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## Your Journey through Dental Social Media: Master the Metrics

Timothy Vassilakos MS

Henry Schein Global Group, [timothy.vassilakos@henryschein.com](mailto:timothy.vassilakos@henryschein.com)

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One are the days where you asked a friend or colleague if they use social media. With a jump from 5% of American adults using a social platform in 2005 to 72% in 2019,<sup>1</sup> the question you may ask a friend or colleague in 2021 would likely revolve around just how *much* time they spend on social media.

For dentists, these numbers are no different, whether you're talking about your peers or your patients. Granted, it's unlikely that your undergraduate or dental school curriculum included a class on achieving social media "influencer" status, but that shouldn't deter you from using the medium to grow both your business and professional network.

Not convinced the dental conversation is happening on social media? Do a quick search of *#dentist* on Instagram and let me know what populates. Spoiler alert: More than eight million pictures and videos will appear. It doesn't end with one term or hashtag, as there are hundreds of dental-related keywords that return thousands, if not millions, of recent posts. With a quick scan of a few posts you'll see the passion for dentistry is shared on social media by both clinicians — doctors sharing information with other doctors — and patients — who love showing off their freshly cleaned *#dentalselfie*.

For the layperson, getting started on social media doesn't have to be daunting or expensive. The following five simple social media tips for you and your practice can help you



# Getting started on social media doesn't have to be daunting or expensive. Here are some simple, easy-to-follow tips for you and your practice to reach new patients, professionals, and boost your personal brand.

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## Start with a goal

Creating a social media presence shouldn't be done in a vacuum. Start by creating goals that follow the SMART outline,<sup>2</sup> which will ensure that you're creating this platform for reasons that will help your career and business, not simply to jump on the social media bandwagon. Construct your goals with metrics that will have a business impact, such as patient referrals and engagement (for those using social media to talk to patients) or increasing clinical connections and speaking engagements (for those using social media to talk to fellow dental professionals).

## Choose your identity and audience

When you think of your dental social media journey, do you envision it coming from your personally or your office's vantage point? The first step here is to figure out if you want to grow your personal reach and brand or your practice's reach and brand. The difference will impact your next steps greatly. Hint: If your goal revolves around sharing clinical content and connecting with other professionals, you'll likely want your platforms to be branded under your name. If the goal is to drive referrals into your office and keep engaged with patients, branding yourself under your office

identity is likely the best bet. Both options have overlap, and much of this decision ties into your personality.

## Pick one platform and master it

I promise, the term "If you build it, they will come," does not apply to your social media page. One of the most common mistakes small businesses make is creating multiple social media platforms just because they can. What happens all too often is that a well-intentioned user creates five pages and ends up using just one or two, with the others making them look like they're out of business. You should spend some time researching which platform your target audience likely lives on,<sup>2</sup> and then meet them on the platform with which you're most comfortable.

Another common issue is saying the same thing across four or five platforms. Your colleagues and patients will want to follow you because you bring them valuable content. Repeating yourself across five platforms negates any type of exclusivity or reason to follow you. So, to start, pick one platform and master it before creating a second one (or three).

## Plan it out

Next, you should create a social media calendar to keep you on track. There are plenty of tools that can help you here (check out Plann,<sup>3</sup> Later,<sup>4</sup> or Smartsheet<sup>1</sup> if you're uninitiated, as many templates are available).

Excel spreadsheets work, too, for content calendar development. This will also help you stay away from thoughts like "Oh, I haven't posted in two weeks, what should I do now?" While planning out your content is a time commitment, it helps create a cadence that your audience will expect to see from you. Don't overlook this step.

For those of you who want to use social media to grow your business, spend some time researching your local competition. You don't want to be a copycat, but learning from them as to what does and doesn't work is a great way to help fuel your own goals. Even better, if you see your competition lacking a social media presence, you have the opportunity to own your local community in the digital realm.

