

Are you relevant?

Why a vanilla marketing approach is never the sweet option with **Shaz Memon**.



One of the biggest predictions for upcoming marketing strategies has its feet firmly planted in the world of politics.

Big brands are seizing upon



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controversies in order to build their presence online. Using powerful and meaningful engagement, they are sharing proactive and reactive comment and voicing strong opinions – not only to join a chorus of condemnation or wave the flag for a particular cause – but also to raise a profile.

Whilst dentistry may not demand that you take a stand against controversial issues on the global stage – the foreign policies of Donald Trump, for example – it is worth noting that this trend is reaping benefits for dental brands if courting a little controversy, too.

But how relevant is disruptive dental

marketing to your audience and what do patients (both potential and existing) gain from this tactic?

Establishing a firm ethos in any dental business is a major component of its success. Having a strong and consistent voice across all platforms reflects well on the practice and can raise its profile above a choppy sea of social media 'noise'.

Bland and repetitive messages can get lost online, whereas incisive comments, awareness raising and campaigning are increasingly becoming good marketing – if handled wisely.

Dentistry itself has become

politicised in the last decade or two. Indeed, as far back as 2001, C. Mudge in the paper, *How and why politics affect dentistry*, suggested that, "dental practices are under scrutiny every day. The dynamics of the public, the media, the lawmakers, the regulators, and other special interest groups create endless possibilities for influence over a practice and continue to challenge a dentist's ability to provide quality dental care to patients".

In essence, your business is affected by politics – and it's important you acknowledge and act upon this fact; it's a wise dentist who recognises that politics not only plays a key role in shaping dental reform but understands the need to translate this process into layman's terms. In other words, how does it affect them, their access to dental treatment and, ultimately, the cost?

Arguably, any dentist is in danger of exposure to criticism if he or she fails to take a stance or offers insight into any dental issue, particularly if it is a favourite headline grabber for the news-hungry media. The tax on fizzy drinks, the inability to get an appointment, illegal tooth whitening by beauticians and the postcard lottery of NHS dental care are all currently hot topics.

Other areas up for comment might include:

- The risks of cheap dental treatments abroad
- To floss or not to floss
- The fluoride debate and water supplies
- DIY braces
- HPV vaccine – for boys as well as girls
- The value and future of NHS dentistry
- Dental contract reforms and prototypes
- Costs of cosmetic treatments
- The crisis in children's dental health
- How Brexit might impact dental care
- The sugar tax debate
- Public Health England's drive to steer kids away from unhealthy snacking
- Charcoal toothpaste – pros and cons
- Sports drinks and the under 18s
- Illegal teeth whitening.

A strategy such as this obviously demands careful consideration – whilst it can elevate a profile, it can



also destroy a reputation if pitched awkwardly and/or not delivered well – because a practice runs the risk of alienating an audience if its dental marketing lacks sincerity or a common voice in and out of the surgery.

Game plan

Practice teams should discuss key areas for debate and devise a game plan. Consider an overall dental marketing strategy and share consistent messages. Invite engagement online as well as off, reflect on common staff responses as well as frequent patient enquiries. Where are your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to communicating advice and opinion?

Access to dental care is sadly not universal, as we well know. Make it a policy to support dental charities that send out teams to countries in need of oral health care and education. Consider funding one of your colleagues on a trip and share the experience with patients in the form of a blog or within your newsletters.

Corporate social responsibility helps to build a brand and tells a story about its principles and ethos. Work on the topics that interest you.

Disruptive business strategies can displace old-school dental marketing and get a practice noticed. The secret is to court support as well as controversy whilst maintaining integrity in all communication. Don't forget, there needs to be correlation between messages shared online and those in house – any disconnect will expose a business to be without substance and, therefore, lacking in a strong ethos.

In order to remain successful in a competitive market, dentists have to rethink their approach to digital marketing. Template websites and run-of-the-mill messaging does little to differentiate one practice from another and those that get noticed are those that put into action what they say.

Rethink what you offer patients and how your business operates. Be authentic, be memorable and be specific. By building your practice identity with honest opinion and getting closer to communities by bearing a little of your business 'soul', you will eventually grow that all-important consumer confidence and buy in.

References available on request.