

# MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

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*This column is compiled by JCO Contributing Editor Robert S. Haeger, DDS, MS. Every few months, Dr. Haeger presents a successful approach or strategy for a particular aspect of practice management. Your suggestions for future topics or authors are welcome.*

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How much do you know about social media in general and Facebook business pages in particular? If you are 35 or younger, you are probably an expert on Facebook. For the rest of us, Drs. Matthew Blake Hillstead and Jae Hyun Park do a good job of introducing and contrasting the personal and business uses of Facebook in this month's column.

After you read the article, I challenge you to do the following: Start a business Facebook page and link it with your website. Identify your target audience as parents, adult patients, or teen patients. Customize the material on your page to appeal to your targets and encourage them to promote your business Facebook page on their personal Facebook pages. Talk to your team about creative ideas to continually update your Facebook page to keep it fresh and appealing. In today's market, you will be hard pressed to find a less expensive way to promote your practice on the internet. **RSH**



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## Orthodontic Marketing Through Social Networking

**B**y 2012, more than half of all Americans age 12 and older had created profiles on one or more social-networking sites.<sup>1</sup> Facebook\* boasted more than 845 million active users and availability in some 70 languages as of December 2011, making it by far the largest social network on the planet.<sup>2</sup> For many people, Facebook has become a routine part of the day, "as normal as making coffee, checking the mail, or walking the dog".<sup>3</sup>

Social-networking services offer an opportunity for social and commercial exchange among members of an online community.<sup>4</sup> In the beginning, individual users drove the Facebook craze, but now businesses are flocking to Facebook to cash in on its millions of visitors. Even health-care practitioners have joined the rush.

For the orthodontist, Facebook adds an interactive component that cannot be achieved with a conventional website.<sup>5</sup> A recent study showed that 65% of orthodontic patients have Facebook accounts,<sup>6</sup> making it one of the easiest ways to interact with a high percentage of patients as well as to make an impression on future patients. In a survey by TeleVox,\*\* orthodontists reported increases in patient interaction, acquisition of new patients, patient referrals, and patient retention through Facebook.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this article is to help you feel more comfortable about incorporating Facebook as part of your marketing strategy.

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\*\*Facebook, Menlo Park, CA; [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).

\*\*TeleVox Software, Inc., Mobile, AL; [www.televox.com](http://www.televox.com).

## Facebook Business Pages

Facebook business pages differ from personal pages in several ways. Businesses maintain lists of “fans”, but cannot send personal, individual messages to them. A business does not have access to the personal accounts of its fans, other than the material these users have indicated as “public”. It is not possible to send a “friend request” through a business page, although the administrator can invite friends who are already on his or her own personal page.

Setting up a business Facebook page is also different from setting up a personal Facebook account. From the Facebook home page, click on “Create a Page” and choose “Local Business or Place”. Fill out the information, click “Get Started”,

then follow the prompts either to sign in to your current Facebook account or to create a new account. After that, follow the prompts to upload your profile picture, enter some basic information in the “About” section, and choose your unique Facebook web address. For consistency, consultants recommend using the same name for your Facebook pages as for your website.

A business page is open to the public; there is no need for an “invite” to gain full access to the page. Businesses post updates or promotions in an effort to prompt visitors to “like” the post or page. When a user “likes” something on a business page, that action is posted to the person’s own Facebook page, allowing his or her friends to see the post. In the case of an orthodontic practice, the goal is to get your fans to interact with the business page, so



Fig. 1 “Page Insights” allow administrator to track metrics of practice’s Facebook page activity.

that current patients' Facebook friends will see you on their own pages, thus broadening your reach and "virality".

An important feature available to business accounts is the "Page Insights" feature, which collects demographic data to help assess the performance of your account and pinpoint the posts or content that resonated with your intended audience (Fig. 1). Among the many metrics, the most important are the following:

- "Total Likes"—the number of people who liked your page, including their age, gender, and location.
- "Friends of Fans"—the number of unique people who are friends of your fans, indicating the number of potential new fans through referrals.
- "People Talking About This"—the number of unique people who have shared content from your

page or have talked about your page in personal posts.

- "Total Reach"—the number of unique people who have seen content associated with your page, including how they were reached (organic search, advertisement, etc.)

### Promoting a Business Page

There are a multitude of ways to get patients and the public to view and interact with your Facebook page, but three of the most critical are discussed here.

