Connectivity in the dental world

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Photo: Toria

_We live in a time in which things are changing exponentially and the way that we go about doing business is drastically evolving. The Internet has become a major player in businesses that never thought that it could apply to them. Instead of battling the Internet with a long stick and keeping it out of the dental industry, it has always been our philosophy to leverage it in new and innovative ways that can be used to the advantage of health-care professionals worldwide.

After a lot of research and brainstorming, we discovered that the real reason that people are online and using products is because of a little thing called connectivity. Many people are online because it allows them to connect and engage with other people who have similar ideas, views or interests. We knew that our mission of serving as a communications and learning hub was lacking, as we were not serving every aspect of our clients' needs in this area of dentistry. This led to a few feverish weeks of programming, writing and networking to bring you the latest suite in the 'Hub'.

_Introducing My Dental Buddies!

My Dental Buddies is a network of dental bloggers, community members and dentists, who can collaborate to provide information to the dental community at large. This free initiative is a social network that allows users to connect and engage with fellow dentists around the world! This is a HUGE opportunity to learn in a collaborative and innovative way to increase your efficiency and effectiveness in your own personal practice.

In one day, more than 100 million people signed onto Facebook. Twitter generated more than 300 million tweets. Approximately 3 million people 'checked in' to their current location and 35,000 hours of video was uploaded to YouTube. The Internet is an extremely busy place for all of that to happen in a single day!

You may ask why that is relevant to you. Fantastic, you say, more teenagers are uploading pictures of the

party they went to last night. You may be thinking that this massive amount of sharing has no more value than the latest episode of *Jersey Shore*. However, this is where you may benefit from a change in perspective! Although social media started as just that, a place to socialise, it has expanded into a massive enterprise that has since evolved into a realm with numerous applications for anyone in the world.

Let us take a few minutes to really dig into what social media is and why it can benefit YOU. Who cares about how it can benefit Lady Gaga or President Obama. I want to know how it can benefit ME in my life and why it is such a big deal.

Unfortunately, this time around our good friend Wikipedia let us down. Wikipedia defines 'social media' as "the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue". Okay, so that tells us the specifics of what social media does. It allows people to connect online. Well, that's cool. E-mail did that. Why is social media so special?

Let us bring it down a peg and see if we can gain some further insight. "If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell six friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends," Jeff Bezos, CEO of amazon.com, said. WOAH, now that provides a lot of insight! Social media allows people to interact with thousands and thousands of people that they would not have access to otherwise. *And they can tell them whatever they want. Uncensored.* Fantastic!

So, social media allows people to say whatever they want online without being censored. Social media is a +1 for free speech. However, we still have not answered the question: *what does that mean for you?* Well, let us go down one step further with some specific examples. If your customers are telling 6,000 people that they are at the dentist and they are lovin' it—that's really good. If they are telling 6,000 people that your office is terrible—that's not so good for you. Being part of the social network and getting involved in communication areas that your patients are in will give you an unprecedented look into your 'online reputation' and give you a chance to really see what your patients are saying.

So now we're spying!? Fantastic, just what you want to do in the health-care industry. The news industry recently tried that and the resulting News Corp and James Murdoch phone-hacking scandal has resulted in worldwide embarrassment for both the media industry and the governments in which those companies operated. However, there are more

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aspects of social media that are very beneficial to you, and not in a creepy kind of way. When people think of social media, their minds immediately jump to huge websites like Facebook and Twitter. While these websites embody the values of social media, they're not the end-all and be-all of the social media landscape.

Social media is about *connecting* and *collaborating* online. Take a look at LinkedIn, tumblr, YouTube and the many other social media websites out there today. These are social media tools. These are social networks. These are YOUR networks. They are places where you can come to connect with fellow people, to collaborate and to LEARN. That is the most important part of all of this! Social media provides an extremely effective medium for active learning, participation and collaboration.

Social media is one major player on the Internet, but it is not the only way that the Internet is changing the dental industry. The Internet has a vast array of resources that are making our world faster paced, more dynamic and more thought-provoking. It is also changing the way that we compete and how we do business. The health-care industry has long been a profession in which competition is not considered

a large factor. Many individuals stayed with a health-care professional for their entire lives and that was the end of it. Once again, the Internet has played a part in upsetting the status quo and changing the way that people view healthcare. Websites like WebMD.com and the online directories of health-care professionals in different areas have opened up the possibility of competition where one did not exist before. Dentists and other health-care professionals are starting to have to change the way that they do things in order to compete in this new marketplace.

