

Effective Use of Social Media

Social media have become the primary means of marketing for an orthodontic practice. Through any number of social media sites, orthodontists can bypass general dentist referrals and engage in direct conversation with current and prospective patients. These sites can thus become a form of interactive practice website, providing not only promotional material but educational content and personal insights about the orthodontist. The purpose of this special JCO feature is to provide helpful advice from orthodontists who are experts in five areas of social media marketing.

Yelp* engagement is generally viewed with some reservation, since an anonymous negative review from a disgruntled patient can have lasting consequences in terms of the practice's reputation. Dr. Sheldon Salins offers a new perspective, however, encouraging us to proactively seek out patients who will write positive reviews and then respond to these reviews as we would to posts on Facebook.** He also provides suggestions for reporting inappropriate reviews so that Yelp can remove them. His Yelp information is listed under Salins Orthodontics South San Francisco and Salins Orthodontics Union City.

Facebook has become synonymous with social media, and current rumblings of its decline in popularity are exaggerated. In fact, it remains the primary site for middle-age females, a target demographic for most practices. No one understands this better than Dr. Amanda Gallagher, whose trendy Facebook business page (listed as Amanda Gallagher Orthodontics) is directed especially toward moms. To maximize patient engagement, she posts in the early afternoon, particularly on Thursdays and Fridays.

The most engaging posts include video content; in 2019, 84% of all Internet traffic was video. This is why YouTube*** is now the most-visited website in the world. Dr. Grant Collins has created a variety of unique videos that can be found on his YouTube channel, Collins Orthodontics. While some of his content is informational, he emphasizes that the most popular videos are the ones telling personal stories.

Instagram** is undeniably the most popular social media platform for people younger than 30, and its cost of content creation is lower than that for YouTube videos. Dr. Dovi Prero is well known for the popularity of his Instagram business page, Preroorthodontics, which has nearly 35,000 followers. There you will find photos and videos of both his patients and his family. A primary emphasis of his page is orthodontist-delivered Invisalign treatment, as indicated by his catchphrase, "Scan everybody and their mama."

Google My Business*** (GMB) is often overlooked when we think of social media marketing, but remember that the majority of patients will find your practice on Google. Your GMB profile lets you manage how your business appears on Google Search and Maps. Dr. Greg Jorgensen emphasizes how small details can dramatically affect your practice's search engine optimization (SEO). For those who are just getting their feet wet in social media, this is a wonderful place to start.

Effective social media marketing is about stimulating a conversation between the orthodontist and the patient. Consider becoming proactive on Yelp, posting during the early afternoon on Facebook, providing video content that tells a story on YouTube, capturing the moment on Insta-

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***Registered trademark of Google Inc., Mountain View, CA; www.google.com.

gram, and incorporating simple SEO strategies on GMB. The best part is that it costs only time.



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Extending Your Office Personality Through Yelp Reviews

Ever hear of a new restaurant and run to the Internet to read the latest reviews of the food, service, and ambiance? Ever get bad service from a coffee shop and sit in the parking lot typing a bad review on Yelp from your smartphone? As practice owners, we might shy away from online reviews, afraid that they leave us exposed to comments we have little control over. I maintain that it is imperative to embrace these new technologies and utilize them to help grow our practices. Research shows that 91% of people regularly or occasionally read online reviews, and 84% trust online reviews as much as they do personal recommendations.¹ On the other hand, while 77% of customers say they would leave a review for a business if asked, only 15% do so regularly.²

Many orthodontists outsource their online reviews to third-party companies that “manage” their online presence for a fee. I believe you need to claim your own business profile to take control of your online reviews. I recommend managing your online personality yourself, or having a social media-savvy team member manage your account. This makes your online portfolio a direct extension of your office.

Yelp, Google, and Facebook offer suites of tools to help business owners manage their online presence (for Yelp, visit biz.yelp.com). You can

customize your practice hours and contact information. You can also upload office or before-and-after photos to add life to your online listing. Analytics are displayed when you log in, so you can see the traffic you are getting.

