



**Social media –
The game
changer for
dental
practitioners
in India**

***A survey
report***

Introduction

The healthcare landscape in India is at the cusp of change. Shortage of qualified professionals, limited healthcare infrastructure and rising health concerns fueled by changing lifestyles are challenging existing practices in the sector. With the Government of India's healthcare policy emphasizing on preventive healthcare, hospitals and practitioners have to find new ways to reach and educate patients to stay healthy.

A new breed of healthcare entrepreneurs have emerged in the last couple of years, primarily leveraging technology to support citizens in their quest to stay fit, eat right and detect signs of illness early on. But real transformation can only happen if medical practitioners too adopt technology to interact with citizens and guide them to stay healthy. In this context, social media can be a game changer, especially for specialist care providers such as dental surgeons, ophthalmologists, dermatologists, and ENT specialists.

Social media can provide a channel that can be used to educate, promote, interact and advise patients for better health outcomes. A US based survey for dentists conducted in 2011*, indicated that dentists were using social media in a variety of ways – creating groups, fan pages, blogs, videos on dental health, and some even used analytics to locate patients with tooth problems and reach out to them.

How do Indian dentists fare in comparison? Do they use social media for professional purposes? What challenges do they face? These questions prompted us to conduct a survey to understand what Indian dentists thought of social media as a tool for furthering their practice and reaching out to patients. Why only dentists? Because both of us are trained dentists and one us is practicing. We felt we would better understand the mindset of our peers and their challenges in adopting such a platform.

Our survey findings indicate that dentists in India have a limited understanding of leveraging social media for professional purposes. Only 28% of survey respondents said they had a budget that was being invested in social media and about one third of survey respondents said they spent less than an hour a week on social media. The survey report also addresses some of the challenges faced by dentists in adopting social media for professional purposes and shares practical tips on how improve social media use.

We hope you find this report useful.

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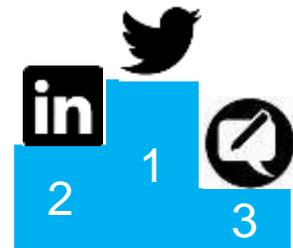
*Source:<http://topdogsocialmedia.com/dental-practice-marketing/> <http://www.thewealthydentist.com/blog/2258/dental-marketing-location-seems-to-be-a-factor-in-the-use-of-social-media/>

Key findings



63% of respondents said they used social media for work purposes.

Top social media platforms used



Social media is used to



Connect with other dentists (**70%**)



Raise awareness of their practice (**61%**)



Educate patients (**51%**)

42% of respondents spent 1-5 hours a week and **33%** spent less than an hour a week on social media for work purposes



Only **28%** of respondents had a budget for investing in social media activities

Profile of respondents



114 Dentists



52%



48%

Work experience



40% - Less than 5 yrs

35% - 5-10 yrs

25% - Above 10 yrs



Survey conducted between *August and December 2015*

Section 1:

Dentists are reluctant adapters of social media for professional use

Around 90% of survey respondents said they used social media for personal use, however, only 63% said they used it for work purposes. In our experience, the possible reasons for this relatively low transition could be:

- a) Limited understanding of how social media works in a professional context
- b) Limited exposure to social media marketing and return on investment
- c) Lack of necessary skills to create social media content
- d) Uncertain whether social media presence/promotions are permitted by the Indian Dental Association (IDA)/ Dental Council of India (DCI)
- e) Lack of well-known example of peers using social media successfully

It is interesting to note that survey respondents have rated Twitter, LinkedIn and Blogs (in that order) as the top three preferred social media platforms for work. In our view, this appears to be a natural extension of the platforms used by dentists for personal purposes. Given the limitations of these platforms (see section below), dentists need to have a well thought out plan to continue using these platforms and see traction.

The subtle differences in social media platforms

(Indicative only based on our experience)



Most suitable for educational, technical and personal content. Works best for industries such as Consumer Goods, Healthcare, Media & Communication, Entertainment, and Financial Services. Easy to monitor if using Facebook Insights.



Most suitable for announcements, offers and discounts related content. Works best for industries such as Consumer Goods, Healthcare, Media & Communication, Entertainment, Technology and Financial Services. Easy to monitor if using Twitter Analytics.



