

Brand new shoes

Shaz Memon discusses how to increase patient footfall with some fancy footwork online

Likening dental treatments to purchasing a new pair of brogues or designer heels may seem somewhat incongruous, but there is a very real similarity in the purchasing journey.

Increasingly, patients are beginning their research online – inspired perhaps by images of smile makeovers that have been posted on social media platforms or just curiosity as to how best to solve a dental problem they might have.

As far back as 2009, Ní Riordáin and McCreary, in their *BDJ* paper, ‘Dental patients’ use of the Internet’, acknowledged that ‘practitioner-led direction for patients regarding quality information sources online is important’ (Ní Riordáin and McCreary, 2009).

Informed choice

There is now an expectation upon all dental practitioners to enhance the patient experience



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by providing evidence-based information in order that they can make informed choices. Some patients may be confused and uncertain about dental treatments, and so care needs to be taken when explaining services to them.

‘With 55% of visitors reportedly spending fewer than 15 seconds on a website before they click off, it suggests you have a very small window of time to engage’

According to *Standards for the dental team* (General Dental Council, 2013): ‘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.’

A US study found that, while most dental patients believe dental care is an absolute necessity, it takes patients an average of 69.8 days to decide whether to purchase treatment. Of the dental patients who sought information online, 51% went to a medical advice website, 38% to websites that provide reviews, and 46% to a practice’s website, reiterating the need for you to have comprehensive information about your practice available at their fingertips.

And first impressions matter. With 55% of visitors reportedly spending fewer than 15 seconds on a website before they click off, it suggests you have a very small window of time to engage.

If the shoe fits

Cosmetic dentistry is increasingly becoming an image-driven industry and, because images are processed much faster than words, it is essential that any forward-thinking practice website uses high quality photographs to make a positive impact. The information you provide and the images you share should work together to convince a visitor to not just stay on the website, but to seek treatments with you, too.

Matching the right clinician to the right dental treatment can prove a minefield in a virtual world of mixed information. Enticing website browsers into your chair is all about clarity, and demonstrating that your practice and their needs make the perfect fit – not unlike a pair of quality shoes! So, how do you get patients to get in touch with you once they reach your website?

Windows of opportunity

If you are failing to convert any website visitors into new patients, then it is essential you use the list below to highlight gaps and improve on the windows of opportunity:

1. Is your website easy to navigate, easy to read, with easy-to-assimilate information about the team (be sure to include smiling photos) as well as the treatments?
2. Is your practice location (with Google Maps embedded on your website to help readers locate your location easily), the email address and the telephone number highly visible on every page?
3. If you offer out-of-hours appointments, late night opening and weekends to

accommodate those patients who cannot fit dental visits into their day, are you shouting about it?

4. Do you have live chat on your practice website? This service builds rapport with your visitors and adds a ‘human’ element to the experience. Few practices have this facility on their sites, but we have recently started integrating this for a few clients who are more proactive. Like any other business, dental practices should offer live chat to enable a smoother transition from site to consultation. Many people may be surfing during a work break and a live chat can speed up the process and help them to overcome the barriers to booking
5. Email capture can be unobtrusive if done well. Adding a pop-up at the end of content, along the lines of ‘Do you need more information?’ may provide a prompt for readers to share their contact details if it means accessing further details about a particular treatment, especially if it is a selling point – ‘We offer free teeth whitening with all short-term orthodontic treatments’ may be an offer too good to ignore. If you are uncomfortable with pop-ups that can

Improve your website’s window of opportunity

1. Make sure your website is clear and easy to use
2. Make contact information highly visible, and embed your location via Google Maps
3. Shout about your out-of-hours services
4. Introduce live chat
5. Add a pop-up to prompt website visitors to your website to share their contact details
6. Offer a subscription e-newsletter to capture more potential patient details.

feel too obtrusive, set up a subscribe box at the bottom of your content or dedicate and optimise a page for email subscription

6. Alternatively, subscribing to an e-newsletter can add value to their experience and encourage them to enter investigate further. Topics such as ‘Top 10 ways to keep teeth white’ or ‘How to eat your way to a healthier smile’ attract interest and keep potential patients engaged. You can configure a subscribe box to slide in after 70-

80% of your page scrolls – a gentle way to encourage conversion.

Visitors to your practice website will have invested much time and effort into researching the dental treatments and the practitioners best suited to meet their desired outcomes. Time costs money and it is imperative that you provide potential clients with attractive and easy-to-read access to the latest clinical information.

Your website needs to reflect your openness, your honesty, and empathetic approach to dental care, and potential patients looking online should experience this immediately when they click onto your website.

Enhancing this experience with easy options to engage beyond the internet introduction is the key to successful patient conversion.

Care to comment? @AesDenToday

References

- General Dental Council (2013) *Standards for the dental team*
- Ní Riordáin R, McCreary C (2009) Dental patients’ use of the Internet. *Br Dent J* 207(12): 583-586