

Social Media from A to Z



Building a comprehensive social media marketing plan

by Brian Spaeth

Since the publication of my last article “The Social Dentist,” [Editor’s Note: See *Dentaltown Magazine*, February 2010, p. 50] the feedback I’d received was what I’d call an “apprehensive acceptance” that social networking has some value. Theory and buzzwords only go so far, of course. With this follow-up article, I want to present a more detailed look at how to actually integrate social media into a dental practice.

I’m going to walk you through what I did for Dr. Daniel Araldi in Saratoga, California. While there are certain standards, tools, and strategies that always apply, *nothing* in the social spaces should ever be executed from a strict template. Don’t let anyone tell you differently.

Needs Analysis

The first thing your office needs to do is figure out if you even *need* social media, because there’s a perfectly reasonable chance you might not. How to do this? Talk to and/or run a poll of your patients.

If you were to find out only 20 percent of your patients are using social networks (like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter), it might not be the right time to jump in yet. Maybe 80 percent of them are on Twitter and Facebook, but they’re not very active. Perhaps the key demographics of your patient base or geographic region aren’t heavy technology users.

Those types of trends don’t indicate that your presence on social networks is going to allow you to maximize the benefits of these platforms. That said, there’s a good probability a high percentage of your patients *are* on social networks, which indicates other people in their networks and your area are doing the same.

In Dr. Araldi’s case, he’d done his research and was ready to get his practice involved in social media – he just needed to know how to do it.

Capability Assessment

Determining what your practice’s support staff can handle is an equally important part of the equation. Dr. Araldi was enthusiastic about blogging and bringing the social networking work in-house. This is the ideal – while outsourcing is possible, social media works best when forming a genuine connection between the business and consumer.

What if your staff is already overwhelmed? There are several options.

1) Start small. Maybe Twitter all on its own will have to suffice. Maybe it’s just Facebook or Foursquare. Doing a single thing well is better than doing nothing. You can always add additional presences as the staff becomes more familiar and efficient with the tools.

2) Outsource. This is contradictory to what I wrote above, but outsourcing can be effective if done in a transparent and intelligent fashion. For example, I do social networking for a garage flooring treatment company. I’m not giving quotes or answering service questions. I function only as a connector and to expose the company to new customers, which is the goal of the program. I knew nothing about this business when I started working with them. In fact, the most compelling part of the blog content is how much I’ve been able to learn about what the company does (which, in turn, makes me an ideal candidate to connect with customers).

The danger of outsourcing is obvious – picking the right person. Of course, there’s also room to have some work done in-house and have other parts done by a trusted third party. Remember, your program is going to be the one that works for you – no templates.

No matter how you put your program together, there’s good news: this stuff is not rocket science *and* it’s getting easier all the time as the space matures. Your practice just needs a solid game plan, the right education and a determination to execute.

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Blueprint and Execution

Time to put Dr. Araldi's program together.

1) Blog/Web site (www.saratogadentistry.com/blog): A blog is considered standard by now and no great revelation. The question was what to do with Dr. Araldi's blog.

Would it be written by Dr. Araldi, the staff, or some combination of both? Would we take a casual approach or make it professional news about the office and/or industry? Did we want to feature patient news or notable events in the area?

Ultimately, we decided to do all of the above. Daniel is an engaging guy with a variety of hobbies and interests. Bringing in his love of cycling and photography was a natural fit and something he was comfortable sharing. He's also a great dentist with

a lot of passion and knowledge, which meant there was room to blog about this, provided we kept the same tone. A consistent "voice" is one key to a successful blog.

If nobody on your staff writes well, there are plenty of freelance writers available who can take your ideas and make them work. The best place to find them? Social networks!

(As far as blogging software, I recommend Wordpress. Blogger and Movable Type are two other leaders in the field.)

2) Twitter (www.twitter.com/saratogadentist): The famous microblogging site is a must as far as networking via word of mouth, engaging with the community, and searching out dentists.

This third element is how we found Dr. Araldi a new patient on day two of his social network plan. We put in keyword



Make Your Tweets Work for You by Rita Zamora

Eighty-seven percent of Americans know about Twitter – this is a pretty good rate of name recognition, especially since this rate was only five percent in 2008. Although the participants who actually "tweet" are less in number, Twitter's buzz certainly sparks the interest of dentists and their teams.

Fifty-one percent of Twitter-users follow brands, companies and products. With statistics like these, including Twitter in your marketing plan as one more avenue of networking is definitely a smart move. Join the buzz; see what it's all about; and then follow these four strategies to optimize your effectiveness.

