

# INDEPENDENT PRACTICE MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

BY CHRIS BARROW DENTAL BUSINESS COACH, IVOCLAR VIVADENT

Chris Barrow takes a look at the current landscape for digital marketing for independent practices. He is acknowledged as one of the most experienced business coaches in dentistry. In the last 23 years, he has worked with over 2,000 practices in the UK, Ireland and around the world, helping them to create "more profit in less time, with happier people" and he has a reputation for speaking his mind and tearing up the rule book. Whilst his dental career has included work for the very largest corporates and retailers, his focus remains on the needs of the smaller independent and micro-corporate.



► In the last few years the world has gone mobile and the pace of technological change is showing no signs of slowing down. Whether they like it or not, today's dental practices need to be aware of and be a part of these changing trends in the digital world. No matter how skilled you are at dentistry, your practice needs digital marketing strategies that work to communicate with patients, not just online, but through mobile devices for patients on the move.

With almost all of mankind now using the web to research and purchase goods and services, a dental practice without a mobile-friendly online presence becomes virtually invisible to prospective new patients. But believe it or not, it's not all about attracting new patients - quite the contrary in fact! Being a part of the digital marketing world should centre around communicating effectively with and retaining your existing patients.

As a consultant, trainer and coach to the UK dental profession, my main focus is on smaller independent and micro-corporate practices, helping them identify trends in digital marketing and suggesting ways to build the framework of a digital marketing plan that is designed to take their practice forward. Working with practices across the UK and Ireland, I see first-hand what is working, and more importantly what isn't working in terms of the current digital marketing landscape for independent dental practices.

When practices ask me to review their marketing strategy there's often an assumption I will simply produce a summary of activities designed to attract new patients. What surprises some is the first question I usually ask is, "How are you communicating with your existing patient data base?" as this is actually their primary source of additional business.

Can any more be done to sell products and services to existing patients and nurturing them to become ambassadors for your business, for example encouraging recommendations across social media?

This is where a practice recall system becomes so important. I often find the way texts, emails and letters are written by a practice to communicate with existing patients could be significantly improved. The information they contain should not just be reminding them about their next appointment, but seen as an opportunity to offer them additional products, services or special offers on treatments. This leads on to seeing how a practice is generating patient recommendations and referrals, finding innovative ways to use the patient experience to positively differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

### GETTING AHEAD

There has never been a better time to develop an online digital marketing strategy. In the past, for practices to get noticed they used traditional printed media, such as having leaflets designed, printed and delivered, a phone listing in Yellow Pages or taking out adverts in local newspapers. Print media today is expensive, takes up a considerable amount of time and response rates to such campaigns can be very low.

The beauty of digital is that a lot of this time and expenditure can be avoided. Printed matter only has a certain shelf life and is often quickly discarded, whereas digital material can constantly be amended, updated and used over and over again. It is now possible to measure in real time who is visiting a website or engaging on social media channels using effective analytic tools and target

messages to those people accordingly. People today spend hours online on their smartphones and tablets - so this is where your practice needs to be.

### INDEPENDENT PRACTICE MARKETING

I will be reviewing the current landscape for digital marketing in dentistry at ICDE2017 and looking in detail, sometimes controversially, at the opportunities digital practice marketing can bring. Many practices are investing money in digital marketing activities that either don't work or don't work as well as others. At ICDE I will look at the common mistakes some practices make in this respect and share the best of what does work with real life examples of websites that earn a living and Facebook pages correctly populated with the right type of information and content.

I want to discuss how to measure the return on investment in digital marketing and if it is working in the right way for your practice. This will include demonstrations on how to grow a positive ROI not just from marketing but by investing in digital dental equipment too, using real life examples to show how my clients have implemented such developments in their practice to generate a revenue stream to give a positive ROI.

If you are looking to get ahead in the world of digital practice marketing join Chris Barrow at the ICDE2017 on 16th - 17th June. Bookings can be made directly via [icde.uk](http://icde.uk), or by calling **0116 284 7880**. Places are strictly limited so book your place today to avoid disappointment.

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