

## Effective Patient Communication Starts with Social Media



*Advice on How to Create a Social Media Plan that Engages Your Patients and Protects Your Revenue*

By: Rita Zamora

Fear has stopped about 20% of Americans from visiting the dentist. This statistic is pre-COVID-19, according to Mark S. Wolff, DDS, PhD, Dean, University of Pennsylvania, School of Dental Medicine. In a [recent webinar](#), Dr. Wolff shared, “Whether real or perceived, fear of the unknown, not knowing what to expect – not to mention fear of needles, pain, or uncomfortable procedures – has kept patients from dental care. COVID-19 is expected to bring a higher level of dental practice fear and requires us to be more communicative than ever.”

You and your team know that safety starts with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the other measures you’ve implemented to protect patients and staff, but are your patients aware of this? An [April 2020 RDH Magazine survey](#) of 2,200 dental hygienists found that 55% of patients were not being communicated with about changes in the office.

Perhaps you’re struggling with what to say in your patient communication or wondering what the best method is to connect with patients. If so, you are not alone. With everything going on in the world, not to mention the new day-to-day protocols you and your team are getting used to, it’s not surprising patient updates may have taken a back seat.

You may already know how vital patient relationships are. If not, here’s a reminder.

**Excellent communication is the number one way to:**

- Reduce patient anxiety
- Establish and grow trust
- Increase patient satisfaction
- Grow strong relationships

**Trust and strong relationships allow patients to feel comfortable:**

- Accepting your treatment plans
- Pre-paying for treatment
- Sharing positive reviews
- Referring friends and family
- Remaining loyal to your practice



The good news is that you have unprecedented opportunities to communicate with patients through tools like social media. Yes, you can [call, email, or text](#), but social media is where patients are spending their time – now more than ever.

If you find yourself lacking in the communication department, here are some tips you can use to get your social media connections back on track:

**1) Identify hurdles** - Does your social media communication struggle due to time, skill set, or interest? These are the three most common reasons dental teams aren't able to keep up with patient communication on Facebook and Instagram. Once you know what the reason is for not maintaining your social media presence, you can explore solutions. Options might include full outsourcing, or using a more affordable program that your team can help co-manage (like [Connect90](#)). There are also one-time options like coaching or consulting that your practice could benefit from.

**2) Implement protocols** - Many practices have protocols and systems in place for their practice operations. Do you have a protocol in place for your social media communication? This means you have specific tasks that need to be performed on a consistent basis. For example:

- Create a content calendar in advance of each month
- Include content that supports practice goals
- Schedule content so it posts automatically
- Boost content as needed throughout the month
- Check social media for comments or messages that require attention
- These are all tasks that can be tracked for implementation, consistency, and accountability.

Unfortunately, many teams manage social media on a spontaneous basis. They post when they might have a birthday to celebrate or they happen to have a good photo op – but strategy cannot exist without a plan in place. Social media management needs processes, forethought, and follow-through in order to be successful.

**3) Take action** - If you want to come back better than ever after COVID-19, you'll need strong patient relationships. New patients in particular are going to do rigorous research before they schedule an appointment. They have always judged practices based on online reviews, and this will be heightened. They will scrutinize the cleanliness of your practice and be more in tune with the energy of you and your team because they can't see your facial expressions behind the mask. Now is the time to take action. Put a plan in place to nurture, restore, or reinvigorate patient relationships.

Visibility is more important than ever, and social media is an essential tool for proactively demonstrating your commitment to your patients' safety. For example, you can use social media to promote that new investment in an [Instrument Management System \(IMS™\)](#) or demonstrate updated sterilization and room turnover protocol. These are necessary steps for achieving optimal infection prevention, but marketing those actions is equally important. More than ever, patients want to see and understand how you are protecting them, and social media is the best way to accomplish that.



Don't let fear of not knowing what to say or do hold you back. Seek out a mentor for help, search for inspiration online, and get into action today. The best way to ensure patients understand what you are doing to keep them safe, what new protocols to expect, and how much you truly care, is to continue to effectively communicate. With social media you can easily share effective, reassuring, and valuable updates with patients. Just as your new PPE protects you and your team, effective and consistent communication will help protect your practice revenue.

#### **About Rita Zamora**



Rita Zamora is author of the book [Get Found, Get Liked, Get Patients - Making the Most of Social Media](#). Known as Dentistry's Social Media Expert, she and her team have offered highly customized "done for you," as well as "done with you," social media services for dental professionals across the globe since 2008. She graduated magna cum laude from the University of Colorado with a bachelor's degree in business and marketing and has over 20 years of experience in the business of dentistry.