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Social Media Marketing:

Effective Strategies to Accelerate Dental Practice Growth

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By Dr. Lou Shuman, DMD, CAGS
Diana P. Friedman, MA, MBA

Introduction: What is social media?

"You can buy attention (advertising). You can beg for attention from the media (PR). You can bug people one at a time to get attention (sales). Or you can earn attention by creating something interesting and valuable and then publish it online for free." —David Meerman Scott, best-selling author

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As Internet search engines and social media play an ever-increasing role in social interactions and marketing, dental and orthodontic practices can no longer rely solely on traditional forms of advertising and marketing communications to connect with their patients. This is the age of digital technology. More than half of all U.S. residents and 75% of adults are online.¹ Promotion and market communications are no longer an option; they are a necessity.

A dental practice without an online presence is virtually invisible, considering that 80% of adult

Internet users look for health information online.² A simple online search is now the easiest way for potential patients to find you. The financial success of your dental practice depends on your patient base. This means you must attract new patients to the practice while staying connected with your existing patients to ensure they remain engaged and active in the practice. Consumers today expect dental and orthodontic practices to embrace social media, ingraining themselves within their various social networks. This is where your social media journey begins.

What is Social Media Anyway?

Definition: *Social media includes multiple forms of electronic communication, including channels like websites, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, and Yelp through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).*³

Social media has elevated marketing to a new level. Traditional directories, fliers and print ads have become secondary to online marketing efforts for one very simple reason: your patients are already online and you must go where the customers are to engage them.

The Key Principles of Social Media:

- **Get connected** - Social media is about conversations, community, connecting with other people and building genuine relationships
- **Be conversational** - Authentic, honest and a naturally flowing dialogue are vital for social media success
- **Listen and respond** - Social media not only allows you to hear what people are saying about your business, it also enables you to respond
- **Make it worth saying** - Always be interesting, useful, current and engaging with your social media dialogue
- **Extend yourself** - Don't be afraid to try new ideas, but think your efforts through before putting them into action

Using social media marketing allows you to spend time effectively, forging genuine relationships with a more extensive range of potential patients. Word-of-mouth marketing is also valued within social media, as the personal touch characterizing these communications adds an additional layer of credibility. Not only are your target demographics actively using social networks, they are specifically searching for health information online. A 2011 study revealed 139 million consumers used the Internet on a monthly basis to seek healthcare information.⁴

Your dental practice is a business that faces common challenges like local competition from other dental practices, members of the community who do not know your office exists, or even the dreaded dental anxiety that keeps some community members from visiting a dentist in the first place. Social media can help your practice overcome each of those challenges. With an effective social media strategy, your dental practice can connect with people in ways you may not have previously considered. In this Whitepaper, we will take a close look at how you can use social media to gain a significant business advantage. Then, we will examine specific social media tools and the practical benefits your dental office can derive from each.

1 Good for Business //

Why Social Media Benefits Your Dental Practice

Credibility

Today's digital generation associates a strong website and solid online presence with the legitimacy of your practice. When users are unable to find your dental practice online, they will often assume:

- No one is talking about your business online because you are not an established practice
- You are a new dentist or orthodontist and therefore may lack experience
- You are such a small or out-of-touch dental office that you do not have the resources to create an online presence

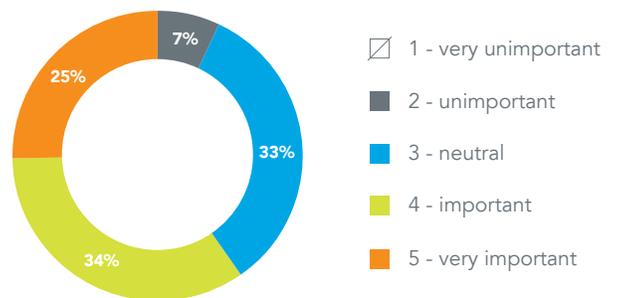
These things matter to most Internet users. In fact, 89% of all U.S. Internet users do an online search before making a purchase, even when the purchase is made at a local business.⁵ Practically everyone is online today. Just think; while you are prepping a crown, de-banding a patient, finishing a root canal or tending to an impacted wisdom tooth, the rest of your patients (both current and potential) are online.

Referrals

This role is filled by virtual platforms such as blogs, social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, Yelp, podcasts, and rating and social bookmarking sites, all of which provide convenient methods for fast, reliable and genuine contact. Like dental professionals, consumers rely heavily on peer feedback before making

a purchase decision. Social networks provide a robust environment to gather such feedback and testimonials. Not only is social media an effective and credible channel to reach patients, online marketing actually costs 62% less than traditional methods of marketing, making it even more valuable to your practice.⁶

Chart 1: On a scale of 1-5, how important are your social networks in remaining engaged with existing patients?



