

# DENTISTRY AND THE ART OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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## WHY MARKETING YOUR DENTAL PRACTICE HAS A LOT MORE IN COMMON WITH THE HARRY POTTER BRAND THAN YOUR MAGIC TOUCH...

The concepts of 'selling' and 'advertising' can rankle a little for some dentists. The struggle to reconcile the delivery of health care with the running of a healthcare business is a lot to do with the seemingly incongruous 'salesmanship' of dentistry. In the process, the marketing of a practice can be neglected if it is a tough one to face. However, the promotion of a practice and its team and treatments is increasingly a reality of modern-day dentistry and, rest assured, any sales strategy offering opportunities for patients to learn about treatments and products need not always be considered a manipulative move to maximise profits.

Ethical selling is an acceptable and everyday face of any dental business. In essence, it is the simple act of meeting each and every patient's specific needs with tailored care. Indeed, it could even be argued that in failing to offer a patient access to information about treatment options, the practitioner is open to accusations of wilful neglect.

'Digital storytelling' is a relatively new concept that involves using digital tools to tell a 'story'. Digital storytelling uses technology and multimedia outlets to recreate the age-old tradition of sharing personal narratives. For those dentists less comfortable with marketing their dental business, this process provides a guilt-free option.

People enjoy reading about people – newspapers and media outlets bear testimony to that – and so patient profiles appeal on many

levels and are far easier to digest and relate to than detailed and clinical information about complex procedures. By matching treatment to patient – and sharing success stories – a dental practice can appeal to new patients, particularly if illustrated with high quality images and amplified via different social media platforms.

Each platform has a different focus – Twitter for the factual element, Instagram for the photo opportunities and Facebook for the personal touch. Many consumers now regard this as an acceptable part of any transaction. The foundation of your relationship with your patients is based on a trust built over time and this adds value to their experience.

Digital storytelling, therefore, has the potential to motivate patients to take action, enquire further and seek treatments. Speak in a language that patients understand; there's a reason why the 20-year-old Harry Potter series of books appeals on so many levels – best-sellers are very often an easy read and branding is all about rapid engagement and tapping into your audience's imagination.

Therefore, in raising awareness of your brand, it is important to aim to entertain as well as educate. In the case of a dental story, the building blocks are as follows:

1. A central character
2. The back story (the dental problem)
3. The search for a (dental) solution
4. The intervention (and the reasons for it)
5. The transformation (and the time this took)
6. The positive effects and the 'happy ever after' – improved comfort and more appealing aesthetics.

Of course, it goes without saying that the stories must be well written, grammatically correct, concise and proofed by somebody other than the author. By adding colour – or description – to the retelling of a patient journey (an important element when it comes to aesthetic stories), you can emphasise the positive ending. For example, be evocative by utilising powerful adjectives, such as 'beautiful', 'stunning', 'attractive', 'confident', 'camera-ready', 'dazzling', 'rewarding' 'first class' and 'aesthetically pleasing' and so on.

In the creation of any successful 'picture book', text and illustration should always work in harmony – the images illustrating the words and the words enhancing the pictures. The same much applies to the 'back' stories regarding dental procedures. A successful orthodontics treatment, for example, is not complete without the 'before and after' photographs and incremental 'work-in-progress' images. Such photos are emotionally powerful and, by telling the story and showing the dramatic results of a patient's journey, the final reward for you will be an increase in take-up of those inspired.

The 2017 Ogilvy Media Influence global survey found that digital storytelling and mobile devices are emerging as growth drivers, with many journalists believing that digital platforms – such as live video and podcasts – present the largest growth opportunity. With the utilisation of patient testimonial blogs, videos and vlogs, you add validity to your storytelling and empower patients to share their version of their own story.

New technology offers a huge potential for creative storytelling that can help to re-invent and reinforce your 'in-surgery' conversations. The clinical role should not feel compromised – and marketing a dental brand in this way can help to reconcile the 'business' of dentistry with a clinician's duty of care to patients.

By harnessing the far-reaching opportunities that the internet offers, you not only meet the expectations upon you to help patients recognise problems and find solutions, you also effectively and ethically drive up your own brand reputation and influence and educate far and beyond the somewhat limited boundaries of the dental chair.

