

# Social Media... Do I? Don't I? Do I have to?



Facebook, LinkedIn Twitter, and blogs of all kinds exist, and tomorrow there will likely be another site to add to this list. It may feel overwhelming to dive into the social media world, but for a practice that strives to connect with their parents and patients beyond the occasional office visit, this world is one worth joining to stay current.

Social media platforms help maintain relationships and foster loyalty with your current patient base and also greatly expand your reach to new patients. **As with any marketing tool, the extent to which you employ it should be in proportion to how busy you want to be.** How many social media sites to use and how active to be on them depends on how many more new patients your practice is trying to attract. There is not a one-size-fits-all answer for doctors on how social media should be used in their practice. Each doctor must make an individual assessment of marketing needs and then implement social media tools to the appropriate extent required to fulfill those needs.

Put simply, social media is a tool used to turn web and mobile technology-based communication into an **interactive dialogue**. Such dialogue is the key to making social media a successful marketing tool for your practice because it allows you to:

- **Actively connect throughout the year** with your parents/patients outside the office setting.
- Tell your story, and share information about your practice that you may not always have the opportunity to share during an office visit.
- **Create easy referrals** – a great experience at your office may end up on a parent's Facebook wall, which in turn may connect you to a friend of his or hers in seconds.
- **Manage your online reputation** by interacting with parents/patients as you see fit and posting information that you feel is important.
- **Fortify your professional reputation** by creating a place for parents/patients to write about their great experiences in your office.

## What do I do?

You have several choices when considering using social media to promote your practice.

- Facebook – the social connection with families when they are not in your office.
- LinkedIn – the professional connection with colleagues and other business people.
- Twitter – the real-time connection. Ongoing discussion in real time.
- Blogging – the educational connection for you to share your professional knowledge and current thoughts regarding topics in the industry.

For practices that are just entering the social media world, it is best to begin with Facebook and LinkedIn. Both of these outlets allow you to control your reputation and tell the story that you want told.

Think of Facebook as an additional (and free) marketing platform. With Facebook, you can promote your practice and reputation with pictures and postings that create a fun, warm, welcoming and educational environment. These postings will help your practice stay on top of minds to those who matter most: pleased, happy-to-refer, returning parents.

LinkedIn should be used for building your professional network and reputation by connecting with colleagues and

business people related to the success of your industry. In this scenario, success is not measured by how many people like you but rather by the extent to which you can build a network that will be of most value to you as a professional. Joining specific groups to discuss trends in your industry, sharing your expertise with those who seek advice and forming new relationships that will ultimately help grow your business, are just a few reasons to join LinkedIn. A side benefit can be that many of your professional connections may have children in need of dentistry.

Once you've successfully set up your Facebook and LinkedIn accounts, you may be ready to write a blog on your opinions and dental health topics.

## FACEBOOK

### Where to Begin

- Look at practice Facebook pages of colleagues whom you respect in order to understand how a practice Facebook can be used to promote a dental practice.
- Assign one individual to be your Facebook coordinator. This individual would be responsible for:
  - posting one to two times per week at a minimum.
  - checking daily for any negative postings that would need an immediate response.



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## How to use it:

- Share information and pictures of community events that the practice is involved in; food drives, *Loot for the Troops* at Halloween, community parades, health fairs, school and daycare educational visits, school field trips to your office, *Run for the Cure*.
- Promote practice contests; no cavity club winners, on-time appointment winner for the month.
- Share fun pictures from your office; Halloween costumes, crazy hat day, theme day.
- Share dental health tips.
- Remind parents to schedule the next preventive care appointment for their child. If your schedule is booked out several weeks, post when your next appointment openings are to motivate parents to call sooner.
- Post office closure due to bad weather.
- Remember interactive is key – when a parent/patient posts something about your office, staff or experience from an appointment, make sure the Facebook coordinator takes a moment to respond. Here are examples:
  - Parent posts - Thank you Dr. Jones and staff for taking such great care of Johnny today. He can't wait to visit you again!
  - Your response - It was great to see Johnny today. We're so proud that he joined our no cavity club. Keep up the great brushing at home.
- Ask parents who have given a verbal compliment in the office to post their positive experience on your Facebook page. It is wise to build up a bank of good postings that will be able to offset any negative online review if one occurs.
- Post links to educational information or videos.
- Link your practice Facebook page to your practice website.
- The doctor needs to stay engaged and visit the practice Facebook page one to two times per week to review the content.