Patient Engagement

Dentists and orthodontists that have already embraced social media are increasingly experiencing the impact that social networks have on their practice growth and success. In a 2012 national survey by Sesame Communications,⁷ when asked how important social networks were in remaining engaged with patients on a scale from 1 to 5, respondents scored a mean of 3.78 in their assessment of importance. 85% stated it was important in order to remain competitive.

New Patient Acquisition

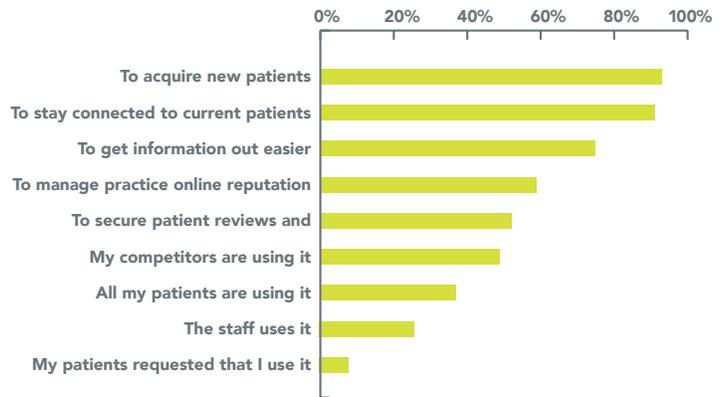
In a recent study conducted by Sesame Communications,⁸ a panel of 88 dental and orthodontic practices were asked about their social media usage and business experience. 75% of respondents said they had been using social media for their practices for at least one year. A staggering 96% of the panel acknowledged using social media as a means of acquiring new patients for their practice.

Table 1: Use of Social Media Channels by Dental and Orthodontic Practices

SOCIAL NETWORK USED BY DENTAL AND ORTHODONTIC PRACTICES	RESPONSE / PERCENTAGE BY PRACTICE
Facebook	99%
Blog	83%
YouTube	59%
Google+	41%
Twitter	34%
LinkedIn	21%
Pinterest	6%

The study⁹ also asked participants why they chose to use social media channels for their practices.

Chart 2: Reason Dental and Orthodontic Practices Use Social Media



The majority of practices found social media offered an effective and efficient way to communicate with their patients. Further, 49% of dental professionals used social media because they believed their competitors were already online.



FACEBOOK NOW HAS MORE THAN
ONE BILLION
ACTIVE USERS¹⁰



TWITTER REPORTS
100 MILLION
LOG IN AT LEAST ONCE PER MONTH¹¹



YOUTUBE STATISTICS SHOW THAT OVER
FOUR BILLION
VIDEOS ARE VIEWED EACH DAY, WITH MORE THAN
800 MILLION
UNIQUE USERS WORLDWIDE PER MONTH¹²

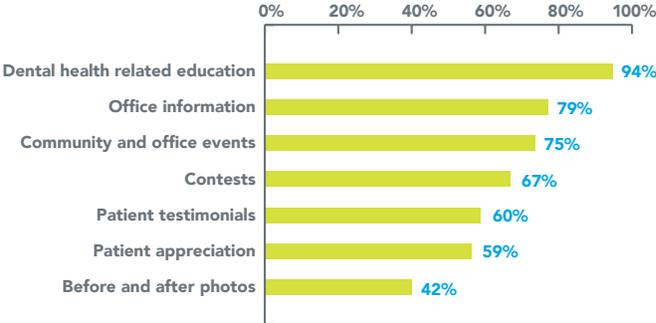


GOOGLE+ NOW HAS MORE THAN
400 MILLION USERS¹³

In the same study,¹⁴ participants were asked what type of communications they disseminate through social media. 94% of respondents stated that education drives the content of social networks, followed closely by information regarding the practice and the community.



Chart 3: Type of Information Communicated by Practices via Social Networks



Social media is a diverse universe offering different channels of communications. Each is characterized by its unique benefits. In the next segment we will break down those channels so you can clearly define the role each may play in growing your practice.

2 Vital Networking Tools //

Your Essential Social Media Platforms

Think of social media platforms as your online marketing toolbox. The questions are which tools in that toolbox are necessary and what is the best way to use them? New social media sites are coming online all the time, but whether they become effective communication channels is often a difficult question to answer. Practices need to direct their efforts to those social media communication channels that are embraced by patients.

