

Social Media Status Update

by Naomi Cooper, President of Minoa Marketing and Chief Marketing Consultant for Pride Institute

Social Media – it could be the biggest buzzword to hit the dental profession in decades. And while an ever increasing number of dentists have become familiar with utilizing social media in their personal lives, the landscape for businesses is constantly changing. As a result, the practical reality of how to incorporate this new communications platform into the practice's marketing plan can be elusive to even the most marketing-savvy dentists.

For the second half of 2012, there are some key upgrades, updates, new features and new networks in the world of social media, so for tips on Facebook's most recent changes to the low down on Pinterest, the hottest new social network, keep reading!

1) Facebook's New Pages for Business

Facebook recently launched its new Pages for Business, which incorporate the chronological Timeline layout, a new page design which phased in on personal profiles at the end of 2011 and into 2012. This same concept rolled out for businesses quite suddenly as of April 1st, 2012, with the new Pages for Business eliminating the need for custom features like tabs and landing pages. While this may seem like a frustrating setback, the reality is that Facebook has done every dental practice a huge favor with this new, simpler design. Dentists no longer have to hire a designer to replicate the look and feel of their website on their Facebook page – a simple upload of a cover and profile photo goes most of the way toward customizing the look of a new Page.

2) YouTube – Dial in Your Channel

YouTube is now the Internet's second largest search engine. More than 60 hours of video are uploaded onto YouTube every minute and over four billion videos are viewed a day! And did you know that YouTube spent over \$200M in 2011 just to fund original content creation for the web? YouTubers around the country are getting paid to create custom video content for online delivery just so YouTube can start to compete with television for those valuable eyeballs and impressions. How does a dentist get in the game? The likelihood of YouTube paying anyone in the dental industry to create compelling content for the dental professional is unlikely, but dentists around the globe are finding that have including several one- to two-minute videos on the practice's website and YouTube "channel" can be an effective part of an overall search engine optimization strategy. The videos on the practice website play into Google's algorithmic preference for fresh, relevant content (Google finds video highly relevant), and the videos posted directly on YouTube drive YouTube search traffic to the practice website as well.

3) Google+ – Stay in Google's Good Graces

Google+ continues to grow into 2012, albeit at a much slower pace than when it first launched June 28, 2011, when it reached a record 10M users in two weeks. Today, Google automatically creates a Google+ profile for anyone with a YouTube, Google or Gmail account, so while there are 170M registered users on Google+, in February 2012, Mashable.com that reported Google+ users are only spending 3.3 minutes monthly on Google+ compared to Facebook users, who spend an average of 7.5 hours on Facebook each month. However, because of its Google affiliation, Google+ is a great tool for developing inbound links. Building out a practice's Google+ business page offers many opportunities to feature videos, share photos and images and create direct inbound links, all of which are incredible drivers of search engine optimization. From dentists who are social media mavens down to the novice, it's a no-brainer to add this social media profile if it helps patients to easily find you and connect with the

practice online. After all, Google is synonymous with online search, and one of the easiest ways to make sure that Google's algorithms continue to work in your favor is to play in their sandbox – aka Google+.

3b) Google Places – not to be confused with Google+, your Google Places page is your practice's profile within Google Local/Google Maps. This profile provides the same opportunities for inbound links, images and video as Google+, and it also features patient reviews, which can have a huge impact on the stickiness of your existing stream of word of mouth referrals. It used to be that when someone recommended their dentist to a friend, they wrote his or her name and number down on a Post-it. Today, they'll just blurt out the name and suggest that you Google the practice to find out more. Google creates a Google Places Page for every business in the country, but it's up to the business owner to claim that profile and make sure it's accurate. Being familiar with your Google Places profile also enables you to monitor what patients are saying about the practice and to highlight these comments (or at least the positive ones) through other social media platforms.

4) Twitter – Reaching into the Universe of Potential Patients

On Facebook, your posts aren't searchable or indexed, so it's unlikely that anyone beyond two degrees of separation will ever find out about your practice unless they're specifically looking for you. What's unique about Twitter is that every single tweet ever tweeted is public and searchable unless it was specifically marked private. That means that your tweets are able to be found by anyone who happens to be searching for any of the keywords you're tweeting about. This is an incredible way to build a loyal base of followers regardless of whether they actually know you or not. And because about half of Americans don't have a dentist, if they're in your local area, your Twitter followers certainly have the potential to eventually become patients in the practice – when they're ready.

5) Pinterest – The Dentist's Dream Target Market: Moms

Pinterest is the current darling in the world of social media. Not only did it grow to 18.7M users in March 2012 from its launch in March 2010, it's a known hub for the dental practice's ultimate target demographic: Moms. Pinterest is the kind of site that may initially seem redundant, but its truly viral nature is only part of the story; the real secret sauce is that Pinterest is a social network that really speaks to its target audience. Moms love "pinning" stories, photos and articles to their Pinterest "boards", and Facebook has even started emulating Pinterest by adding the ability to "pin" important content to the top of a page. For dentists who have a true general or family practice, and especially for pediatric dentists and orthodontists, Pinterest is the latest new addition to the practice's social media arsenal.

At the end of the day, social media is the ultimate patient-practice connector. Imagine being able to broadcast every patient's positive sentiments about the practice to his or her entire social circle! What's more, social media has become a big part of every search engine's decision-making algorithm, so a practice's level of social media engagement will play an increasingly larger role in its rank or score for a particular keyword or searchable phrase. And perhaps most importantly, social media helps dentists and dental teams establish and maintain meaningful, ongoing connections with existing patients and prospective new patients!

Once a practice makes a conscious decision to participate in social media, the most important next step is to devise an integrated and targeted approach. This process begins with goal-setting and the identification of key objectives and outcomes so they can be woven into a social media strategy. Certainly not every dentist's website needs to feature a Facebook icon, Twitter link, YouTube channel and Pinterest pin, but practices should find some way to participate in social media in order to ensure

that Likes, Pins, Retweets and online reviews are driving traffic – and positive word of mouth – to the practice.

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