

Who influences you?

Shaz Memon asks who really designs your website and what factors dictate the choices you make.



We are the architects of our own destiny and the designers of our own future. At least, that's the consensus of opinion should you ever choose to conduct a philosophical Google search. But what hope is there for those of us for whom the dental marketing vision is a



Shaz Memon

is the creative director of Digimax.

tad blurry? Where do we unearth that all-essential inspiration for a strategy to match our business plan – and who best to turn to when we're struck by a crisis in confidence?

I have worked with many dentists on the development of their practice website, professional online profile, brand and marketing strategies – either at the very start of their business journey or some years down the line when they feel they have lost their way – and no two projects are ever the same. Indeed, nor should they be. Equally, the source of their ideas can vary tremendously, too.

When it comes to dental marketing, it is not unusual for a practice principal to seek a little help in 'joining the dots' in order to see the bigger picture.

What is surprising is how many arrive in my studio, having drawn a blank or reached a creative brick wall, but not first sought inspiration from elsewhere.

Creative stimulus comes in many guises and from the most unexpected of places – from the practice team to patients, from a business unrelated to dentistry to your biggest competitors – and drawing on these sources can be helpful before seeking professional input from a marketer.

In fact, rather than someone on the payroll, sometimes it can be your biggest critic who will nudge your brand into an illuminating and refreshingly new direction.

Whilst, in an ideal world, you will be confident in developing your brand identity alongside your business, ☺

Other factors can get in the way of your thought processes – lack of time having a major impact. So, there are huge benefits in handing over the digital marketing of your practice to a team of experts well versed in the intricacies, trends and shifts of online branding and promotion.

However, there is also a real need for any dental marketing agency you appoint to fully understand your business aims and objectives – and your target audience – as well as you do. At this juncture the ball is very much in your court.

The curating of information about you and your practice is therefore essential for any dental marketing agency wishing to succeed in promoting your practice. The onus is very much on you to let them know what messages you wish to share and how these will ideally dovetail with your business plan.

Whilst the underlying principles of dental marketing remain a constant, the stark differences lie in how these are applied to the specific requirements and profile of any given dental practice.

What is enlightening, however, is who in the team (as well as who outside of the practice) might influence these choices.

Your biggest competitor

Let's be honest, we all look to our competition to seek inspiration for our next bigger and better move. An insight into the world of our most challenging competitors can widen our options – and who better to effect change than those who challenge us most? To understand how competitors will respond to your next move, evaluate the situation and your shared customers' expectations, and then evaluate your own status. How do you measure up? What is your competitor practice doing online that you are not? Does their website match their branding on-site? Do they use rich content, such as videos, to market their brand? Are they on Instagram? View their website as a potential patient and with a critical eye – and then do the same with your own. Where are their strengths and weaknesses – and where are yours? What hashtags do they use in their social media to get seen and what

are their most popular posts? What gaps need to be plugged and, if your opposition is doing it differently and well, can you improve upon it?

As fashion designer, Tommy Hilfiger once noted, "I looked at my competitors and I thought that, if they could do it, I could do it. And if, they are popular and doing well, I could compete with them."

Your team

Channelling that inner-marketing hero within your team can also often elicit positive points and help to cast aside the negatives.

Your team are at the coalface and are your eyes and ears. They often get unofficial feedback from the patients who stream in and out of the practice on a daily basis. What do they hear? How do you compare with others? What do patients like or dislike? Where did they first hear about your practice?

It may even be that your newest staff member who has just transferred from another practice has a whole treasure chest of dental marketing ideas they can share!

Inviting staff to comment on ➡

☛ Your branding also demonstrates an employee-inclusive ethos and underpins a team approach to dentistry, which is paramount. When having meetings, discussing the challenges of dental marketing is arguably as important as those concerning patient care, product purchases and regulatory demands, so don't forget to factor this in. Remember, marketing plays a pivotal role in your success.

Your patients

Whilst they may not understand the intricacies of dentistry, patients do know what ticks boxes for them. Clever dental marketing elicits a fan base and then builds upon it. Patient feedback is one of the most valuable tools a practice can use. Whether it is to retain existing patients or attract new ones, there are several different ways in which you might gain feedback. An online poll on Instagram, for instance, or a patient feedback form at the front desk both work – just keep the form simple to encourage patients to fill it in. A star rating system is all you need.

An anonymous comments box is also a good idea.

Consider targeting specific patients to get a spectrum of demographics and treatments they receive. Ask open questions, such as, "What do you think we could do better at our practice?" This engages the patient as well as shapes the future delivery of your dental care, and how you market your services.

Listen to your critics, too! A good complaints-handling policy allows for reflection and an opportunity to change what isn't working.

Non-dental businesses

Borrowing ideas from industries other than your own is perfectly acceptable, so long as you stick to the rules regarding dental advertising. Broaden your outlook and seek ideas from your favourite consumer websites. Go beyond dentistry to find ideas that will make your practice website work. What draws you in? How do they add to their customer experience? When it comes to design, which fonts work – and which don't? Is the imagery clear?

Does the website function well? Do you instinctively know where to look to find the information you need? How often is it updated? What makes you choose one business over another? Is it quality customer care, cost or is it something less tangible, such as overall style or feeling of quality? Very often we instinctively return to businesses without giving much thought as to why. Write down what you expect from any business transaction and check if you meet the criteria. That vital missing link might be all that's needed to turn a good practice into an exceptional one.

The ultimate aim of any brand is to improve visibility online. Adding elements of other ideas and innovations to your own can often prove explosive and jettison your brand to a new level.

With the help of a digital marketing agency, you can appear in the top ranking of any major search engine for a dental practice in your area – but do have a clear idea of what it is you wish to achieve and how you want to appear, and leave no stone unturned in your search for inspiration.

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