In order to determine which social media outlets and content will reach and resonate with patients, you must first understand the delivery mediums. Once understood, you must then clearly define the marketing objective(s) for each area. While most marketing efforts entail either attracting new patients or engaging with existing patients, there are a host of marketing objectives within these two areas. Possible marketing objectives include:

- Optimize search engine results so new patients can find your practice
- Provide educational materials to help facilitate treatment plan adherence
- Distribute helpful advice to improve patient retention
- Highlight the benefits of cosmetic treatment to improve case acceptance from existing patients
- Make patients fans of your services to increase referrals from existing patients

Setting a clear marketing objective will act as a guide to ensure you derive value from your social media marketing efforts. Patients have different expectations for each social platform and it's imperative that your objectives align with those expectations.

The Blog

Adding a blog to your website gives your practice a simple way to share information, whether it's office news, photos, videos or other information. A regularly updated blog educates patients, promotes your dental brand, differentiates your practice from the one down the street, and keeps your patients up-to-date on exciting developments in dentistry and your dental practice.

57% OF COMPANIES
HAVE ACQUIRED A
CUSTOMER FROM THEIR
COMPANY BLOG.¹⁵

A blog can be used as an extremely effective channel to promote new dental technology and cutting-edge products and services sold in your office, share in-depth information about specific treatments performed, or promote community events. In addition, you can share photos, videos and other multimedia, featuring patients and your dental team, in an effort to strengthen your relationship with patients.

A blog has the ability to provide expansive information in each post, giving readers a more thorough understanding of the featured topic as well as an inside look at who you are as a person, who your team is and what your practice philosophy is. Blogs are not only informative; they allow you to carve out your brand identity and community image. For instance, if you volunteer for a nonprofit organization or dental charity, your blog is a great place to highlight your involvement.

Your blog should be integrated on your practice website. It should be updated at least weekly and contain relevant and interesting professional and practice content. You can mix it up and post other forms of clinical and office-related information, such as posts written by your hygienist or dental assistant, patient success stories, or even community involvement. Readers love to see variety in blog posts and, over time, grow to know your practice on a very personal level, leading to increased engagement and loyalty.

For your practice blog, ask yourself the following:

- **What are your goals?** Are you simply broadcasting office news and public relations for your practice or will you be engaging with patients and providing regular support?
- **Who will manage the blog?** A blog needs to be updated regularly if it is to be successful. Designate a staff member to update the blog at least once a week or make time on your schedule to do so, even if it's just to remind patients about a contest. Alternatively, hire a company with dental specific social media expertise to manage the postings on your behalf.



» Facebook

Facebook has become an integral platform for all individuals to connect, and an effective platform for businesses to reach new and existing clients. Sharing photos, events and information through specially designed Facebook Business Pages is easy and enormously productive. In fact, 20% of all page views on the web are on Facebook.¹⁶ In order to address the question of why Facebook is relevant to your practice, consider the following facts:

- 93% of all U.S. adult Internet users are on Facebook¹⁷
- One out of every eight minutes online is spent on Facebook¹⁸
- There are 2.7 billion 'Likes' and comments made on Facebook each day¹⁹

Facebook is an extremely powerful tool as it allows you not only to communicate with your existing patients, but when effectively networked to reach their social networks, grow your target market exponentially. The additional benefit is that this channel introduces your practice to prospective new patients through information delivered to them from a member of their own trusted network.



» Twitter

Twitter is widely regarded as a powerful marketing tool, used to share quick and focused updates, connect with patients, learn from customers past experiences and connect with professional peers.

Maintaining a Twitter presence is fairly easy. It is much more convenient to tweet a message in seconds than to use a time-consuming media platform. Your dental office can reach out to thousands of potential patients in a matter of a few clicks.

How it works: Twitter is an interactive stream of messages that are limited to a maximum of 140 characters each. Those messages (known as "tweets") post on your Twitter page, and automatically stream to any other user who "follows" you. When groups of people all follow each other, Twitter communities begin to build, and so the service has grown into one of the most popular marketing tools available.

- About 75% of companies use Twitter as a marketing channel²⁰
- 42% of all active Twitter users learn about products and services via the social media site and 49% percent follow brands or companies²¹



» YouTube

Despite being known as a video network first, YouTube is also the second largest search engine in the world, with 72 hours of video uploaded every minute and over 4 billion video views globally every day.²²

There are many different ways you can utilize the power of video. Whether filming patient testimonials, a demonstration of a treatment or just a simple office tour, dental practices are harnessing the marketing power of YouTube. It's a perfect platform for your patients to share their personal experience with your dental office. In fact, 60% of social media users create reviews of products and services.²³ These reviews include written and video testimonials of your practice. When patients enjoy your content, they share it with their friends and family on their own personal social networks.