It’s crucial to give every single patient and parent an amazing experience when they visit your office. Yelp recently changed its terms of service to allow customers as young as 12 to post their user experiences. The boisterous patients—the ones whom every team member is excited to see—often don’t write online reviews unless they are repeatedly reminded. I find that it’s easier to engage and encourage the more introverted patients and parents, who typically write the most colorful reviews. Refrain from posting “People love us on Yelp” stickers at the front desk to discourage “keyboard ninjas,” who are highly erratic in scheduling appointments. Front-office advertising never results in positive reviews, and it commonly backfires if an unsolicited posting stands alone on Yelp while someone is waiting for an appointment.

If the office does receive a negative review, don’t respond publicly as soon as you read it. Give yourself some time to cool off and clearly evaluate the comments. If you feel that the Yelp review was posted incorrectly or in retaliation, your Yelp business account allows you to flag and report it (Fig. 1). A Yelp team member will then evaluate the flagged review and determine whether it should be removed. The most common way to get a review

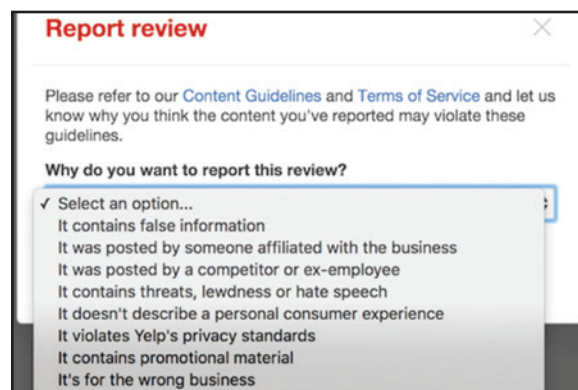


Fig. 1 Negative review can be flagged and reported to Yelp* for being incorrect, unjustified, or inappropriate.

removed is to report that it violates Yelp's terms of service by failing to describe a personal consumer experience (as when parents report something negative experienced by their child). When faced with a negative review, it is important not to encourage all your patients and staff to write positive five-star reviews in an attempt to "drown out" the one negative posting. Yelp will notice the sudden flurry of activity and flag the account to remove those new five-star reviews.

All of us have worked hard to build our businesses and deliver ideal orthodontic treatment in a fun atmosphere. Many of us have been heralded as heroes for the malocclusions we have corrected and the relationships we have created with our patients and communities. Online reviews are an extension of your office personality into the world. Embrace that new technology to help grow your office and protect the reputation that has taken so many years to build.



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Targeting Your Facebook Audience

As more and more people move online, the future of brand promotion is through interaction on social media. Today, awareness, trust, and affinity are largely built online, before a patient ever steps into your office. It is therefore important that your social media presence directly reflect the image you want to portray: who you are, what your practice is like, and how you care for your patients.

Facebook, which recently celebrated its 15th anniversary, is still at the top of social media platforms. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2018 and 2019, almost seven out of

10 American adults (69%) use Facebook. Except for YouTube, used by 73% of adults, no other major social media platform comes close. And among U.S. adults who use Facebook, 74% visit the site once a day—a higher percentage than for Instagram (63%) or Snapchat† (61%). Facebook users access the site or app an average eight times per day.³

Facebook is popular among all demographic groups, although women (75%) are more likely to use it than men (63%). Usership is declining among teens, however, from a high of 71% in 2014-2015 to 51% in 2018.⁴ The most common age demographic on Facebook is now the 25-34 group, at 29.7% of users, making this the prime target demographic to engage on Facebook. I intentionally create ads and run campaigns aimed at women in the 25-34 age range, who tend to be mothers of young children or might be interested in orthodontic or esthetic treatment for themselves.

What is the best way to draw new followers to your page? Research has found that 42.2% of Facebook users will follow a particular page just to take advantage of a special offer.⁵ If you want to incentivize a big growth in followers on the platform, consider running contests or giveaways, or create an official Facebook offer to drive more views. If you really want to grow your followers, "boost" your post or turn it into a paid ad for more visibility in your market. When I create a contest or have a well-performing Facebook post, I always boost my post for a nominal fee of \$20-40, thus extending my reach by a few thousand more engagements (Fig. 2).

