

The core algorithms used by Google to determine map listings and organic search listings are similar but not exactly the same. For the organic search listings, the primary factor that determines a page's rank is website content, which should be full of relevant and detailed information. However, many other variables also contribute. Among these are backlinks, which refers to other websites that link to the dental site; page speed, or how fast the website loads when clicked on; mobile friendliness, referring to how the website appears on a mobile device such as a phone or tablet; technical coding factors; click-through rate, which is how often people click to get to the website; and user experience, determined by how long people stay on the dental website to read content and watch videos. Dentists who focus on optimizing these areas can have significant improvements in their website rankings across the web.

Clinical Significance

Today, digital marketing campaigns must be part of the dentist's efforts to reach the public and encourage new patient acquisition. The dental practitioner should ensure that the practice's marketing team works diligently to improve the website daily so the practice obtains the best results in a Google search.

Naderi J: Playing the game: Understanding the Google search engine. *Dent Econ* 109:20-22, 2019

Reprints not available

MARKETING

Marketing for New Practices



BACKGROUND

Nothing in dental school prepares you for the challenges of marketing a dental practice – especially a new practice. Marketing can become expensive, with no guarantee of a return on your investment. Starting out, one new dentist was surprised to find that some of the least costly marketing techniques were also the most effective. Particularly if integrated as part of comprehensive tried-and-true marketing strategies, these creative, “low-cost, high efficacy” approaches can help to get a new practice off to a great start.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Dental practice is all about building relationships, which is something that many dentists are naturally good at. In community engagement, those same skills are transferred to practice marketing efforts in order to build relationships in the community and increase awareness of your practice.

THE DIRECT-MAIL DEBATE

Direct mail has the reputation of being out-of-date, but with targeting of your message and audience, it can still be highly effective. If your new practice is strategically located in a growing area, direct mail is a promising way to target those new neighbors. Lists of new move-ins can be narrowed by home price and other factors; such lists are typically not very expensive and can be highly cost-effective. The message can be more along the lines of “Welcome to the neighborhood” than “We want to be your dentist.” Evidence suggests that well-executed direct mail campaigns have one of the highest response rates among marketing media.

DOING GOOD IN THE COMMUNITY

Recognizing needs in your community and taking steps to address them are great ways to build your team while contributing to marketing efforts. Such philanthropic activities are also personally and professionally rewarding, and a natural fit with the reasons why many dentists choose their profession. Examples include efforts targeting local first responders or children's groups' creating campaigns in collaboration with other local businesses, such as restaurants, salons, and professional services; and being a presence at local events such as farmer's markets and health fairs.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has opened new avenues to cost-effective marketing. Social media advertising has become more of a “pay to play” activity: paying to boost posts and to be seen in user feeds. However, a relatively small investment can lead to a large increase in viewership.

Facebook and other social media platforms use algorithms to determine visibility, and frequent posting is key to growing audience engagement. One study recommended posting intervals for popular social media sites, ranging from 1 or 2 posts per day on Facebook or Instagram, up to 15 per day for Twitter. Focus your efforts on the platform that best meets your interest – for example, Instagram for targeting younger audiences and Facebook or LinkedIn for building relationships with other businesses and professionals.

Defining your ideal patient and the ideal message to reach that person will help you build marketing and social media strategy,

focusing on the platforms that yield the best return on investment. It's OK to repurpose content from your different social media accounts, and to cross-refer between sites. Scheduling tools and content calendars can greatly simplify the work of managing your social media presence.

TRACKING YOUR RESULTS

Tracking ROI may be the most important yet challenging part of your marketing plan. Even with a good plan and attentive follow-up, it can be difficult to determine where patients are coming from. In some cases, a new patient may have seen several types of impressions before their first visit. Different marketing plans may have differing goals. For example, a Facebook contest might focus on gaining new followers, while a direct-mail campaign may target getting new patients into the office or simply increasing awareness and recognition.

Clinical Significance

A recently established new dentist shares her experiences and strategies for cost-effective marketing. Helping people and building relationships with patients and communities is what our profession is all about – which makes community engagement a great focus for your marketing plan.

Singh A: Cost-effective marketing for a start-up. *Dent Econ* 110(4):15-16. 2020.

Reprints not available

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Tips from Tech Startups



BACKGROUND

The fast-moving technology sector is known for fostering a culture of creativity with the capability for rapid growth and adaptability. A technology CEO shares workplace “hacks” from his industry that be readily integrated to promote productivity and growth in dental practice.

MORNING HUDDLES

The morning huddle provides all staff members – even the quiet ones – a regular and equal chance to make their voices heard. It also helps in communicating the practice goals for that day. Schedule the huddle for the same time each morning, preferably before the first appointment. Making it a “stand-up” meeting helps keep the huddle brief and focused; 10 to 15 minutes is a good scheduled time. In dental practice, the huddle can be a time for each staff member to share their plans for that day, along with possible obstacles. The morning huddle is also a good time to discuss practice goals or progress toward implementing new initiatives. The huddle should be a “judgment-free zone,” where everyone’s viewpoint is welcomed and heard.

AGILE DEVELOPMENT

In the tech sector, agile development refers to a process of continuous development and collaboration enabling flexibility and quick responses to change. In dental practice, rather than developing new software features, the focus will be on developing solutions to improve practice finances based on patient reactions. For example, if patient reappointment rates are identified

as an area for improvement, an agile development process might measure this performance indicator and make adjustments more frequently. Staff could be asked to try different scripts and give feedback on how patients are responding, providing information on what’s working and what isn’t.

POSTMORTEMS

Postmortems are a process for responding to negative experiences reported by users/patients, analyzing what went wrong and taking necessary steps to prevent future problems. The goal is to confront the issue head-on and work as a group to come up with effective solutions. This is a way of taking control of failures and turning them into learning opportunities.

SINGLE POINTS OF FAILURE

In technology, the concept of high availability seeks to eliminate specific “points of failure” with the potential to cause problems – for example, a database would store information in multiple locations so that a backup will still be available if one location fails. An application of this idea to dental practice might include cross-training to ensure that more than one staff member knows how to do a particular task – ensuring coverage in case of illness or vacations. To set up this process, identify the staff members who are most proficient in a task and encourage them to share that knowledge, including with new staff members as they come on board. Although this process requires some investment of time, it will help to ensure that things run normally when absences occur.