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# 10 REASONS TO MARKET WITH SOCIAL NETWORKING

**Do you Tweet? If not, you really should, says Suzy Gorman. Social networking sites both allow the practice to market itself in new ways – and eavesdrop on what patients are saying about you!**

**W**e are all aware of the term ‘word of mouth’, and what a powerful marketing tool it can be. The term describes the motion when one person discusses the services they have received from a person or organisation, good or bad. While the definition remains the same, the speed at which this can be done can now be almost instant - and in fact you can inform all your friends in two lines without even needing to speak to them. Social networks such as the eminently popular Facebook and Twitter now provide this platform.

With the rapid development of the Internet, digital marketing has taken a significant turn and evolved to use social networks as an effective marketing strategy, and can be observed in many different online channels, such as discussion forums like Facebook and Twitter.

People use these networks in different ways. Facebook is easier for people to connect with; sharing images, videos and information as well as instant messaging all feels more familiar to users than Twitter – which is almost a completely new experience and can take more getting used to.

Facebook is a more personal service than Twitter. Many will use it as the sole way to keep connected with friends, offering a ‘one stop shop’ with one interface and one log in, replacing email and external chat clients for a lot of its users. Facebook contains a lot of personal information and as a result, for marketers in particular, allows for very targeted marketing campaigns.

Twitter is more impersonal: ‘Tweets’ can be placed in the public domain, and it lives somewhere between the worlds of email, instant messaging and blogging. The instant responses from the ‘Twitter sphere’ make Twitter addictive and it is much easier to build up a following than on Facebook. Relationships in Facebook resemble those in ‘real-life’ whilst relationships in Twitter are much more informal as the information shared is much less personal.

Social networking (SN) sites such as Facebook have been paid mounting attention from scholars and marketers. These sites are of paramount importance for marketing managers as consumers freely share their experience and opinions and rapidly spread information and opinions regarding products and services in their social networks comprised of friends, personal contacts, and other acquaintances (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). No wonder marketers currently invest considerable resources in encouraging positive digital marketing in the social venue by setting up their brand profile pages (ie brand communities) and engaging consumers to ‘make friends’ with the brand (Morrissey, 2007). More and more dental practices are using this type of media to help create awareness of their brand.

I believe the modern day dental practice should have a Facebook page and should Tweet. Here’s why.

## **1: MORE CUSTOMERS CAN INTERACT WITH THE PRACTICE**

The use of Facebook and Twitter allows more customers/potential





customers to interact with the practice which ultimately helps to build relationships outside the practice. On most SN sites, users can add other users to their 'friends' network. Usually, one user initiates the invitation process, and the other user then accepts or rejects the invitation. When the invitation is accepted, the two profiles become linked. For the modern dental practice this allows you to have access to the world's fastest growing business directory (around 600 million users) and allows your practice to launch products to new customers and helps find new revenue streams as well.

**2: EXTENDS CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Facebook and Twitter offer an extension to the practice's customer services – which means that your practice offers a personal service outside the doors of your own practice.

They are accessible 24 hours a day, which means your services are being promoted around the clock. If you have a member of your team who can be the 'social media' person and interact with your customers for as many hours as possible, then your customer is being responded to just when they are emotionally ready to buy from you. That means every time someone comments on your new status, a photo, a video, a discussion thread, or anything else, you need to comment on it immediately. Gone are the days of a one-way conversation in which the brands talk down to their customers. We are in the midst of a conversational revolution and your practice needs to be part of it. At this point, you don't have the option not to participate. Remember, it's your job to cook up fresh, tasty, nutritious offers and get them on the table, so in order to receive comments you need to make them as appealing as possible. Your customer is looking for your services today, not tomorrow or yesterday. If you respond straight away you'll make selling much, much easier.

**3: SPECIFIC ADVERTISING**

An improvement to Facebook happened in April this year when they debuted their new-and-improved 'Like' button, allowing users to connect more easily with brands, services, and products across the Web. The third-party 'Like' button isn't a one-time connection; it's an open channel, like adding a new friend, that allows the third-party to update the user's News Feed with news, offers, links, or photos. For those in the customer service industry such as dental practices, this means you can market special offers directly to people who are already interested in your services. This represents a truly specific and personal style of advertising with a correspondingly higher return on investment (ROI). It



can also help drive users to your website where you can further promote your services. For example, click 'Like' to receive a 10% discount on whatever product you are looking to promote.

**4: AN OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER SPECIAL DEALS**

Offering special deals for Facebook/Twitter followers encourages new and return customers - the next step for 'word of mouth' marketing.

However large or small, if the consumer product is good enough and works efficiently, such as a tooth whitening offer, eg: 'Whitening Wednesdays', it almost certainly will be discussed in networking forums, and the task that lies ahead is for you to be able to make the most of this heightened sense of awareness around your product. Try to encourage customers to visit and interact with your offers by creating an engaging photo for your Facebook page. It's one of the first things users look at and it has the potential to leave a lasting impression, so make it good. The last thing you want is for a potential customer to arrive at your page and leave immediately! So make sure you are creative with both your offer and your photograph. By providing interesting content, by posting questions to users, creating new offers, and performing other activities that create dialogue, you'll keep users coming back to your Facebook page giving people something to talk about and so spreading 'word of mouth' for your brand.

