

Clinical Significance

This is a clear-eyed overview of some of the essentials of digital marketing in dental practice. Data is the key to efforts to identify your best patients and attract more like them. Analyzing and acting on data enables your practice to develop an effective, cost-efficient digital strategy.

Nation K: When it comes to digital, data is critical. *Dental Econ* 110(10):22-25, 2020.

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Pitfalls in Digital Marketing



BACKGROUND

Google Ads has become the prime player in the online marketing world, with revenue of nearly \$135 billion in 2019. As organic ranking of online advertising becomes increasingly difficult, Google Ads becomes an increasingly important aspect of digital marketing strategy. A dental marketing consulting outlines some key mistakes in digital marketing.

COMMON ERRORS IN DIGITAL MARKETING

Sending Ads to Your Website

Online ads for your dental website should link users not to your practice website, but rather to a landing page. For example, users searching for information about dental implants should land on a page with information relevant to this topic only – targeted to the key concerns and obstacles patients may have. The landing page should be the patient's last stop, leading to making an appointment. Whereas websites exist to inform, landing pages are designed to “promote and convert.”

Overlooking Remarketing

Not every click will lead to an appointment. In Google Ads, patient conversion rates exceed 20% for new patients, while patients interested in specialized services are more likely to seek more information and ask more questions. Google does not allow dentists to remarket, due to HIPAA provisions. However, adding a simple Facebook remarketing pixel to your landing page allows your ad to repeatedly display in potential patients' Facebook feeds. That keeps you at the top of their minds when the time comes to schedule an appointment. The practice pays nothing until the patient clicks on your ad, providing highly affordable brand awareness.

Not Using Tracking Numbers

Tracking numbers are unique phone numbers that redirect to your office number. Recent changes have been introduced to avoid previous concerns about search engine optimization with this strategy. With unique tracking numbers, you'll know exactly

how many calls you're getting through your Google Ads campaign, and how many of those are being successfully converted – you can even listen to the calls personally. With the addition of tracking software, you'll also know your campaign's exact return on investment.

Not Promptly Responding to Leads

When a potential patient provides information on your landing page, callback time should be no more than 15 minutes. Email responses need to be almost immediate. To be able to “speed to the lead” in this way, staff members must be aware of the digital campaign and have the knowledge and ability to respond immediately. The ideal solution is to enable patients to schedule online, saving the time and inconvenience involved with calling the office.

Not Highlighting Your Brand

Your practice's brand and culture have a major influence on whether users will take action or simply move on to the next items on their search list. Patients must be able to see what distinguishes your practice from the other results they're looking at. The language on your landing page needs to be judgment-free, while answering the most difficult questions right away. Practice maps, welcoming photos of the dentist and staff, videos, and patient testimonials can help patients feel comfortable and confident with proceeding.

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Digital marketing can be a little daunting at first, but the potential benefits are worth the investment. We're all familiar with searching for information online and making decisions based on the results. Dentists and practices should put themselves in the patient's shoes: If you were Googling “dentist near me,” what would you be hoping to find?

EMPLOYEE THEFT

Employee and Accounting Controls to Reduce Theft



BACKGROUND

Theft by trusted members of the dental staff is not only a common problem but is increasing. An American Dental Association (ADA) survey reported that 48% of the respondents had been a victim of embezzlement, which is one of the most common types of theft in the dental office. This is 13% higher than 10 years ago. Of those who were victims, 46% had been victimized more than once. Instituting employee controls and accounting controls can help dentists discourage staff members from even the thought of stealing.

EMPLOYEE CONTROLS

Trust is a foundational part of many dental practices, with practice owners placing their faith in staff, especially long-term employees. The ADA survey found that almost 40% of employees who were accused of stealing had been employed 4 years or longer. Typically these employees are tasked with handling accounts receivable, accounts payable, or banking functions.

Several behaviors serve as red flags for possible theft by an employee, as follows:

- Refusing to delegate tasks, share responsibilities, or take vacations. The need to hide their illicit activities makes dishonest employees possessive about their duties and reluctant to cross-train other staff members. Workspaces can be also jealously guarded from other employees.
- Working early or late. Employees who are stealing need time in the office when no one else is there to hide what they're doing.
- Complaining about finances. Frustrated employees who seem to always be short on cash and those with unexpected expenses are the most likely to engage in stealing. Employees who live well beyond their means should also be suspected if financial irregularities are found in the practice records.

ACCOUNTING CONTROLS

When accounting controls are in place, potential employee embezzlement becomes much more difficult, yet many dentists unthinkingly put their practices at risk by trusting a single

employee with all the financial tasks or by not regularly reviewing accounts payable and receivable. Among the ways dental employees can steal from the dentist are deleting appointment and ledger entries, endorsing patient checks to their personal accounts, forging payroll checks, altering payroll information, misappropriating credit cards, and using signature stamps for which they aren't authorized. Some employees perpetrate more sophisticated schemes, such as fabricating fictitious vendors, creating nonexistent employees, taking kickbacks from patients or vendors, or coercing subordinate employees to steal for them.

A significant reduction in the likelihood the dentist will be victimized can be made by simply reviewing bookkeeping structure and implementing accounting controls. This step also sends a message to employees that the dentist is watching. Other accounting measures that help avoid theft are as follows:

- Delegate financial tasks among several employees so no one person can manipulate the information. For example, separate job functions related to reviewing statements, entering online payments, and preparing monthly bank reconciliations. With multiple authorized signers, different employees should be tasked with preparing checks and signing checks.
- Ask the bank to mail statements to the dentist's home or personal email and take the time to review statements regularly.
- Keep company checks where they are only accessible to authorized employees. In addition, require supporting documentation for every check signed and review it to ensure the expenditures are appropriate.
- Perform an accounts-payable history to review invoice numbers and amounts. In addition, run an audit report on patient accounts to detect transactions that involve an account payment that is posted, then reversed after the deposit is processed.
- Work with the bank to prepare a list of approved vendors and authorized signers. Provide the bank with specific instructions or guidelines for your accounts.
- Be alert to increased patient refunds, adjustments, or bad-debt write-offs. Discrepancies between accounts-receivable