Most suitable for news and views on business aspects and technical content. Works best for industries such as Government and Technology. Moderately difficult to monitor if using tools such as Social Selling Index.



Most suitable for educational and instructional content. Works best for industries such as Hi-Tech, Entertainment, Travel & Hospitality, Healthcare, and Financial Services. Moderately difficult to monitor if using Google Analytics.



Most suitable for educational and instructional content. Works best for industries such as Entertainment, Travel & Hospitality, Healthcare and Automobiles. Easy to monitor if using YouTube Insights.

Knowing what to communicate is key

To see traction from social media it is important to understand the objectives of communication.

Survey respondents have indicated the following the top three reasons for using social media for work purposes: to connect with other dentists (70%), raising awareness of one's practice (61%) and educating patients (51%).

Using the same type of communication to generate these three outcomes may not be realistic. For instance, connecting with other dentists may primarily be done with the aim to understand how one's peer group runs their dental practice and what new technology or tools they use to simplify business outcomes. For such a scenario, the following topics may be relevant:

- Professional qualifications/ certification courses necessary for offering new services
- Changes in professional practice guidelines issued by the IDA
- Financial institutions that can support dental practice expansion
- Suppliers who can provide better quality dental materials and equipment
- Tax consultants/ chartered accountants who can help manage the business financially

Forming closed groups on LinkedIn and Facebook can help practitioners discuss these issues more effectively than, say, Twitter or YouTube.

To raise awareness of one's practice, it is important to understand how patients choose dentists. In our experience, some of these factors include:

- Proximity to the patient's home
- Ability to diagnose and provide treatment with minimum side effects
- Typical clientele visiting the dentist
- Availability of the dentist
- Look and feel of the clinic/ cleanliness
- Flexible payment options – credit card, insurance plan etc

Dentists need to keep these aspects in mind while creating content to promote their practice on social media.

Very often, we have observed that dentists tend to discuss their qualifications and professional affiliations as part of promoting their practice, when in reality the patient has little understanding of how to evaluate these qualifications / professional affiliations. The best platform to create awareness about one's dental practice would be Facebook or YouTube, where there is a provision to take photos/ videos of the clinic, its location and also have client feedback. To educate patients on dental health, dentists need to break down complex medical jargon into simple and easy to understand language. Infographics, videos and pictures are best used to educate people on dental health.



Support by the IDA can spur social media use

Dentists, like other health care professionals, work in a heavily regulated environment that involves getting their dental license from the state dental associations (affiliated to the IDA).

Dental associations the world over are recognizing the role social media can play in growing the dental practice. The American Dental Association for instance, has a presence on FaceBook, Twitter, and YouTube and encourages its members also to leverage social media*.

The IDA has been on social media since 2010 and it is quite active on Twitter (@IndianDentalAsn) and Facebook (@IndianDentalAssociationOnline). Besides promoting scientific research in the dental community, the association also promotes events and educational forums for dentists to attend. Its blog features issues concerning the public as well as dentists.

With the IDA demonstrating (and encouraging) social media use, we feel it is a matter of time before practitioners can follow.

*Source: <http://www.ada.org/en/about-the-ada/american-dental-association-social-media>

"Social media can help me get more references from my peers and also from existing patients. But I do not have the knowledge and time to implement any social media plans for my practice" - An Endodontist from Uttar Pradesh

"I use Whatsapp and Facebook to discuss new treatment procedures, instruments and dental materials with my fellow doctors running their clinics in different parts of the world. Never used twitter..no idea how it will help me" - An Orthodontist based in Delhi

"I would love to use social media for my benefit. I think it has lot of advantages in dentistry..to get more patients and to share patient feedback..but I practice in rural Bihar where I don't think a lot of people know how to operate mobile, computers etc for this purpose. Who will educate them first on how to use facebook etc? I can't." - A dental surgeon from Bihar



Section 2:

How to use social media for professional purposes: 5 FAQs

1

How much time and effort should be spent on social media before one can see traction?