**5: IMMEDIATE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRACTICE**

Social media accounts provide immediate information. People can use them to get the latest from the practice.

The consumers have the authority, the knowledge and the money available and can make their own decisions for themselves. The purpose of a digital meeting is to get into a conversation which will get the right result. It is about making everything clear to the consumer and making them involve themselves in conversation with the staff and other customers to find out the pros and cons of the product. It also helps in the reshaping of the customary promotional method by making a person know about the product so that he may use the interaction with his friends to tell them about it and in the process, unknowingly promoting the product. If you decide to sell tooth whitening, for example, your practice could use social media marketing techniques to gauge the interest of an audience who are potentially known to be interested in whitening, but have not yet decided to buy which tooth whitening product and from where in the market. Therefore the content of the social media marketing campaign would be written for those customers who have an understanding of tooth whitening a little better than others in the market, who are able to compare prices and features, but are at an earlier stage than the actual purchase.

**6: HELPS BUILD CUSTOMER TRUST**

Regular expert advice from social media will help build trust for potential customers – the more reassured the customer the more likely they are to use the practice.

As a dentist you can use this type of media to offer relevant information and advice about your services in an efficient way which will



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## General stats to the effectiveness and importance of social media

<http://bx.businessweek.com/social-networking/view?url=http%3A%2F%2Fsocialnomics.net%2F2009%2F08%2F11%2Fstatistics-show-social-media-is-bigger-than-you-think%2F>

also build trust, confidence and brand engagement and reinforcement. Over time this educates and puts prospective patients more at ease so that by the time they walk into your practice they are aware of your services, they have already conversed with you or a member of your team, and are more or less ready to buy from you. So be passionate about your services, share your knowledge. This type of marketing is based on permission. This implies that one can only provide advice and help to people when they have a desire for it. In this technique we have to constantly re-state our online presence and should make a constant conversation with our audience so that we can prove ourselves to be the first one to influence them when they are reaching the decision to buy. During these meetings the more advice and help presented and the more answers provided to their questions, the greater the chance of you connecting with your patients and of your patients remembering the product or service, either for that time or for some time in the future.

## 7: ANOTHER WAY FOR POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS TO CONTACT YOU

You can link your Facebook and Twitter accounts. Every time you update your Twitter, your Facebook status will update automatically, which saves a lot of time. The rationale for this is that some people like to use Facebook and some people like to use Twitter, in the same way some people used to use the *Yellow Pages* and others preferred the *Thomson Directory*.

Facebook pages present a massive opportunity for your practice to engage directly with your existing and future customers, even the occasional passer-by. Make sure you provide your users with a safe entrance to contact you, either on Facebook by leaving a message, via telephone, website or email.

If you decide to create a Facebook page you should aim to use this as an extension of your practice; you should maintain the same level of professionalism you would aim to keep in the practice, the use of shorthand expressions and colloquial language should be kept to a minimum.

## 8: REGULAR UPDATES TO SOCIAL MEDIA INCLUDING BLOGS HELP IMPROVE THE SITE'S RANKINGS IN THE SEARCH ENGINES

Search engines crave regularly updated content that is fresh and unique. The success of these social networking sites directly depends on using the sites properly and on the number and activity level of your users. What attracts users to the site is a continually changing digital content (eg messages, pictures, photos, videos, blogs) generated by other users. You can also support this by manipulating content (adding products, adjusting prices, updating news, etc). Blogs have relevance when there is information of real note or if they are expressing a particular view which is not an extension of the website but an extension of the thoughts of a person.

If your practice chooses to blog, the question then relates to the motivation and what you seek to achieve by doing so. If your practice is seeking personification and wishes itself to be more approachable, then by creating separate blogs and involving different hierarchical

members, personal emotions can come across slightly more strongly.

## 9: MONITOR THE BUZZ

Social networking offers the chance to monitor the 'buzz' about your brand, what people are saying and give you the chance to react and turn any potential negatives into positives for your brand - with tailor-made special offers, discount codes, etc.

Monitoring social media activity is important as you have a room filled with people driven by one desire to communicate, share, digest and relate, while carrying on many independent conversations. Some of these conversations can be about you, your competitors or the dental industry in general. Some of these conversations could be people looking for a product like yours. They will talk about all these topics regardless of whether you are listening or not. However, you wouldn't know any of this if you weren't listening. You need to know what potential customers are looking for: are they talking about their tooth whitening experience at your practice, for example, and what are they saying about it? If a patient is promoting your services then offer them an incentive to keep doing so. If they have had tooth whitening then this could be a single tube of maintenance gel, free.

## 10: COST-EFFECTIVE MARKETING

Social networking sites are the most used platforms where people get together, share their ideas and views and participate in social activities. These social networking sites have become a major source of attention for marketers who view them as an effective marketing place, being at the same time a cost-effective and instant method where products may be noticed and viewed within no time across the globe.

While studying for my MBA, I compared 'new social marketing streams versus traditional marketing streams', and when I summarised the results there was a generally encouraging view of social marketing. Participants could see and experience that although today traditional marketing campaigns are still widely in use, they realise there is a rising number of users of internet and social networking sites, which shows the potential and scope of social marketing for dental practices and that social marketing will become more popular in future. Social media is bigger than you think, so don't let your practice be left behind.

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