

That Was Then. This Is Now.

Keeping up with digital solutions.

BY DAWN THOMPSON

Technology is changing rapidly, and the early adopters of the world are constantly striving to stay ahead, while the late adopters are forever trying to catch up. The Internet is a perfect example; how we use it each day constantly evolves, from a standard website to search engines to the latest in social media. You can count on one thing: it will not stay the same.

THAT WAS THEN

Not too long ago, you were on the cutting edge if your practice had a website. It allowed potential consumers to learn about your services and test drive your practice from afar. If the website was easy to navigate, was appealing to the eye, and appeared on the first search page, you probably got a call. If not, the practice down the street did.

Today, a website is not enough. A practice offering services that require consumers to pay out of pocket for premium technology needs to be able to communicate with potential patients through a variety of digital solutions. For example, website management, search-engine optimization, pay-per-click advertising, and social media networking provide a variety of ways in which to help increase awareness of your brand, promote the services in which your practice specializes, and ultimately help fill the spots on your schedule.

THIS IS NOW

Setting a solid digital strategy is critical for effectively reaching consumers in today's web-savvy culture and should be a part of your marketing plan. As with any marketing approach, the key to success is carefully setting your objectives and goals for the year and identifying the behaviors that currently exist within your

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targets. The digital portion of the plan is no different; it will be your roadmap for the year.

The question you may be asking is how? What exactly is the right promotional mix?

STRATEGY

To help define a digital strategy that works for you, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I want to accomplish? Potential answers may be more patients in my waiting room, better brand awareness, and more surgical procedures.
- How much do I want to invest?
- How long do I want to commit to the strategy?

Once you have those answers, you can begin building. Your strategy will need to utilize the best media to achieve your desired results.

The mix is where you determine how much of any one solution you want to use in your overall plan. For example, if you are looking to convert more patients to premium procedures, you will need to focus on tactics that highlight those services and drive patients to request them during the consulting process. Two options are social media contests and pay-per-click advertising. If you want to augment brand awareness, you will need to make sure you are effectively utilizing search engine optimization to maximize your digital presence.

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PATIENTS START WITH THE WEB, SO SHOULD YOU

In the past, the patient’s journey to your practice began with a phone call. Now, it starts on the Web. You need to provide potential patients with the information and education they need to make knowledgeable decisions and engage them in an experience that makes them choose your practice for their vision care needs. If you can reach these individuals using their preferred medium, whether it is Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or Google +, you will have them at hello.

If you are already taking advantage of the available solutions, keep it going and take your efforts beyond “like” and “tweet.” If you are not already on board, get out of “coulda, woulda, shoulda” mode and make it happen. Although the preferred media may continue to evolve, connectivity is here to stay. New sites are popping up every day like Pinterest, Flipboard, and Tumblr, where consumers share their likes and dislikes and search for things that may be of interest to them.

CONCLUSION

Your patients, young or old, are living in a world with more modes of communication than ever before. Mobile phones, social media, 4G, and tablets are connecting patients with their families, friends, preferred businesses, and hobbies every day and increasing their expectations and satisfaction with every tap. Be prepared for those expectations to flow over into your practice, and be ready to provide them with an experience that will leave them hitting the “like” button on every visit.

Remember, you cannot be considered a premium practice if you are not utilizing premium solutions. So get ready, get set, and get connected! ■

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