

Managing Marketing

ADA's Guidelines for Practice Success™ (GPS™)

CHECKLIST FOR ENGAGING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

- ✓ **Set actionable goals that relate to the business, not a specific social media platform.**
 - Determine what audience you want to target and develop a message that appeals to them. It's a good idea to consider more than one message if you're going after more than one population group.
 - Identify your social media style. Do you prefer messages that are short and to the point? If so, Twitter might be the right platform for your practice. Have a lot to say? Maybe a blog, such as Tumblr, is the right platform. Want to rely mainly on images? Maybe Instagram is the right forum. Whenever possible, include links to other relevant content on your website or other social media platforms.
 - Craft descriptive messages that support your brand and educate prospective patients about why they should choose your practice instead of someone else's. Consult the articles [What is a Brand](#), [Your Brand and the Name of Your Practice](#), and [Your Logo and Tagline](#) in this module for more information.
 - Focus on the outcome, not the tool. The sheer amount of new social media tools can be overwhelming and no one can use all of them. What you're trying to do is reach and stay connected to your target audience. For example, a tool that allows patients to make appointments online is both simple and accomplishes an important outcome for your practice.

- ✓ **Select the social media tools the help you most.**
 - Each social media platform has its own benefits and disadvantages, so make sure you select the platform(s) that best align with your goals. Keep in mind that each platform requires a profile and each profile will need to be maintained and supported by posts. You might want to start slowly and limit yourself to one or two different platforms; others can be added later if they're likely to offer a benefit to the practice. While social media is fun, exciting and easy to use, using these platforms effectively requires a commitment of time and staff. Be strategic when selecting which platform(s) to use. Some elements to consider as you evaluate the options include:
 - Is the tone and purpose of your content consistent with content already on the platform?
 - Who is your target audience? Do they use the platform you're considering?
 - Will your content be accessed via a smartphone or some other mobile device more often than via a desktop computer?
 - How frequently will you post or update messages?
 - Who will monitor each platform? How will you decide which messages require responses? Who will develop those responses? Do messages need to be approved before posting? If so, who will be responsible for those approvals?

- ✓ **Determine resources – staff and budget – up front.**
 - While you can join most social media networks at no cost, keep in mind that someone on staff will need to invest time, typically at least an hour each day, supporting the practice's social media efforts.
 - Make sure that the appearance and content of the practice profile on each platform is consistent across all platforms and supports your brand.
 - Each social media platform should have one key administrator and at least one person to provide backup support.
 - When possible, allow the team member responsible for each platform some freedom and flexibility in creating and managing your social media presence.
 - Practices that don't have the resources to manage their social media presence in-house may want to consider hiring a consultant to help manage their online reputations.

- Practices that are looking for outside expertise and already have a marketing consultant can ask that person whether they offer that service or can recommend someone to manage their online presence.
- Many of these services can help track and evaluate the status of your practice's online reputation; some will even review and help you respond to posts on review sites related to patient experiences.
- Establish what your social media goals are and how much you're willing to invest in budgeting for outside services to achieve them. Do you want custom designs developed for your social platforms? Do you want to buy targeted advertising on those sites that offer it? If so, a well-placed and compelling ad can help you reach the right audience. Make sure that any ad complies with all federal and state regulations regarding advertisements; also consult the [ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct](#) for guidance. It's also a good idea to review the content in the article [Legal and Ethical Aspects of Marketing](#) for more information.
- Even if you outsource the development and management of your online reputation, make sure that you and your staff is actively involved all along the way; after all, it's your brand and practice that's being promoted.

✓ **Develop a content calendar.**

Once you've identified which social media platform(s) you want to use, it's time to develop a content plan. A content plan is similar to the editorial calendar used by publishers to pre-plan what content, or message, to run and when to run it.

- Start by developing a schedule of major "dental dates" that would be of interest to non-dentists and develop content to support them. Also consider creating content that support others' national health awareness efforts, especially if the topic relates to oral health. Also plan to develop content on other topics, such as sports, which aren't directly related to health since that will keep your followers engaged and interested in reading your future posts. Two Sample Content Calendars, one on dental topics and another on non-dental ones, follow this checklist and offer a few content ideas to get you started.
- Write your posts at least one week in advance to ensure that they're current and relevant. Doing that also allows you to pre-load your content into a free online social media management system so you can schedule the date and time that the post should be issued. One of the major advantages to this approach is that you don't have to take time away from other activities – or procedures – in order for the post to appear.
- Once you have a content schedule and plan for uploading messages, you'll need to write the message. Consider the platform, the audience and the purpose of the post before you start. Messages should be upbeat, informational and fun.
 - The length of your post will vary depending upon the platform used: Twitter limits you to 140 characters, Instagram allows a photo and caption, and Facebook and most blogs allow you to upload video, pictures and text of almost any length.
 - Keep your text brief so followers will be more inclined to read it, like it and share it. Remember, you're not being paid by the word.
- Other tips for developing engaging content include:
 - Write content that your friends, followers and fans will want to share and repost.
 - Be engaging and authentic. Your social media content should be genuine and invite some type of interaction or follow-up. Ask questions. Post surveys. Authentic social media means that you are interacting with your patients and not just posting on Facebook. It also means being spontaneous and posting about new subjects, rather than repeating the same material over and over. Being genuine also means you're listening to your audience and having a real conversation with them.
 - Tell your story. Social media offers you the chance to highlight what makes you, your practice and your brand special. Offer patients a well-rounded picture of who you are and include links to all of your social media platforms on the practice's website. This makes them easier to find, builds credibility and allows you to promote the practice across multiple platforms.
 - Use pictures, images and videos whenever possible. All are easy on the eyes and easy to share. Visual content also ranks highly in searches. If possible, post videos shot with a smartphone or similar device; many social media users prefer the informal appearance and authenticity of "amateur" footage to videos that have been professionally produced.

- ✓ Always make sure you have the necessary permissions before posting any images or videos.
 - Keep content brief, even if the platform doesn't have character or space limitations. Remember, many of the people viewing your posts will be accessing the content via a small screen, such as a tablet or smartphone.
 - Team up when appropriate. Connect to the brand pages of select organizations that you support. Examples include non-profit organizations, civic or community associations, businesses, etc. This gives your audience an idea of what's important to you and gives you more options for content to talk about on your pages. Also give some thought to whether or not you want to share content that relates to your personal life and the personal interests of members of the team. While some individuals prefer to maintain a distinct line between their professional and personal social media identities, many believe that patients are interested in connecting with their healthcare providers on a personal level and this is one way to do that.
- ✓ **Chart your progress.** Track your social media success.
- Lay the groundwork for success in advance by committing to a certain number of posts each month on each platform.
 - Monitor and document engagement as it happens. Count likes, shares, comments and retweets for each post. Documenting engagement means tracking communication such as Facebook "likes" and Twitter "tweets" in response to content posted on your website. A retweet would mean someone has used one of your tweets and reposted it for their own followers to see.
 - Review the analytics available through each platform. If you're using a social media platform that doesn't offer analytics data, it's possible that the social media management system you're using might.
 - Analyze which types of posts have the highest levels of engagement and see if you can mimic the tone or type of message in future posts to keep engagement high.

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