

Social Studies



5 tips to effectively use social media in your private practice

There's no denying that social media is part of our daily lives. We use it as a tool to connect with our friends and family. The question is: Should we use social media for our businesses? And the answer, of course, is yes! Social media is a great marketing tool that can bring in new patients and engage your existing patients to keep them involved with your practice.

We know that social media is important, but how should you use it in your practice? The five tips on the next few pages will help you become a social media guru in no time.

Dr. Grace Yum found her passion for dentistry when she was 18 and worked as a dental assistant. Yum earned a DDS from the University of Maryland School of Dentistry and completed advanced training in pediatric dentistry at Chicago's leading children's hospital. She then started her own practice, which now has two offices. As a certified pediatric dentist, she has earned a certification held by less than 5 percent of U.S. dentists.



A recent recipient of the Top Doctors of America award, Yum is a podcaster for her own show, "Mommy Dentists in Business," which can be found on iTunes, and founded the Mommy Dentists in Business group on Facebook. She lives in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood with her husband and their two children.

1 Dedicate one person in your office to handle your social media campaigns.

Typically, this will be someone who can dedicate 10–15 hours a week to creating content and keeping track of all your materials to post. This person should be passionate about social media and enjoy marketing. Meet with this person once a month to discuss what should be posted and where. Keeping a calendar will keep everyone organized. I use Google Drive to share documents so that everyone is on the same page. I also like to meet with my marketing team in November to discuss the calendar for the next year. It's nice to have a plan of action and be organized because you never want to be in a position of having to scramble to get things posted online.



2 Choose which platforms will work best for your office.

You don't need to promote your office on every single social media platform! Different age groups have a preference for different platforms, so look at your practice and see what age groups the majority of your patients are in, then research which social media platforms those age brackets are using. (You can also ask your patients what they like to use.)

For instance, my practice is mainly pediatric and orthodontic patients. The littlest ones aren't on phones but their parents are, while the teenagers have phones, tablets and monitored social media accounts. I focus my marketing efforts on Facebook and Instagram because that is what my patients use. If you serve a patient base consisting of executives or journalists, then you might consider Twitter. Also, remember to receive consent before posting photos of your patients.

3 Branding your business is very important in this day and age.

Your business logo and website say a lot about you and your office. Many patients use Google and other search engines to find information about everything, including health care providers. If you don't have a logo, hire a marketing and branding expert to help design one. Nike is always identified by its "swoosh" and tagline "Just Do It"; Apple is identified by its logo of an apple with a bite taken out of it. But Apple stores across the United States also have a look and a feel that can't be mistaken for anything else—Steve Jobs took great lengths to make sure his stores had a certain feel to them, from an open box with a lot of light to his team wearing certain T-shirts and colors.

Dental and orthodontic offices can also have a voice, look and feel! Your identity and what you want to communicate to prospective patients must be clear in your brand. It is the first thing that patients often see when they are on your website. Consistent branding is important so that patients are not confused. That branding should be consistent throughout, from your business cards to your letterhead to your website to your social media.

4 Appropriately manage your content.

The material you post on social media is your *content*, which reflects your business and your brand. Social media users are inundated with posts all day long, so it's important to really think about what kind of content will grab their attention. Photos often grab more attention than words and videos grab more attention than photos. You have roughly 17 seconds to keep someone focused on your post before they move on to the next one. Existing patients love seeing candid photos and videos of our team members, so we do team member spotlights, showcase birthdays and love to post photos of doctors getting their teeth cleaned by our hygienist. When we have patients come for their first visits, we ask the parents if we can post a photo of their child in the dental chair. If they say yes, we tag the parents, so they can share that photo on their social media feeds, and usually a few days later we'll receive a phone call from someone saying that she saw her friend's child come in for their first visit and would like to book her first visit as well. This type of content draws new patients to the practice with little cost to the doctor!

I also like to post content about new technology in the office. Patients often come in asking about those procedures and they share that with their friends. We also do in-office and social media contests to keep current patients active. We just had our Yummy Dental golden birthday and tied it in with the recent *Christopher Robin* movie by having a drawing in the office to win movie tickets.

5 Use your social media analytics to follow data and use it to your advantage.

Facebook and Instagram offer insights as to when your followers are using social media. You can use this data to help identify when to post your content. On Facebook, if you're on your business page as an administrator, you will see an Insights button at the top. By clicking this, Facebook will populate all kinds of data that's useful to you, such as which posts had the most likes and what time and days people are looking. This is all free information! So, if most of your followers look at their Facebook on Wednesdays at 8 p.m., you know that your office administrator should push your content on that day and time, rather than on Friday at 1 p.m. This ensures that your content is seen by a wider audience. Why not post so that you can be seen and maximize your efforts?

Now you may be asking how you can get your team member on board to post at the optimal time of day if it's during the evening and not normal business hours. Luckily, there are programs you can subscribe to that will push out content for you. All you have to do is schedule your days and times. These software programs can upload to more than one social media channel, which saves your team member a lot of time. I use Buffer to schedule our content, but there are others such as Hootsuite and Sprout Social. ■

