



Social media etiquette

Laura Parsons offers a beginner's guide to the often mysterious world of social media.

You've probably heard many times what a valuable tool social media can be, both in terms of Google rankings and in growing your practice, but where do you start? It



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can be overwhelming diving in head first without any prior knowledge and even if you already have an idea of how to use the various platforms, it's important to frequently evaluate the content of your posts. Building a practice community that creates solid relationships with patients and provides real value can take a lot of time and the latter is a resource that many practices are short of.

Whether your current sentiment leans towards enthusiasm or trepidation, there's no getting away from the fact that your patients are highly likely to be talking about you with their friends on social media. So to help you be an informed part of that conversation,

here's some hints and tips on the best ways to utilise the two main platforms, Facebook and Twitter.

Social media

The clue is in the title – it's a social space; you're meeting new people as well as old acquaintances, so treat it no differently to how you would any other social situation. You don't meet someone for the first time and start selling to them, no matter what the context. Instead you introduce yourself and begin asking about them, and wait for them to ask about you. Hopefully this turns into a witty and engaging exploration of common interests and may lead to a discussion around

Shared experiences and so starts a relationship. By being welcoming, good fun and interested in the other person you can achieve the real life version of a Like or Follow. Conversely, selling or promoting your practice at every opportunity will guarantee only one thing - no followers outside of the practice team!

First encounter theory

It is really important from the outset to give your practice a personality. Keep posts short, snappy and to the point. Before you post anything say it aloud to yourself – does it sound natural, like a conversation you'd have face to face? The best posts are the ones which inform, amuse and entertain your followers, enabling them to interact with you rather than just posting for posting's sake. Remember it's a social space; there will be conversation so expect comments and messages; make sure you acknowledge and respond promptly to these – if possible on the same day.

When dealing with the general public, freebies always go down well and people are often prepared

to work a little bit for something free by sharing your content. Think of Emerson's Law of Compensation - your rewards will always be in direct proportion to the service you give to others. So focus on how you can increase the value of your services to patients by applying this theory to your social world.

Measuring success

While you need Likes and Follows in order to get content seen, this shouldn't be the measure of your success. There isn't any value in having 500 Likes on Facebook if none of those people are interacting with you and the same is true of Twitter. This is why you should never buy Likes. Facebook's algorithm looks at your page's 'Likes to Engagement' ratio, and if no one is interacting they'll make the assumption your posts are uninteresting and will put them into fewer and fewer newsfeeds. Paid for Likes will never interact with your page or content, so you're spending money on something that is hindering rather than helping your chances of success. On both platforms, measure success by

engagement rather than by the quantity of Likes or Follows. This metric demonstrates affinity to your practice, moving toward patient advocacy.

Facebook – basic tips for success

Facebook's newsfeed algorithm shows users what it considers the most relevant content, so your practice is competing for newsfeed space with every other brand and person that your audience member has Liked. It's getting tougher and tougher to break through the noise, so in order to get your content seen, your posts must be interesting, relevant to your audience and add value.

Platforms like Hootsuite help you manage your social pages, but because Facebook's algorithm favours posts that originate from within, you'll have the best results by posting directly, using the post scheduler.

Don't forget to share content generated by other like-minded businesses or charities in your area. You can let these people know you're talking about them by linking to their page; put @ and then type the business or charity name in your post. ➔



❗ It's poor form to make multiple updates within a short time frame. It risks annoying your audience, can look like spam and will negatively impact future posts in the fight against the newsfeed algorithm.

When you link to an article, Facebook will automatically generate a preview image. Once the image has loaded, delete the link to keep the post clean (the preview image will act as a link), then add your commentary.

Twitter – basic tips for success

As with Facebook, engagement is top priority. If people don't engage with you on Twitter you're as good as talking to yourself. Tweets with approximately 110 characters get more engagement because there is room for people to add their own thoughts when they retweet you.

Remember your manners - If you're talking about someone who's on Twitter, use their @username so they can see what you're saying. They're also more likely to share your post if you've said something that makes them look good.

Try not to start a tweet with @ username as only people who are following both you and @username will see your tweet. If you must start the tweet with @username, and want more people to see the post, put a full stop before the @.

Hashtags quickly tell the user what your tweet is about, for instance if you're at an event you'd use #nameofevent or if you're talking about implants you'd use #dentalimplants. Anyone following that hashtag can then see your tweet – even if they're not following you.

If you're linking to an article, shorten the URL by using a link-shortener such as **Bitly.com**.

Don't send out tweets @mentioning all and sundry in the hope that you'll draw their attention to a piece of content – this is difficult to read and can be considered irritating. If you want their attention, earn it by being more creative.

Use twitter lists. You might want a list for "Dental Industry" where you'll add the likes of DPAS Dental Plans or Milkshake Marketing for instance, a list for your patients and a list for local

businesses/charities. Lists act as a filter for your newsfeed making it easier to follow the respective tweets allowing you to interact with ease. It's important to remember that anyone can follow your lists if you haven't made them private, so when creating lists always check the privacy settings.

The world of social media is constantly evolving and keeping up with changes can be a challenge. However, these platforms are becoming important sources of patient interaction and if used appropriately can effectively become an extension of word of mouth recommendations. Those practices using social media to best effect are engaging frequently and amassing good numbers of Likes and Follows from an audience that is genuinely interested in what they are saying. In the best examples, practices' social media space is becoming an important patient resource for local and dental health information. Using social media to drive interest to your website is now an essential part of the marketing mix and should be front of mind in developing any practice communication plan.

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