Photo: olly

One of the most important things that dentists do in their practice is selling. Now, this is not the way things have been done in the past. Many dentists still operate under the belief that patients come to them for health care, not to be sold to. However, let's look at some of a dentist's vocabulary in sales terms and see what happens:

_*diagnosis:* which product will work best for the patient
_*case options:* pitching
_*case acceptance:* making the sale
_*treatment:* delivery of product.

Are you still as convinced that sales do not exist in the dental industry? The Internet is responsible for a huge number of changes in the dental industry and as a result health-care professionals are constantly having to be innovative in order to survive in a more competitive and dynamic workplace.

I stumbled across this cool article recently that talks about innovation in the workplace, a fascinating read and very applicable to the dental industry! This is one area where dentists are currently lacking. It is so easy to fall into a set routine and not think about new or different ways to do things. I mean, why bother? Your practice is making money. Why do you need to be innovative?

Emily Ford, *The Sunday Times*, recently wrote an article on that very topic. Innovation is a huge new part of the dynamic connected world. People are constantly collaborating to come up with more and more innovative solutions to problems and it is important to keep up with this changing environment. Ford suggested a few tips for innovating at work, which have been given a dental twist to make them especially applicable to your practice.

Make innovation a priority

Always look for new ways you can do things, new products you can use and new ways of interacting with your staff and patients. Not only will it make your days new and exciting, it will benefit your practice in the long run too!

Take risks and embrace failure

If you buy a new instrument and it does not work, what did you lose? A little bit of time and money? What would have happened if it worked? You may have saved a ton of time, made the quality of treatment increase and made a patient's ordeal less painful. Do you think that it is worth it? I definitely do! By embracing failure, you can learn new things quickly, learn what works and what does not in your practice, and ultimately help your practice to succeed with the increased knowledge that you will have.

Eyes on the future

Think of it this way: when you know where you're going, you can figure out the fastest and easiest way to get there. By planning ahead, you can spend time thinking of innovative and new ways of doing things that will make your future endeavours that much easier. By knowing where you're going, you can constantly be on the lookout for things that will help you get there, making the whole process faster and more efficient.

Foster creativity at all levels

Encourage your staff to do the same as you! Ask them to be constantly thinking about ways they could change the way that they do things. Would something else work better than what they're currently doing? Could they use a new tool to make their job easier? No one will know the answers to these questions better than them, so have them start thinking about it! Your staff are a huge resource in coming up with creative and innovative ideas in your practice.

Break the rules

Ask a ton of questions! Why do you do something a certain way? Has anyone ever tried doing it another way? We get so entrenched in our beliefs, habits and routines that over time we stop thinking about why we do things and just do them. Bring that back! Question the things you do everyday—ask yourself why you do them and whether there's a better way. Chances are that you'll find a few things that will make your practice a more productive and efficient place!

Collaborate across boundaries

Everyone has insights to share. Your receptionist or assistant may notice things that you do not. Get them involved in the process! Chances are that they have some great ideas of things that you could be doing in your practice that you are not. Using your staff effectively is one of the best things that you could do and by involving them in this process you are giving them ownership of the success of the practice and motivating them to make it better!

Innovating does not have to be a one-man show either. The Internet is connecting us in ways that we could not have even dreamed of in the past and it is important to be involved in every way that you can. Although the Internet provides both a valuable resource and fierce competition for your time and your professional career, it is not the only tool for collaboration and shared learning that is out there today.

Here is a new and interesting thought: why don't you ask your employees for their ideas? Your employees may have a ton of cool and innovative ideas for ways that you could make your practice more efficient and effective. However, they are probably not telling you these ideas! Why not? Well, for starters, you never asked! Many people won't share their opinions about some things (especially business) because they are scared that they will seem like they do not know what they are talking about. No one likes that feeling!! If your employees know that their ideas are welcome you will probably find them flooding in!

What does this all boil down to? It comes down to *connectivity* and *collaboration*. That's it. Those two simple words are what the future of the dental industry (and every other industry) is going to come down to. The ability to collaborate with other like-minded individuals, share ideas, innovate and ultimately create a better working system are what the Internet, social media and connective sites are all about.

This is what we are about at My Dental Buddies. My Dental Buddies is a connective website for you, for dentists, staff and other health-care professionals in the dental industry. We recognise the importance of collaborating socially and innovating together and want to bring that to you. It is a portal, a blank slate that the users of the site can fill with whatever content they feel is important to them. That is the beauty of the uncensored Internet; whatever is most important to the largest number of people is what gets talked about. We strive to leverage the Internet to make your dental practice the best that it can be. Please help us to do the same!_

Editorial note: A complete list of sources is available from the publisher.

_about the author

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