Every YouTube video your dental practice posts should drive people to visit your website, Facebook, Twitter and other social media profiles. You have the option to post the links within a video description or create pop-up links that appear as part of a playback. You can also conclude videos you produce with a message to the viewer to visit your profile elsewhere online. By linking your online presence elements you can effectively cross-promote your dental practice.

53.5%

OF THE POPULATION AND

70.8%

OF ALL INTERNET USERS

WILL WATCH AN ONLINE

VIDEO IN 2012.²⁴



» Google+

Google+ is Google's foray into social networking, and shares many features with other popular sites, especially Facebook. The key differentiator for Google+, however, is in its link to Google search results. Google's social sharing feature is proven to drive traffic to your website, increasing your visibility in the networks' integrated search results.

One of the key features of Google+ is "Circles," which are simply groups that contain your contacts. Set up a profile for your dental practice and then start adding your patients (if they agree to it), local businesses and other dental related professionals to your public circles.

- Google+ now has over 100 million monthly active users²⁵
- Google+ is the 4th largest social network and is the fastest growing of all time²⁶
- The Google+ "+1" button is used more than 5 billion times daily²⁷



» Pinterest

Pinterest is a pin-board, or bookmark style, photo-sharing site. Users create theme-based image collections that include favorite events, hobbies, interests and more. It is interactive; users can browse other boards, repin images to their board, or "like" images.

When Pinterest launched in late 2011, it immediately turned heads. One of the fastest growing social media networks online, Pinterest is the third largest behind Facebook and Twitter.²⁸ It is known as a platform for your ultimate target demographic: moms. In fact, from September 2011 to February 2012, the number of unique monthly visits to the site grew over 866%.²⁹

Pinterest boards include specific areas of interest. For example, your dental practice may pin items such as "Top 5 Ways To Keep Teeth Healthy," "Teeth Whitening Techniques," or "Foods You Can Eat While in Braces." If they agree, using your patients' before-and-after dental photos can create valuable content on Pinterest.

PINTEREST DRIVES
MORE REFERRAL TRAFFIC
ON THE WEB THAN
GOOGLE+, YOUTUBE,
REDDIT, AND LINKEDIN
—COMBINED.

» Sweepstakes and Contests

No matter which form of social media you use, contests and sweepstakes are an excellent and quick way to expand your social media footprint, while serving as a proven way to market your dental office, increase your contacts and energize your patient base. Contest platforms that integrate with social networks, particularly Facebook, allow your practice to run anything from a simple enter-to-win sweepstakes to a more involved "Share Your Smile" photo contest, while offering appealing prizes to patients like electronics, gift cards, and more.

The benefits of online contests and sweepstakes for a dental practice are documented in a 2012 study by Sesame Communications looking at 48 dental and orthodontic practices and 64 distinct contests and sweepstake campaigns.³⁰ The results showed that, on average, these patient engagement campaigns drove 194 new "Likes"

per practice, per campaign, as well as 4 appointment requests that originated with filling out an entry form. Just as significant, for each sweepstakes and contest, participating practices received an average of 17 recommendations on Facebook—testimonials that will exist on their page and benefit them indefinitely.

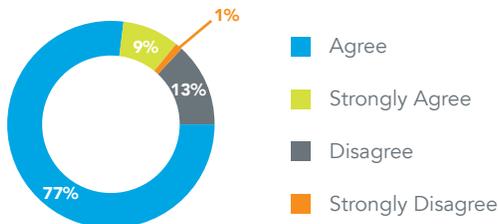
While sweepstakes and contests can be a powerful addition to your social marketing efforts, it is important to pay attention to the finer details and rules surrounding online contests. Work with a provider who monitors and keeps your promotions within Facebook guidelines and government regulations, while assisting in driving activity through promotional email blasts and newsletters to patients. Furthermore, ensure the contest platform you choose allows you to capture entrant contact details for later marketing efforts.



48 PRACTICES WITH CONTESTS AND SWEEPSTAKE CAMPAIGNS, ON AVERAGE DROVE
194 NEW "LIKES"
PER PRACTICE, PER CAMPAIGN, AS WELL AS
4 APPOINTMENT REQUESTS.
PARTICIPANTS ALSO RECEIVED AN AVERAGE OF
17 RECOMMENDATIONS ON FACEBOOK.

