A primer on social media success

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Social media tools are brilliant, free ways for companies to consistently market themselves. However, this means companies need to learn a lot of new things about marketing and how to use these tools. Once you are past this initial learning curve, it is a matter of keeping your messages out there and continuing to interact, grow your network, build your reputation, and nurture new relationships. This in turn creates much wider opportunities for referrals, new business, and additional publicity.

LINKEDIN

Business owners often say that they do not need to network since either all their business comes from their website or that the lion’s share of their business comes not from their website but from word of mouth.

In either case, the answer seems simple: LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). It is a way to enhance both word-of-mouth referral and website traffic.

Business is built on reputation, and LinkedIn allows companies to build on that. If you take the time to fill in your profile, upload your picture, and describe properly your current and previous roles, people who come across your LinkedIn profile will get a good sense of who you are, why you are good, and why they should know you.

Initially, LinkedIn should not be used to connect with lots of unknown people. Start with acquaintances—build on an existing network—and you will be surprised at how many of them already are on LinkedIn. Many do not use it properly, but you can still connect with them. Hopefully, your invitation will be the one that prompts them to get more involved. The more active you are on LinkedIn, the more one will benefit from it. But at the very least, spend 2 hours on it for profile updating.

TWITTER

Twitter is magic when used properly, but not everyone should be on Twitter (www.twitter.com), and this is not due to the type of business they are in. In fact, any business can benefit from someone representing that business on Twitter. Twitter is about people, and people need other people for their businesses to succeed. But it takes consistency and commitment, and it is not meant to be a one-way conversation. So when considering Twitter, realize that you cannot tweet just once a day. Broadcasting messages about only sales offers, products, and promotions seems too “salesy,” and people will unfollow you.

In addition, Twitter has its own strange language of RTs, hashtags, and @ replies. Training people in Twitter for business takes around 1.5 hours of one-to-one training for them to get the most out of it.
A handy resource for learning about Twitter is the Mashable Twitter Guide Book (mashable.com/guidebook/twitter). Mashable is a fantastic blog about social media, technology, and gadgets.

FACEBOOK

 Millions of people use Facebook (www.facebook.com) and regularly spend many hours interacting through it.

 For businesses, it is recommended to set up a Facebook page, not a group or personal profile page, for the dental practice. The dentist can be the administrator of the Facebook page without anyone else knowing about it.

 Facebook also takes commitment, and the trick here is to keep posts regular and visual and to encourage engagement and interaction. See mashable.com/guidebook/facebook for the Mashable Facebook Guide Book.

 Note that Facebook makes frequent changes, so some things in how-to guides do not work quite as described. Be patient with these sources, and remember that one-to-one training is available for Facebook, too.

 Do not use the same information on Twitter and Facebook. Some people feed the same information to all three social media platforms (LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook), but doing so can be damaging to your brand.

 Each post has a little image or thumbnail photograph attached to it. You can comment on posts and other people can, too. Every time anyone does something on Facebook, it comes up in the news feeds of his or her friends; their friends see the interaction with you and can join in.

 For every industry, there is a unique way to use Facebook: consider before-and-after photographs, snapshots of the dental practice, and images of patients. The page can showcase new equipment and techniques and link to blog posts. If patients write on the dentist’s wall to thank him, he gains the benefit of public endorsement.

 If the clinician does post images of people on his Facebook page, he should make sure he obtains permission to do so and tag them.

 As with all social media, take time to learn the platform and use common sense when deciding what to post.

BLOGGING

 Blogs allow people to get a sense of the business brand or personality. They are a quick and easy way to keep an audience up to date on business news, industry thoughts, useful tips, case studies, interviews, and reviews. The best blogs are varied with the size and type of posts but consistent with the brand and overall messaging.

 The best place to learn how to write a blog is to start reading them. Check out ProBlogger (www.problogger.com) and Copyblogger (www.copyblogger.com). Both have fantastic a collection of posts all about blogging successfully.

 Blogs increase web traffic, especially WordPress blogs, which are designed to help with search engine optimization. Every new post added to the blog means another page on the Internet. And if one continues to consider key words and phrases in headlines and text, the blog is even more powerful.
WHY WEBSITES ARE STILL IMPORTANT

In this age of social media, it is becoming more and more affordable for people to market themselves and their businesses. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are all free to use and take just a bit of training and practice to get started.

But at the heart of it all still lies the website, which serves as a hub where people can go to find out about a person, his services, how he works, and how to connect with him.

There is no excuse to forget about one’s website and leave it looking the same year after year.

Take a good look at your website and answer these questions:

- Does the website’s look and feel accurately represent you and your business?
- Is the information up to date?
- Is the information on it all true, or are there parts that do not accurately reflect your business?
- Are you proud of your website?
- Is there fresh content on the website on a regular basis?
- Do you know if your website is optimized for search engines?
- Are the images on the website right for your business?

There are rules for what makes a good website for a business, including:

- No more than seven links in any group of navigation links
- Clarity in the values of the business
- Fresh, modern design
- Well-chosen images
- Easy links to other parts of the website
- Regularly updated blog
- Links to social media

IT IS WORTH LEARNING ABOUT

Social media and blogging are tools that are becoming integral to the marketing of any business. Websites that don’t incorporate them look more and more out of date. Anyone in business needs to take the time and learn about it, since this is where their referrals and introductions are likely to come. There is so much evidence that it works and helps businesses grow their brand and reputation when done properly.

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