types of services you could offer just for patients/parents like them - perhaps a free consultation for mom when all family members come in for orthodontic appointments on schedule for 6 months? And finally, determine how you might communicate these messages to them.

Some possibilities include:

- Create a Facebook fan page for your practice with status updates about your practice
- Facebook advertising for new patients in your area in a specific demographic
- Create a profile on Yelp and/or Angie's List and have loyal patients post reviews
- "Tweet" on Twitter about new technology or appointment availability
- Blog about being a dentist, your relationship with your community of GPs and patient interactions
- Post YouTube videos of patient testimonials and collaborative educational videos with your general dentists
- Record podcasts about popular services like clear aligners

**"FOUR OUT OF FIVE ADULTS
NOW PARTICIPATE IN
SOCIAL MEDIA."**

Fred Joyal, CEO and co-founder of 1-800-DENTIST and author of *Everything Is Marketing: The Ultimate Strategy for Dental Practice Growth* agrees that when it comes to social media, it can be confusing for a dentist to know where to start. "While there is a lot of noise out there in social media, you should make sure you have a presence on Yelp, Facebook and Dr. Oogle," he recommends.

"Four out of five adults now participate in social media, so it's never been so important for you to participate and to provide your potential patients with access to more information about you and your practice," according to Frith Meier, CEO of Sesame Communications. "You have the opportunity, through your social networks, to influence them and guide them directly to your door."

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Today, millions of Americans use social media applications for healthcare research and information. In fact, according to a 2008 report by the California Healthcare Foundation, 34 percent of Americans searching for health information online go directly to social media sites, behind only health portal sites and general search engines. And a study by the Pew Internet Project shows that 55 percent of consumers want to be able to e-mail their doctors and that 61 percent of Americans go online for health information, with the majority of them turning to user-generated content.

"The dental industry can no longer deny that social media is an integral part of the marketing toolkit," says Dr. Lou Shuman, president of the Pride Institute, a leading dental practice management company. "I've been watching the expansive growth of social media as a technology and believe that it has a natural application in the dental field - it not only allows the dental professional to have a direct dialog with both existing and prospective patients, but also enables patients to do your marketing for you by creating positive word of mouth about your practice."

With social media marketing, you can easily build relationships and find your ideal target consumer wherever they naturally congregate online. Now is the time for you to start joining - and leading - the conversation. Go on, get social!



NAOMI COOPER

Resident Social Media Expert
Chief Marketing Consultant of Pride Institute



Naomi Cooper is president of Minoa Marketing, Inc., a dental marketing and social media firm based in Los Angeles, CA. With over fifteen years of marketing experience and more than eight years as vice president of marketing for one of the leading practice marketing companies in the dental industry, Naomi brings both depth and breadth of marketing expertise to the Pride Institute, where she serves as resident social media expert and chief marketing consultant. Naomi will be presenting the basics of social media marketing at a variety of state and national dental meetings throughout 2010 along with Dr. Lou Shuman, president of the Pride Institute. Naomi can be reached at naomi@minoamarketing.com.

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