#### Content

Content for your Facebook page should in-



Fig. 2 Facebook home page includes important office information such as practice address, phone numbers, office hours, photos, and videos. Home page "cover" promotes patient-appreciation event. (Image from animated movie *Epic*, trademark and copyright of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.)

clude background information on the practice, philosophy and goals of treatment, oral-hygiene tips and instructions, what to do in case of emergency, and directions on how to get to the office (Fig. 2). Pictures could include interior and exterior views of the practice, pre- and post-treatment photos (be sure to obtain consent first), and fun events involving you and your staff. External links that may interest users include your practice website, the AAO homepage for orthodontic patients ([www.mylifemysmile.org](http://www.mylifemysmile.org)), and sites for various treatment options you provide, such as Invisalign or SureSmile. Adding games and other apps (applications) can entice users to visit frequently. To add applications, go to your Facebook home page and click on “Help”, then “Visit Help Center”; click on “Apps, Games and Credits” in the left column, then “App Basics” for further instructions.

### *Acquiring Fans*

The first step is to click on “Invite Friends” on your personal Facebook home page. A list of all your Facebook friends will appear, allowing you to check the ones to whom you would like to send an invitation to visit your new business page.

Next, click on “Build Audience” in the top right corner of the business page, then on “Invite E-Mail Contacts” in the pull-down menu. After choosing your e-mail provider, log in with your e-mail address and password to see the list of contacts saved under that e-mail profile. Since all of them will be checked initially, you will need to scroll through the list and uncheck contacts who should not receive e-mail invitations. Click “Preview Invitation” to review the e-mail, add a personal message if you wish, then click “Send”.

Again under “Build Audience”, click on “Share Page” to share your page on your personal Facebook page or on the business page itself. This will draw attention to your page when people look through their “News Feeds”.

### *Promotions*

Another good way to attract more activity on your practice’s Facebook page is to promote a

contest or discount for those who go to the page. This can be advertised on your practice website or through regular mail, including instructions for participation—usually clicking the “Like” button, posting a comment about patients’ or parents’ positive experiences in your practice, or sharing your practice’s page on the participant’s Facebook “Timeline”. Depending on the kind of prize you are willing to give away and your ability to advertise, this method can produce a considerable amount of activity. Be sure to make a Facebook post about the winner, perhaps with a picture.

### **Business Page Management**

A Facebook business page engages potential patients through status updates, similar to a blog. Consultants report, however, that most orthodontists do not post regularly on their own Facebook pages.<sup>5</sup> This task is usually delegated to someone in the front office—often the treatment coordinator or an assistant with social-media experience. In any case, it is critical for someone to be constantly monitoring posts on the page and to answer questions and reply to comments. While Facebook can be a wonderful forum for highlighting positive aspects of a practice, it can also be used by patients to complain or write rude comments. The doctor must be made aware of any such posting immediately, so that a small misunderstanding does not turn into a larger altercation. Negative online publicity can cause rapid and lasting damage to the reputation of a practice.

What makes a Facebook page successful? In conversations with management consultants and expert Facebook business users,<sup>5</sup> some common suggestions emerged:

- Brand your Facebook page to match your website—colors, background, and design. Your page thus becomes a representation of your website and office, potentially impressing a visitor enough to make a phone call and schedule a consultation.
- Ensure that there is frequent interaction on your Facebook “Wall”.
- Post more about your patients than about yourself and your employees, including news items such as debonding days, birthdays, and community-

event participation.

- Run contests or drawings to drive patients to your Facebook page; be sure to include patients who aren't on Facebook, however, so that no one feels left out.

Some orthodontists ask whether engaging a third-party consultant is necessary to be successful on Facebook. The answer depends on how comfortable the orthodontist feels about managing the page, making wall posts, and commenting on recent events. If you're worried about how others will perceive your posts, it might make sense to hire a consultant or at least assign Facebook duties to a reliable staff member (with a daily or weekly time limit to keep the task from becoming too distracting or time consuming). In any case, it's a good idea for the doctor to spend at least some time keeping up with the page.

Consultants agree that it is difficult to measure exactly how much your Facebook page will improve your profitability.<sup>5</sup> In a recent survey of orthodontists, only 23% reported that Facebook marketing increased their numbers of new patients, 36% said it did not, and 41% were unsure.<sup>4</sup> In a separate study, 24% of the practices reported getting new referrals from their Facebook pages, while more than 50% said they had used Facebook to improve patient interaction, promote contests, and disseminate educational resources.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Although social networking can be a confusing and sometimes challenging aspect of practice management, there is no doubt that it is here to stay, and that it can either attract or deter patients. A careful, well-thought-out Facebook strategy that focuses on the patient-doctor relationship and the services you provide will help set you apart from the competition. By creating positive connections on your Facebook page and keeping the content relevant, you will greatly improve your chances of success.

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