## LINKEDIN

### Where to Begin

- Sign up and set up your profile. There are four areas on your LinkedIn page where you can sell yourself and tell your story.
  - Summary: This is your bio. You can share your practice philosophy and mission statement, why you became a pediatric dentist, what you love about your profession, professional organizations, past work experiences, hobbies.
  - Skills and expertise: List your specialties and what is unique about your practice.

- Education.
- Recommendations: This is where your professional connections/clients can write a testimonial about their experience in working with you.
- Build your connections. Search for professionals that you want in your trusted network, reconnect with old colleagues and seek out those you wish to establish a relationship with.
- Continue to market your brand by building a company profile in addition to your personal profile. You can upload your logo, list your locations and link to your website.

## How to use it:

- Be active on the site; you can regularly participate in discussion groups, or simply update your status/contacts each day. The more you use it, the more visibility you and your practice will have.
- Link your profile to your practice website and any other social media activity that you have going out. (Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, etc.) This allows your network to stay up-to-date with your most recent activity.
- Post questions for experts in your industry or chime in with a post, contributing to a discussion with your own suggestions and expertise.
- Don't be pushy about selling your practice. LinkedIn is a soft-sell marketing tool. If you are an active participant by genuinely engaging in discussions as you see fit and sharing your real-world expertise and professional experience with your network, your practice will sell itself.
- Think about recruiting and hiring employees for your practice. LinkedIn is a great way to research job candidates and associates.

## BLOGGING

### Where to Begin

- Choose your platform and decide if you want to host the site yourself or use a free blogging service.
- Consider your content and what you want to write about. Original content and consistent new blogs will increase your search engine ranking with Google.

## How to use it:

- Think of this as having short, one way conversations with your parents/patients about information that would be helpful to them or you would like them to know. Call it "Blogging with Dr. Tom". This is the perfect format to educate families on the need for all children to have a dental home by age 1 to combat early childhood caries, the number-two childhood disease that is completely preventable.



- The doctor should write the blogs to make sure they are authentically what the doctor wants written or you may choose to hire a professional dental marketing company to supply the content. Blog content can be dental health tips, new dental health facts, information on procedures, addressing current dental health concerns that are in the media or about community dental health issues.
- Create a link/tab to your blog on your practice website, as well as link from your Facebook page.

## MANAGING ELECTRONIC CONTENT

### Where to Begin

- Have policies in your Employee Policy Manual related to social media that address:
  - Use of practice equipment and services.
  - Protection of confidential and proprietary information.
  - Protection of patient information.
  - Use of the Internet to harass co-workers.
  - Prohibit criticizing patients and vendors.

- Make sure staff understands the detrimental effects that negative comments about their workplace on social media sites can have. There is not a lot of privacy on the Internet.
- Monitor doctor rating sites by setting up a Google Alert account at <http://www.google.com/alert>. This service will send an email anytime your name or practice name shows up on the web and you will be able to review the content and appropriately address.

Whatever social media tools a doctor decides to use, it is important to have staff and doctor time dedicated to sustain a consistent presence and monitor content. Set aside 10 minutes a day to update and review your social media sites. Doctors should use these platforms to manage the practice's web presence and reputation to achieve positive results. However, any type of external marketing can never replace the power of treating parents/patients genuinely with kindness and sincere caring for their particular needs. Excellent customer service is the cake, external marketing is the icing.

**Increasingly, consumers don't search for products and services.  
Rather, services come to their attention via social media.**

~ Erik Qualman

## Need help sticking to a marketing plan? Wondering where to begin?

You may ask yourself...

- What are the best marketing tactics for my practice?
- How do I determine a budget?
- How do I get the best online presence to attract new patients?

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more efficiently and effectively.**

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