Enhancing your ability to gain audience attention in social media starts with engagement. As organic (unpaid) reach on Facebook continues to decline, it is even more important to post content that promotes engagement with your target audience. Any fan engagements with content updates (likes, comments, answering questions) are votes that help drive greater visibility of your brand through search engines. Likes on Facebook can increase the reach of a post by making it more relevant and visible on more newsfeeds.

†Registered trademark of Snap Inc., Santa Monica, CA; www.snapchat.com.

**Registered trademark of Facebook, Inc., Menlo Park, CA; www.facebook.com.

Given that young people have an average attention span of eight seconds, Facebook video content will further promote engagement with your brand. Consider using closed captioning for better viewership and engagement, since 85% of videos are played without sound.⁶ I often create my video content in Instagram Stories and then select to post it in Facebook Stories as well, eliminating the need to post content multiple times on

multiple platforms. Alternatively, Facebook Live has continued to grow in popularity and is still one of the highest-engagement strategies you can use on Facebook.

For best results, AdEspresso recommends that you go live at peak hours, when your viewers know you will be there. The best days to post content on Facebook are Thursdays and Fridays (Fig. 3); the best times are 1 p.m. for the most “shares”

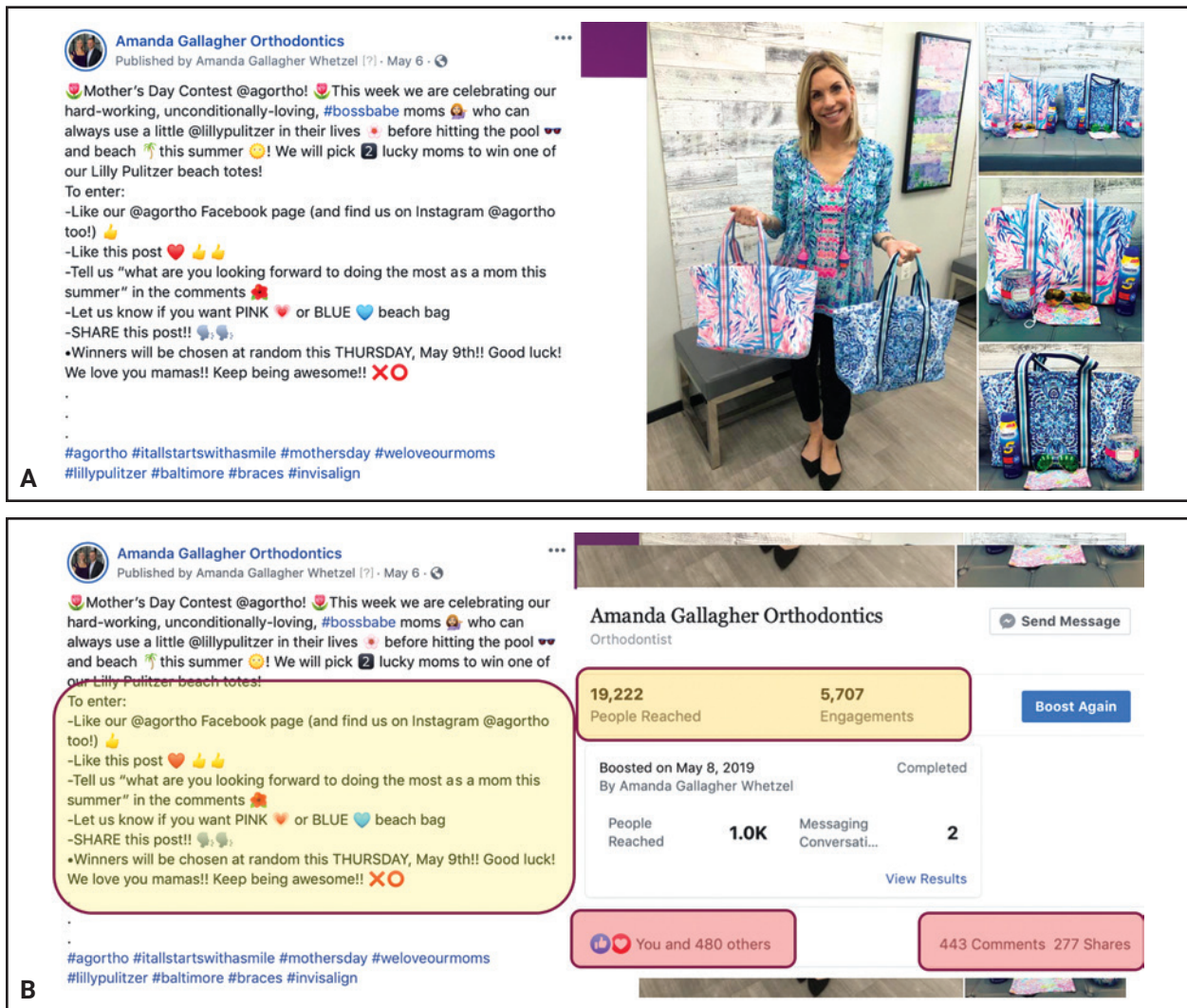


Fig. 2 A. Mother’s Day Facebook contest designed to incentivize engagement and growth in followers. B. High-light of “call to action” on this post, with corresponding reach, engagements, comments, likes, and shares within one week of posting.**

