

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING **MUST-HAVES**

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Is your practice on board with social media? If you said yes, chances are you have questions. Because social media is a relatively new tool—when compared to direct mail or yellow page ads—many practices are still trying to understand how to use this online medium effectively and efficiently. At minimum, some practices just want to validate what they're doing is correct and better understand how social media benefits them. Below are five social media marketing must-haves, or keys to success, to help your practice launch, boost or simply validate your social media efforts.

KEY #1: BE WELL MANAGED

Years ago, when social media began to increase in popularity, many practices eagerly adopted Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. However, it wasn't long before some team members began to complain they were too busy to do this type of work. In some cases, team members were told to manage social media "whenever they had time." This was because the doctor or office manager didn't fully appreciate the benefits or relevance of social media and it was not viewed as worthy of valued work time, therefore social media responsibilities fell through the cracks or came to a halt.

Today, many of the most successful social media communities and online reputations belong to practices that have a dedicated team member handling the job. The role of social media managers has evolved into an important part of a team member's formal job description. Are your social media managers' responsibilities included in their job descriptions? Have you communicated to them what your expectations are? Or how important their role is in building trust and maintaining the practice reputation? If not, make a note of Key #1 as a reminder to take action because with review sites such as Yelp, your practice reputation can either be managed by you or created by happy, or not-so-happy, patients.

KEY #2: BE VISIBLE

Now that you know how important it is to have someone responsible at the helm of your social media efforts, the next key to consider is where you should focus your time. There are a variety of social media tools available. Here is a partial list:

Facebook | Google Plus | Twitter | YouTube | LinkedIn | Instagram | Pinterest

So where is the best place for you to get started? Which are the most important tools for you to use? Facebook and Google Plus are the top two social media platforms practices should have a presence on. Facebook is the most important place to get started, and to master, because of its enormous popularity.

Although Google Plus is not as well known as Facebook, the fact that it is a Google product and can impact your overall visibility and credibility on Google, makes it worthy of your time. One of the best things about Google Plus is that its functionality is very similar to that of Facebook. This means with very little effort, you can manage your Google Plus as well Facebook.

In addition, having various reviews and videos are also incredibly important. And when it comes to sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, etc., your practices goals, resources and interests will determine if they are right for you or not

KEY #3: KEEP GROWING

Now that you know where you need to focus your efforts, most people want to know how they can grow their visibility, likes and reviews. There are two primary methods to achieve growth on social media: organic and paid.

Organic methods are the low hanging fruit. They involve engaging with your existing patient base and will only cost you time, effort and energy. The most effective organic methods to increase your visibility, likes and reviews can be as simple as asking your patients. Make sure to have a structured conversation and role play with your team to develop verbal invitations to motivate patients to join you on social media and post positive reviews on your practice.

Unlike organic methods, you will need to dedicate advertising dollars for paid growth options. Facebook ads or sponsored posts can be a great way for your practice to significantly increase visibility for as low as \$25-\$35 per month. The Facebook advertising platform is available to anyone and allows you to expand the reach of your posts in your community. Organizing a combination of organic and paid growth methods is a must if you want to maximize your visibility.

KEY #4: BE HUMAN

Once you are well managed, know where to focus your time and have systems in place to leverage your visibility. It's important to consider your reputation. Every post, tweet, video and photo you share represents your brand. And social media has prompted new standards - one of which is - people expect your social media to represent who you are, authentically.

Photos of dental teams tend to be among the most popular posts on social media. However if you have hesitations about showing your human side, know there is no need to reveal anything private or uncomfortable. Photos can help you set expectations with patients and you can use social media to give them a preview of your team and your practice's environment. Every practice is unique and has its own special personality. In some cases, you may need to work with a social media advisor or coach to help you brainstorm ways to best represent what your specific practice has to offer.

KEY #5: KEEP LEARNING

Even the best-laid plans need to be flexible. Social media is dynamic and there are always new opportunities to leverage—if you and your team are aware of them. The last key to success is perhaps the most important. It's critical that you allow your social media manager time for CE such as webinars, virtual training or reading articles.

Also seek other ways to expand your resources. For example, ask key practice suppliers or vendors if they have any insights, best practices or tools available to you. For example, CareCredit has a significant online presence and they created the Advertising Toolkit to share their expertise and practical tools with practices. The Toolkit includes free digital assets practices can use to include information about CareCredit on their web and social media sites.

Social media is not just about marketing to attract new patients; it's about creating and protecting online reputations, building brands and establishing trust with new and existing patients. Use the above key points as a checklist. Review this with your team and determine where you are covered and where you may need to improve. Chances are you will find several ways to expand your visibility, enhance your online reputation, and attract new patients.

Save these dates for more social media strategies and tips:

June 20th, 2015 - Register for the Academy of General Dentistry Annual Meeting, when Rita Zamora will share additional social media must-haves during her Keys to Social Media Marketing Success seminar.

August 6, 2015 - Log on to the Academy of General Dentistry's Supercharge Your Social Media Success webinar with Rita Zamora, where you'll have the opportunity to ask your most pressing social media questions and renew, optimize and accelerate your social media skills.



Rita Zamora

Rita Zamora is an international speaker and published author on social media marketing and online reputation management. She and her team offer experienced social media training, mentoring, and support. Their healthcare professional and corporate clients are located across the United States. Rita graduated magna cum laude from the University of Colorado with a bachelor's degree in business and marketing and has over 20 years experience working in the business of dentistry. Learn more at www.RitaZamora.com or email info@RitaZamora.com.

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Rita Zamora collaborates with CareCredit to develop educational materials for the dental industry.

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