- 1. Complete your entire profile.** Many people will open an account on Twitter and either leave it, or immediately begin "tweeting" and "following." There are several benefits to completing your *entire* Twitter profile as soon as you join:
 - **Benefit #1: To establish legitimacy.** Once you begin to follow others on Twitter, they are certain to check your profile to see who you are. This first impression is wasted if you do not have credible, ready-to-view information. Simple details like leaving out your Web site URL will make tweeters hesitant to interact with your "faceless" practice. Like any other marketing strategy, you must be transparent. Fellow tweeters will question your motives if you don't have information listed. *Why tweet if you don't want people to know about you and your business?* This is exactly what other tweeters are asking themselves when they see your empty profile...
 - **Benefit #2: Business exposure.** If you neglect to fill out your bio section, you lose a great opportunity to inform others about your practice. Twitter has recently begun including profile and bio information on notification e-mails. This means when you follow someone who receives notifications, you have an opportunity to share yourself and your practice via e-mail. Most importantly, it's often your bio that will tip the scale in your favor and help others decide to "follow" you as well.
 - **Benefit #3: Relationship building.** When you use Twitter's generic profile photo and fail to include your real name, you

lose the opportunity to make a connection. People relate better to photos than to logos, and real names to screen names.

- 2. Be social.** Once you have successfully completed your profile, you are ready to begin tweeting. Remember the "social" in social media...you don't have to tweet about dentistry all the time. Begin to "follow" others. Try following waves of 25 people at a time, rather than instantly following 500. Focus on quality rather than quantity.
- 3. Tell the truth about who is tweeting.** If the name of the person tweeting is different than the username or name in the profile, tell your followers. For example, if your username is "DrMolarDDS," and in the profile's name section you've entered "Dr. John Molar," people who follow you will expect that Dr. John Molar is actually doing the tweeting. However, if it happens to be Becky, the office manager who is tweeting, stating this will yield far greater results. Tweeters appreciate transparency and authenticity. In the bio section, simply add Becky as the "tweeter-in-charge."
- 4. Stay local.** As part of a business community, it is important to follow local people and businesses first. There is little benefit to having 5,000 followers if only 100 of them live in your region. Get to know others tweeting in your area. Ask questions about their businesses – in turn, they will take an interest in you and your practice.

Twitter is a great social medium to add to a marketing regime. Build your Twitter community by interacting genuinely. You'll begin to establish new relationships, trust, and rapport with locals, and potentially new patients, one tweet at a time. ■

Author's Bio

Rita Zamora is a leader in social media marketing for dental professionals. She has trained dentists, teams, dental consultants, as well as corporations. Rita and her team actively co-manage dozens of dental practice social media programs, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. To learn more visit www.dentalrelationshipmarketing.com.



searches across Twitter for things like “Saratoga dentist,” “Cupertino dentist,” and other combinations in his area. Logic said people using these keywords could be asking their network something to the effect of, “I’m looking for a good dentist in Saratoga, California. Any suggestions?”

That’s exactly what we found. From there it was as easy as reaching out and introducing the office. People are out there looking for you on these networks – be there to help them find you.

3) Facebook (www.facebook.com/saratogadentistry):

On Facebook we set up a business page, which essentially functions as another version of the practice’s Web site. This wasn’t going to be as active of a presence as Twitter, but there are many people who log on to Facebook at 7 a.m. and sign off at 10 p.m. It’s also an excellent place to curate reviews and feedback from your current patients that their network and others in your area can see.

4) **Google:** We “claimed” Saratoga Dentistry’s Google Place Page (on Google Maps) as part of this process, allowing us to upload photos and add additional links and information. This also became the primary place we drive patients to leave reviews. It’s quick, simple, and Google is a valuable resource for people doing general searches.

Google also supplies a “QR Code,” which is a custom symbol that can be scanned by a mobile phone and then automatically loads the Google Page on that device. You can put this QR Code anywhere, including your homepage. It’s a convenient way for people to call the office quickly or get instant directions. (See the background of Dr. Araldi’s Twitter page for his.)

5) **Integration:** Once we set everything up and got it running, we needed to integrate the social networks into any current marketing and communications. This included an e-mail blast to inform current patients they can follow the practice’s social networks, as well as informing them of how they can leave reviews and testimonials on the Google Place Page.

In-office signage serves these same purposes, and a new policy to follow up appointments with an e-mail prompt for a Google review was put in place. (Additions to staff e-mail signatures, letterheads or other materials might also be warranted, depending on how your practice operates.)

These were the foundation of the program. Foursquare and other geo-location-based networks are things we’re still playing around with for Dr. Araldi.

Location is one of the fastest growing areas in social networking, especially with the smartphone market exploding. Devices like the iPhone and Android phones are opening up all kinds of new marketing and promotional ideas based around people telling their social networks where they are.

One vital thing to note: don’t unveil your blog or social networks to your patients until they’ve been in use for at least 30 days. It’s going to take that long to get them running smoothly and develop a consistent voice and intent. Your patients (and potential patients) are going to feel more comfortable knowing this isn’t something the office decided to do yesterday on a whim. Too many businesses make this mistake because it’s just that easy to start a Twitter account.

Conclusion

What you’ve read here is by no means a comprehensive guide, but remember – there’s no template to social media success other than having a reasoned plan and consistent execution. ■

Author’s Bio

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