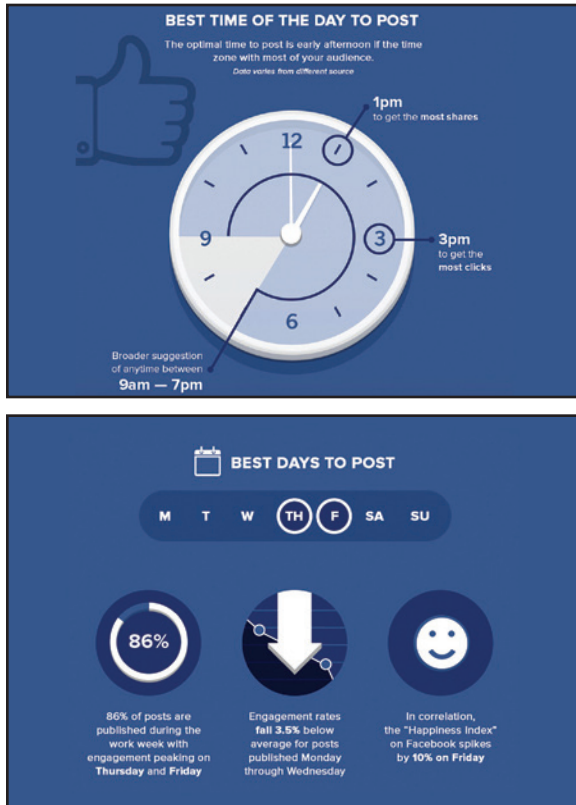


Fig. 3 Best time of day and days of week to post on Facebook.⁷ (Images courtesy of Quicksprout.com.)

and 3 p.m. for the most “clicks.” You can drive higher traffic to your site during peak times, but keep in mind that your target audience may be more likely to be engaged in the evenings after work or at home.⁷

Although steadily declining in popularity among the teen audience, Facebook is just as strong overall as it has ever been. It remains one of the best social media platforms to engage with the young and older adult populations and thus increase the reach of your practice. Focus your Facebook marketing efforts on decision-makers—mothers, fathers, young adults, Millennials—to get the best response for your brand, and post at the times when you will get the most engagement. Create content, contests, and giveaways on Facebook to extend your reach to prospective patients and grow your practice.



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Growing Your Practice with YouTube

“Waitress Gets Life-Changing Surprise Tip and Her Story Will Bring You to Tears”: that’s the title of my first viral YouTube video. Before that, my videos had received only a few thousand views each, some barely into the hundreds. But this one? It has more than 1 million views and counting (for a link to the video, see the online version of this article at www.jco-online.com). So what is the difference between this video and all my former videos? It’s simple. We told a story. And a powerful one at that.

