Social media is seen by many as an excellent new marketing tool. However, because it is new, many practices are struggling to figure out how to use it properly. As with all marketing activities, it is best to be informed so you can manage your efforts well and achieve desirable results. Here is a list of three common social marketing mistakes and how you can avoid or overcome them.

Mistake number one - Social marketing delegation
Use caution if delegating your social marketing 100 per cent. Why? It’s like telling someone to answer your phone, have conversations with your patients, and then not bother to tell you what was said.

The biggest benefit you get from using social media is the ability to connect with people on a human level. It’s simply not possible to connect — long term — with your patients unless at least one person within your practice is actively participating at some level. Be sure that someone in your practice can answer the following questions:

- What is being said on your Facebook page or being tweeted on your behalf?
- How to access your Facebook page — who are the administrators of your page? (Also know that administrators can currently delete your account with the click of a button).
- Who is responding to patient testimonials and inquiries? What language is being used and what voice does your Facebook page or Twitter account have? Knowing what is being posted or tweeted on your behalf will develop the voice or personality for your social platforms.

Most importantly, legal advisors recommend you monitor and be aware of activity on your Facebook page or Twitter account. Ultimately you, the practice owner, are responsible for your social communities. With that said you can also see how over-use of automation could be problematic. If you are going to participate in social marketing, know that it’s like a garden. What you get out of this type of marketing is a direct result of what you authentically put into it. It is okay to delegate part of your social marketing, however never delegate 100 per cent or you risk isolating your audience — or worse, appearing as if you simply don’t care.

Mistake number two - What you need to know about contests on Facebook
Many practices are running some type of contest or drawing competition on Facebook. Unfortunately, many of them are also breaking Facebook’s Terms of Service and risk having their pages removed. If you are running a contest or drawing competitions on Facebook, or considering running one, you must at least be aware of Facebook’s guidelines. See www.facebook.com/promotions_guidelines.php for the details. In short, Facebook’s guidelines are clear — you should not collect contest or drawing entries or announce winners directly on your Facebook page.

However, you may run a contest using a third party application, such as WildFire Promotion.
with. If you have a thriving Facebook community, it would be a shame to lose it for something you could prevent.

**Mistake number three - How focusing on numbers can mislead you**

What is your primary objective for being on Facebook or Twitter? Are you interested primarily in link-building, solely for search engine optimisation or “SEO” purposes? Perhaps you are interested in acquiring as many friends and people who will “like” your Facebook Page as possible, because we’ve always been taught that more is better...

A traditional marketing mind-set was to acquire more. Let the numbers show how effective our direct mail piece was, how many new patient phone calls we got from our phone book ad, or how many hits we got to our website. However, without quality none of those numbers really matter. Some practices have had the experience of running a marketing campaign and getting a great response, yet then having a large percentage of those new patients be unwilling or unable to accept, pay for, or follow through with treatment... Those experiences painfully illustrate the difference between quantity and quality.

It is our intentions that drive our actions. If we intend to build up a certain number of fans, whether it be 500 or 2,000 fans, we are focused on the numbers. On the other hand, if we focus on winning the interest, praise, and appreciation of our followers, we build strong relationships that lead to loyalty and referrals.

Remember that social media marketing is unlike any other marketing tool we’ve ever had access to. Discard your old marketing mind-set. Be thoughtful about your objectives. Consider what is more important to you—a high quantity fan base or a high quality fan base. I’m not saying you can’t have both, but in social media, typically numbers as a primary goal can sabotage quality.

First and foremost, set your intention to build trust and relationships with your followers. Strive to make your social media platforms a place you can talk with your patients and followers. Imagine when patients come into your office. What is the social conversation you have with them? It is that type of exchange that can make your social marketing efforts a success.

It may take more time and energy to consider what your ideal social media community could look like. The easy way out is to set a number as a goal and walk away. A better objective— which will return more positive word of mouth and referrals — is to put interaction, authentic “liking”, and relationship building at the top of your list. Decide today what improvements you will make based on the information provided here—or what risks you intend to avoid; stay informed and take precautions to protect your communities. Take advantage of all the opportunities that social marketing has to offer. Make human connections with your patients and potential new patients, focus on genuine relationships, and treat your efforts as you would a living garden—you’ll then find positive word of mouth and referrals will flourish.

**About the author**

Rita Zamora is an international social media marketing consultant and speaker. She and her team activity manage dozens of dental practices’ social media programs. Her clients are located across the United States and internationally. She has been published in many professional publications. Rita is also Honorary Vice President to the British Dental Practice Managers Association. Learn more at www.DentalRelationshipMarketing.com or email Rita@rita-zamora.com.

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