



Hero to Zero what price an internet presence?

Shaz Memon considers the fine line we tread online between an 'over-sharing' egotist and an 'undercover' virtual wallflower

How people perceive us matters. Increasingly, this applies not only in the real world but in the virtual world, too, and across all social media platforms. The dental industry thrives on this premise and it would be naive to suggest otherwise.

While some of us might profess not to care what others think, the truth is we are

Shaz Memon

Shaz Memon is the creative director of Digimax and Digimax Dental. He has worked with leading dental and non-dental names. Shaz specialises in offering bespoke, creative, high-end design solutions that encompass branding, website design, top Google rankings, eMarketing and more just for dentists.



psychologically tuned to seek approval and validation from others – particularly if looking to attract people to buy into our business.

Some dental professionals have welcomed with gusto the opportunity to create an online profile, their presence ever present and enhanced – either by their 'alter ego' life outside of the surgery or their skills as a clinician within. Others have taken a more political approach to fame, commenting and debating key healthcare issues and regularly invited by the media to be the 'voice of dentistry'.

In a world ruled by 'celebrity', it may prove too much of a temptation for some who seek that infamous 15 minutes of fame.

That said, creating a persona that makes dentistry friendlier – and more accessible than historical clichés would have us believe – offers an opportunity to toot your horn.

Singing dentists and smiling dentists, dentists who appear in adverts or create new smiles in TV reality makeover shows all work towards not just raising their own profile but creating a positive portrayal of the profession, as well.

However, there is always a need to temper such enthusiasm with mindful conservatism and an acknowledgement of the regulations of professional governing bodies.

For those clinicians for whom social media jars with the principles of clinical health care, it is worth considering that there may be a price to pay for ignoring self-promotion.

Any increased knowledge of digital marketing will enable a dental business to connect more successfully with existing and potentially new patients.

Whilst personal recommendations will always carry weight, in the battle to ensure a

thriving dental practice, the internet is your secret weapon.

But just how much or how little do you need to self-publicise – just enough to attract interest in you and the services you offer or should it go beyond that? Should you work at becoming an industry expert, a key opinion leader or even a celebrity clinician?

The only proviso is the need to promote your business and practise dental marketing within the regulations of the governing body as well as those of the advertising authorities.

In the eyes of the General Dental Council's Standards for the Dental Team: 'You must make sure that any advertising, promotional material or other information that you produce is accurate and not misleading, and complies with the GDC's guidance on ethical advertising.'

Additionally, there is a duty to advertise in accordance with standards set by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Office of Fair Trading (OFT).

In other words, misuse of specialist titles, making comparisons between you and colleagues regarding skills and qualifications and/or listing memberships or fellowships of professional associations, or societies or honorary degrees in an abbreviated form, are all definite no-nos.

'Any increased knowledge of digital marketing will enable a dental business to connect more successfully with existing and potentially new patients'

Consider the following.

Hopefully, you already have social media accounts for your practice via which you promote you, your team and your services. But, when it comes to your personal accounts, the issue of privacy should be given serious thought. Do you really want to show off that sports car or expensive hotel you stayed in at the weekend? If you are comfortable with that, it still may be worth taking time to consider what you do and do not post. Your lifestyle reflects you and your business. Will patients make judgement calls based on your endless selfies or displays of a healthy bank balance? One option is to separate your personal social media accounts from your public/business one. With your private accounts, set the privacy levels high to prevent the general public from seeing posts meant only for your nearest and dearest. It remains important



©Tempura/Getty Images Plus

to be mindful of the implications of posting anything online as well as how it may be shared – however innocuous it might seem at the time. Remember, the GDC's Standards for the Dental Team states: 'You must not post any information or comments about patients on social networking or blogging sites. If you use professional social media to discuss anonymised cases for the purpose of discussing best practice, you must be careful that the patient or patients cannot be identified.' In a nutshell, be discreet and do show some humility – whether it's a business or personal account.

Get creative and channel your inner writer, film-maker or photographer. Social media covers a number of internet-based tools, which allow businesses to create and exchange content. It includes blogs, internet forums, content communities and social networking sites, such as Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, LinkedIn, GDUK, Instagram and Pinterest. Each platform offers its audience a different type of engagement so it's important to understand what content is expected on which. Don't be tempted to bombard sites with the same messages – what works on one will not translate well to another. Take a look at the sites and see what the competition is posting – alternatively, speak to a creative online expert who has experience in helping businesses outside of dentistry as well as within raise their online profiles. Suggested actions include writing a regular blog, posting high quality photos of recent case studies on Facebook and tweeting your views about key dental health issues on Twitter. Who knows, your comments may get picked up by news websites and further help to raise your profile and your practice's. Potential patients, looking for related treatment information, will find you online

and see the added value of your helpful insight, gallery of treatment photos and so on...

Create a brand (that could be you or your practice) and stick with it. Ensure your practice (and your team) has the same 'voice' across all media platforms as well as at the practice door. Once established, customers generally associate certain qualities with a brand – and do not always welcome surprises. So, if yours is a family-focused business, then deliver relevant information and be the 'go to' dentist for family dentistry. Don't dilute messages by switching your targeted demographic.

Be proactive and reactive to new dental thinking. Meet the needs of patients and help them understand developments in dentistry – but ensure it is in layman's terms. Nobody likes wading through jargon! In lieu of evidence, patients can plug the gaps with knowledge from unreliable sources away from the dental profession – and that's not healthy for you or them!

Speak to an SEO expert who can amplify your website content. Enhance the patient experience and ensuring your practice profile meets the requirements of regulatory bodies is important, of course. But so too, is the need to be seen. In a world of 24/7 communication opportunities, there has never a greater need to raise your profile and reputation – online as well as off – and good dental marketing will help achieve this.

Good patient communication is the cornerstone of excellent dentistry and these days this goes beyond a conversation in the dental chair. While little replaces the hard work you and your team members put in to creating long-lasting relationships, the internet offers a wealth of opportunity to engage with those who have yet to meet you. ♦