## Spend your time on content

Finally, once you have a direction, spend your efforts creating quality content. While the term "quality" can seem subjective, the metrics that each platform provides will make you quickly realize that it's easy to measure. Use these metrics, most notably "engagement rate"<sup>5</sup> as an indicator of what your followers cared for and valued. Getting into a groove of creating engaging content will take time, so have patience.

To start you off, keep this in mind: Social media users gravitate toward visual and authentic content. The  
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person you are offline shouldn't differ with the person you are when on Instagram. Quick videos, pictures of your practice's daily life, and happy patients (after ensuring HIPAA compliance, of course) will always fare better than generic oral health advice, which has been easy to find on the internet since "Googling" became a verb. Speak to your patients and colleagues via social media as you would in a one-on-one physical setting. Don't be afraid to have fun on social media — building trust and a human connection with current and/or potential patients is critical, and humorous and inspirational content

tends to out-perform practically everything else.

### **Advertising basics: know how it works**

Once you're familiar with the social platforms and you've decided to incorporate social into your practice's marketing efforts, advertising is likely the next step toward your goal. It's important to note here that social media is a pay-to-play channel now. Organic (unpaid) posts are only visible to fewer than 10% of your page followers. Therefore, deciding to use social media for growing a business will require you to

pay for social media advertising.

Social media advertising has many differences compared to traditional media buying. Arguably, one of the biggest benefits it brings to the table is that your content will only be seen by audiences you deem relevant. Even more beneficial, there's no wasted marketing budget going to people who have zero chance of entering your practice. Goodbye "spray and pray"! Want to only target parents within a 10-mile radius of your office? No problem!

While social media ads have been around for a while, this is very different than traditional advertising, such



as television, billboard, and newspaper ads, where you're banking on quantity over quality.

You can find your target audience on social media in many ways, mostly bucketed into these four groups:

- Location.
- Age.
- Interests.
- Demographic.

The latter two are really where you can find detail, such as what the user "likes" or has engaged with (interests) and what their education level or relationship status is (demographic).

If you're curious as to how the ads you see on Facebook have found you, take these steps the next time you're on Facebook:

1. When you see an ad — any content that has the term "Sponsored" under it — stop and click the ellipsis (three dots) in the top right corner.

2. Next, click on "Why am I seeing this ad?"

3. You'll be presented with a host of reasons as to why this brand has decided to target you. More than likely, there will be a mix of high-level details, which you can click through for more information.

4. Within the same box, you can click "Make changes to your ad preferences." This is a treasure trove of all the items Facebook either knows you've shown interest in or believes you're interested in based off of previous behavior. Fair warning: Doing this can be a bit of an informational rabbit hole.

There are thousands of ways you can mix-and-match audiences, which will take time for those with a creative mind, so make sure you incorporate this into your planning. The most important thing when running ads is your flexibility. Thanks to the on-demand nature of social media ads, you can start and stop as you please. The platforms make it transparent: If you see something is working, press forward; otherwise, pause and reassess.



If you are interested in social media tools to help manage both your pages and advertising, check out Sprout Social ([www.sproutsocial.com](http://www.sproutsocial.com)), Hootsuite ([www.hootsuite.com](http://www.hootsuite.com)) and Buffer ([www.buffer.com](http://www.buffer.com)). I have no tie to these companies, but have used all with success in the past.

No matter the size of your office or how many years you've been practicing, social media can help you better connect with your audience, help you reach new patients, and increase connectivity with fellow clinicians. If the amount of options seems overwhelming at the start, remember that you don't need to be everything to every-

one. Think it through, and have fun doing it. Much like the practice of dentistry itself, take a focused approach and find value in quality over quantity. ●

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## About the Author

**Tim Vassilakos** is the senior director of strategic business operations for the Global Dental Group at Henry Schein, with responsibility for the company's Corporate Social Media team. The team is responsible for integrating and growing social media presences across the company's business groups, which speak to dental and medical professionals around the world. He holds an undergraduate degree in communications and public relations from the State University of New York at Oneonta and a master's degree in media management from The New School.



**Vassilakos**