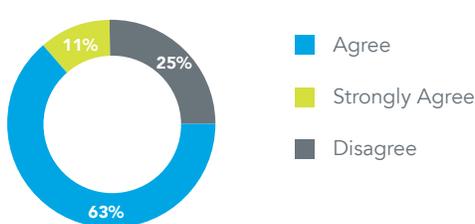
3 The Impact of Social Media on the Practice //

Chart 4: Social Media Helps Me Get New Patients



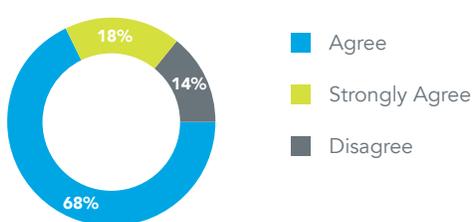
In a national survey of 88 dental and orthodontic practices administered by Sesame Communications³¹ participants noted the following benefits to their practice from developing and implementing a social media strategy.

Chart 5: Social Media Helps Me Retain Current Patients



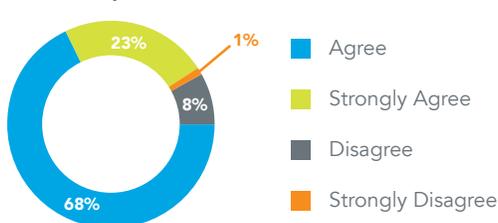
A significant 86% of dental professionals (Chart 4) agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them get new patients into the practice, and 74% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that (Chart 5) it helps them retain their existing patients.

Chart 6: Social Networks are a Valuable Resource for my Patients



In the same study by Sesame Communications,³² participants were asked to evaluate whether content on their social media was valuable for their patients. 86% strongly agreed or agreed (Chart 6) that it is.

Chart 7: Social Media Drives Traffic to my Website



Social media is not only about the practice's Facebook, blog or YouTube pages. Respondents confirmed what previous market research has shown, that social media provides a strong driver for practice website traffic.

Precise Measurement of the Impact of Social Media on your Practice

The information in the previous section quantifies the impact dental professionals assign to their social media activities. Beyond perception, it is important to have a more precise, consistent and accurate way to measure practice results. Call tracking systems can help identify which dental marketing strategies are most successful in generating the "first call" from a potential new patient. This technology can track new patient calls by campaign, but also has the capability to record patient calls so you can listen in and continue to improve how new patient calls are managed and scheduled in your practice.

Additionally, tools like Google Analytics can help you get an accurate perspective of your website performance like the pages patients are spending time on, and the areas that are causing visitors to leave your website completely. The tool is also invaluable in assessing the impact your social networks are having on your website traffic. You can access detailed reports of your incoming website traffic and which sites are the biggest influencers.

Lastly, professional service providers and social media marketers can provide you with robust information on your search engine performance and social media channel impact. While social networks are approachable by anyone, to truly maximize your growth in this new medium, working with a specialist is advisable.

You can't wait any longer

There's no denying it. If you are a dental professional, you must actively pursue social media. This is no fad—patients have shifted their focus and time to online social channels, and so must your practice to remain competitive and successful. Social networking provides innovative channels of communications that can make enormous differences in your dental practice.

While it can be tempting to dive headfirst into social networks, it's important to first

build a strategy and concrete goals for your social marketing efforts. Once launched, a successful social strategy takes time and dedication to grow. So work with a partner experienced in dentistry that understands the nuances in communicating effectively with patients on these social channels. With the necessary pieces in place, social networking affords your practice incredible new patient exposure, increased referral opportunities, and strengthened relationships with your patients.

About Dr. Lou Shuman, DMD, CAGS

Dr. Shuman currently serves as President of Pride Institute. He is a leading authority and sought after speaker and educator in the areas of internet strategy, emerging technologies, digital marketing methods, and operational practice management. He is both a member of the Key Opinion Leader Board and a personal executive consultant to DENTSPLY GAC.

Dr. Shuman serves as Chairman of the Sesame Communications Technology Advisory Board, and is a member of the Advisory Boards at Dentistry Today, The Progressive Orthodontist, Orthodontic Practice US, and The Progressive Dentist. He is the only dentist to be recognized by Dentistry Today Magazine both as a Top CE Leader and a leader in dental consulting.

About Diana P. Friedman, MA, MBA

Diana currently serves as President and chief executive officer of Sesame Communications. She has a 20 year success track record in marketing innovative technologies and fortifying brand positioning for dental companies in the professionals and consumer markets. Prior to joining Sesame, Diana was Vice President of Novalar Pharmaceuticals,

launching the first in-class drug OraVerse™. She also served as North America Director of Professional Marketing, Education and Professional Relations for Philips Sonicare and as a senior consultant to leading companies in the dental space. She holds an MA in Sociology and an MBA from Arizona State University.

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NOTES

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