Around 42% of survey respondents said they spent 1-5 hours a week on social media for work purposes. Around 33% said they spent less than an hour a week. Further, only 28% of survey respondents said they had a budget for investing in social media activities.

In our experience, while it is important to spend at least 30 minutes a day on social media, it is more important to constructively use this time. Social media savvy dentists use time to answer to queries from patients and do research to understand what concerns people have - not just post their views blindly. A good way to start this would be by

- a) Setting up alerts on Google to understand what are the health issues in the local area in which the dentist is operating. For instance, if you choose to search for 'Hauz Khas New Delhi' as the local area, you would be able to find general information about the socio economic status of the locality. In this case, the locality Hauz Khas definitely appears upper middle class with a significant population over the age of 50 years. Therefore, it is likely to be afflicted with ailments such as diabetes, eye and hearing problems, and heart conditions. Once these diseases have been identified, you may set up alerts to track developments in these disease areas. For instance an alert such as "Diabetes India" may result in news about new medication to manage the disease better.
- b) Translating known health issues into actionable insights for patients - In the case of diabetes, dentists know that it has an effect on gums leading to conditions like gingivitis, bleeding and loosening of teeth.
- c) Sharing this knowledge with the patient - A blog post, tweet or video or image addressing how diabetics can take better care of their teeth and gums can help attract patients to read this information.

In terms of investing in social media, most platforms offer the flexibility to invest as little as Rs 500 for running a marketing campaign on them.

2

How do I sound credible on social media?

In our experience, following the 80:20 rule on social media can help build credibility. This means that around 80% of your updates/ posts should be informative content pertaining to issues your local residents have. This can include facts on the condition, symptoms and who is more likely to fall prey to the concerned condition. The remaining 20% of posts can be suggesting remedies which may include positioning your services as a care provider.

3

Will investing in a social media certification course help me understand social media?

Our survey saw mixed response to whether respondents would like to undertake a professional certification course on social media, with 49% saying they would and 51% indicating otherwise. In our experience, you may get your fundamentals on social media right by undergoing a certification course. However, there are several consultants and organizations that can help dentists establish and build a social media presence. You may seek help from them if you don't have the time to educate yourself on social media.

4

How do I know if I am doing well on social media or not? What benchmarks should I use?

Social media success can be ascertained qualitatively as well as quantitatively. One of the qualitative benchmarks to understand success is engagement. This refers to the number of people reading and commenting on your content, sharing your content as well as reaching out to you based on this content. A steady rise in these factors means your social media campaign is working well.

Quantitatively, you could look at influencer score tools such as Klout to see if your score is increasing. However, it is important to note that a marketing campaign tends to fluctuate depending on market conditions and customer priorities. In line with that, a social media campaign should run for at least a couple of months before measuring parameters for success.

5

How real is criticism on social media and how should I respond to it?

Social media is a user created platform with an objective to facilitate communication of viewpoints. Often people can lose control and make potentially defamatory statements. If you are trolled by such individuals, it is best to request the person to communicate with you in person (not publicly) to resolve the issue. In case the person does not do so, you may choose to block this candidate from your conversations. Many social media platforms have such options. At no point in time should you engage with the individual in a derogatory manner that violates the code of conduct for dentists as prescribed by the IDA.

About Us

Healthcare in India

Healthcare in India is a social movement for better health. We believe that revolutionary health care outcomes are possible only when patients, care providers, local communities, businesses and the government are all deeply involved in the cause for better health. We run a blog for all these stakeholders to share different perspectives on health to allow individuals to make better informed health decisions. We also provide advice to healthcare organizations on their digital, marketing and social media strategies.

The Dental Education

The Dental Education was established by Dr. Mayur Davda so that every dentist/ dental student / dental associate (like dental hygienist and dental ceramist) could get quick and easy access to the vast knowledge of dentistry on the go. The Dental Education is aiming to be as resourceful to dental students and para dental staff as it is for the dentists and offer educational services at free / subsidized cost. Dr. Davda is also President of the Dental Photography School (pioneers of Dental/ Medical Photography Training And research in India) and a Photomenter at Canon India & GPS Smile design, Las Vegas, USA. All photos used in this document are credited to him, unless specified otherwise.

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