

Simple and effective

Kevin Coyle advises on e-marketing

Let me start with a question. Do you remember WAP enabled mobile phones? What about PointCast? Or to take things to an extreme what about Tamagotchi, Atari or Sinclair Spectrum? This random selection has one thing in common. They were all either a fad or were based on a technology or idea that was soon superseded by a better one.

How does this relate to your dental practice? Increasingly I have been made aware of e-marketing strategies being rolled out by practices, which include a presence on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. I do not doubt these will have a varying degree of success for some, but is this really the best use

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of a clinician's time? It is surprising to see frequent online updates regarding treatments carried out during a normal working day. As a marketer this presents a number of concerns, namely how patients (if they are a part of your online social network) could interpret the updates. Not only could it appear that the practice is not busy, but one wrong word could spell disaster. The list of public relations blunders by people who are professionally trained is well documented, so the prospect of making one statement that could be interpreted to have various meanings is a very real threat indeed.

What is an altogether more realistic



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vision for your practice is a well thought out and very basic offering. Have a website with the obvious relevant pages including 'the team', 'history', 'treatments', 'contact details/enquiries' and most importantly a section of case studies. The DPAS website is quite in-depth, yet the most visited pages by far are the case studies. Practices which are considering carrying out a conversion with DPAS like to read articles from other practices, which highlight the quality of service and cost savings achieved. Visit www.dpas.co.uk to see what I mean.

Speak to a few website design companies and think long and hard before commissioning a 20 page flash enabled website at great expense, just for the sake of it. When it comes to having search engine optimisation, again question how much of this is needed. Whilst I may be about to oversimplify the process, by and large, if you live in a densely populated city or urban area where people are likely to use Google or Yahoo to find a practice then by all means opt for a higher optimisation package. If however, your practice is in a small rural area with only a handful of practices and a more mature population demographic, then your marketing budget would be better spent elsewhere.

Furthermore, send out frequent e-newsletters to your patients. If they like your service then ask them to refer you to their friends and family. For a low cost option visit www.constantcontact.com which is an e-newsletter template service costing less than £50 per month for an average practice.

Always carry out a return on investment analysis on any marketing activity and if the social networking sites prove profitable then keep using them. However, if you are unsure then take a look at the statistics. MySpace has seen a significant fall in page views, Bebo is also on the decline and Twitter, whilst still on the rise, has only a fraction of the



• Have you the time to constantly update your social network site?

page views of some of the other larger social networking sites.

It's obvious social networking is now embedded in our psyche. What is not so obvious is how this can be transferred to a dentist/patient relationship. I strongly suspect there is no natural connection, a view which will no doubt raise objections. It may generate a few extra treatments, but in the long term will it prove to be worth the time, energy and investment? ■

DPAS *Further growing your practice* seminars take place on July 17, in Basingstoke and September 18, in Bristol.

Contact DPAS by calling 01747 870910 or email enquiries@dpas.co.uk