



The rise of Instagram for your dental practice

How a few simple strategies can make your office stand out on this social media platform.

[by Lou Shuman, DMD, CAGS, and Ian McNickle, MBA]

I love Instagram; maybe it's the simplicity of it. The highly visual posts and concise captions (if there are any) make it a fun distraction throughout my day. It's no wonder that many users —

especially those between the ages of 18 and 30 — find themselves to be addicted to the platform. Yet, there aren't many dental practices taking advantage. Many are pouring their efforts into Facebook, but the very

nature of Instagram makes it a great community for dentists to show off their work and engage with their communities. To get some insight and advice about how practices can jump on the bandwagon, I

interviewed my friend and dental marketing expert, Ian McNickle, CEO of WEO Media and president of The DSO Project.

Why do you recommend dentists get on Instagram?

While I've always recommended Facebook as the primary social media platform for dental practices, Instagram is rapidly gaining on Facebook as an impactful social marketing platform.

Facebook and YouTube still dominate social media for most users in the United States, but Instagram has seen significant growth, especially among young adults. As of June 2018, Instagram reported to have more than 1 billion active users worldwide. Likewise, according to the Pew Research Center, 35 percent of all U.S. adults now use Instagram. In particular, 71 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds and more than 50 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds are regular users.

According to Instagram statistics,

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at least 80 percent of users are now following at least one business. People want to be a part of a brand identity and keep up with it. Advertisers in general are seeing value with Instagram ads. According to Recode.net, in the first quarter of 2017, Instagram made up 10 percent of Facebook's total ad revenue, but in the fourth quarter of 2018, it will make up about 30 percent. (Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 for \$1 billion.)

Posting and advertising on Instagram can produce a significant benefit for practices that are able to effectively engage with their patients (and potential new patients).

Where should dentists start?

It's very important to set up a business page for your practice, as opposed to using your personal Instagram page. Business pages have many advantages over personal pages: the ability to list information about your business, the option to include clear calls to action (CTAs), page analytics and the ability to advertise.

When setting up your business profile page, make sure you include relevant keywords that people might search for, such as your practice name and "dentist type, city, state" as well as your primary services and procedure categories (general dentistry, orthodontics, dental implants, etc). We recommend using the following CTAs: call, email, text and get directions.

You often talk about user-generated content. Can you explain what that is and how to create it on Instagram?

You don't always have to be the one to create content for your page. You can collaborate with highly engaged users (patients, friends, colleagues) who are creating content about you. Featuring this type of content shows that a business is listening to their community and can encourage further engagement from other users. User-generated content doesn't

always have to be photos and videos; it could be asking people to comment or tag a friend so that you can feature these interactions as a post or in stories. Sometimes encouraging engagement is just asking people to post emojis if someone agrees, or you can ask them to pick the best emoji response to content you've posted.

“Successful promotion requires trust, and trust on Instagram involves establishing yourself in a community and showing that you have a story to tell but also that you listen and celebrate the stories of others.”

For example, you can create a post asking users to share photos of their smiles using the hashtag #shareyourmile and this will give people a chance to be featured on your page. You can also encourage user interaction with giveaways and asking people to like, comment and share, which would enter them in a drawing to win a fun prize.

I think the great thing about Instagram now is that it's not just about posting static photos to the timeline. Can you tell practices how they can post stories just like their users?

Taking notes from Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook have added stories to their platforms, allowing users to share updates that disappear after 24 hours. While Facebook

hasn't received a high amount of adoption, Instagram users frequently use the story feature to get regular updates. In fact, according to Statista.com, there are approximately 400 million users watching stories every day. Stories also offer a way to create user-generated content and feedback, such as direct messages, polls and submitting questions for the practice to answer. This allows for informal, real-time updates from the practice. Ask questions, interact with followers, share news about the office, showcase moments in your day and have fun!

How creative do you have to be to get solid engagement from your Instagram posts?

Gone are the days where you could post any photo and get decent engagement. The visual esthetic of photos is extremely important as people curate their feeds. Instagram is a highly visual platform, so while people want value beyond esthetics, it's still important to have visually interesting, striking or beautiful photos that draw people in to learn more and engage. Also, consistency in visuals is important for your branding. If you're posting from your mobile phone, apps like VSCO, Snapseed, Canva and Over are just a few of the many photo editing apps for mobile devices.

How often and when should practices post to get good engagement?

There's a lot of conflicting information on when you should post to Instagram and how often, but in general, weekdays seem to perform best. The exact time and frequency of posts is up to you and your specific audience, but in general, think of when someone would have breaks in their day to check their phone (waking up, lunch, breaks, once they get home). While it's important to post frequently to keep users engaged and keep up with Instagram's algorithm, it's also important to focus on high-value content that encourages people to interact.

As for promotion, we generally recommend the 80/20 rule in which 80 percent is spent on teaching people new information, entertaining them, or encouraging them to interact and 20 percent can be product or service promotion. You could post daily if you have the bandwidth, but at least once or twice per week would be acceptable.

The majority of posts should focus on telling a story, encouraging followers to share and providing them something of value. Successful promotion requires trust, and trust on Instagram involves establishing yourself in a community and showing that you have a story to tell but also that you listen and celebrate the stories of others.

If you follow these strategies, I'm confident dentists will experience benefits in their practice marketing and online engagement. ●

MARKETING CONSULTATION

If you have questions about your website, social media or online marketing, you may contact WEO Media for a consultation to learn more about the latest industry trends and strategies. The consultation is FREE if you identify yourself as a Dental Products Report reader.

ABOUT IAN MCNICKLE

Ian McNickle, MBA, is a national speaker, writer and marketer. He is a co-founder and CEO at WEO Media and a three-time winner of the Cellerant Best of Class Award for dental websites and online marketing. He is also president of The DSO Project. If you have questions about any marketing related topic, please contact Ian McNickle directly at ian@weomedia.com or by calling 888-246-6906. For more information, you can visit www.weomedia.com.

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