A young waitress who won a free braces contest at our office had recently lost both parents to illness, and her story captivated the hearts of millions. From that video alone, we received calls from all over the country, were interviewed by multiple news stations, and landed on the front pages of newspapers. Our new patient exams skyrocketed. All because of a single video on YouTube.

I’m not saying there is only one way to do YouTube, but I have noticed several types of videos that seem to perform well on the platform. If you want to step up your YouTube game, here are some great ways to do so.

Storytelling

Never underestimate the power of storytelling. Whether you are telling the story of how your office began or the story of a patient or team member, viewers connect with this style and will share the videos with their friends. A great place to start is by telling your own story. Make it personal. What was your journey to becoming an ortho-

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VIDEO EDITING ADVICE

- » Use a high-definition camera.
- » Shoot in widescreen format.
- » Use video-editing software such as iMovie‡ or Final Cut Pro.‡
- » Make sure the audio is well balanced and easy to understand.
- » Match any background music to the feel of your video.

dontist, and what hardships did you encounter along the way? If you had humble beginnings, talk about that and explain how your office grew to what it is today. If you have a patient with a powerful story—more than just teeth—find a way to share that story in video format (see box). Though good storytelling can hold audience attention longer than most types of videos, I would say the sweet spot for duration is between two and five minutes.

Informational Videos

YouTube is becoming one of the first places people search for how-to advice; informational videos can get millions of views. Producing these behind-the-scenes videos helps position you as an authority figure in the field. One of the best orthodontists I’ve seen at this is Dr. Greg Asatrian, who has amassed more than 3 million aggregate views and 35,000 subscribers on his brilliantly named channel, Braces Explained.⁸ Dr. Asatrian provides short videos describing the basics of various orthodontic diagnoses, treatments, and techniques in easy-to-understand terms that are helpful to the public.

Training Videos

Onboarding new employees is crucial not only to get them up to speed with the technical skills required for their positions, but also to help them understand your culture, your mission, and your values. Instead of just waiting for the first day on the job to begin the process, we have all new employees complete 15 training modules, including multiple YouTube videos, before they start work. These videos include an office tour; training

in customer service, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA); dental procedures; practice administration; and many more. To best control this training for our office, we record all our own videos, and we keep many of them on “private” status so that only team members can access them.

Entertainment

In the world of YouTube, some of the most popular videos are those whose sole purpose is to entertain. We have produced several videos—including a braces makeup tutorial, music videos, and even a segment highlighting awkward moments in the workplace—to help our patients get to know the fun feel of our office and to give my staff and me the goofy and creative outlet we need.

As you launch into creating videos for your YouTube page, the best advice I can give you is to be original, be authentic, and be you. Let your personality come through in the videos; viewers can easily sniff out inauthentic and copied material. Find your own perspective and personality, and watch your audience—and your practice—grow.



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INSTAGRAM TIPS

- » People cannot use your services if they don't know you provide them.
- » The larger your following, the louder the megaphone.
- » Document content, don't create it.
- » Never pay a company to run your social media.
- » Just take the picture.
- » Use video whenever you can.
- » Never tell anybody to "put the phone away."
- » Use influencers.
- » Don't hard sell.
- » Have fun and be yourself.

The Science Behind Instagram

Nielsen reports that the average user spends more than two hours per day on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.⁹ We enjoy connecting with others, exploring the world, and consuming content on these platforms, and our patients do, too.

Instagram started out as a simple platform for sharing square photos with cool filters. Now, it's a seamless combination of engaging media, making it an ideal way to educate your audience in a robust arena of shared photos, short and long videos, and other content. Who uses Instagram? The way I see it, Facebook is for the moms and dads, Snapchat and TikTok^{††} are mostly for the kids, and Instagram is where they all hang out (see box).

Getting Started with Instagram

Don't underestimate teeth. I still believe patients want to see before and afters of your work. When prospective patients see a malocclusion similar to theirs, along with the final outcome, it engenders confidence in the practice. They say in their mind, "If Dr. Prero can treat that case, then he can treat mine, too." As Dr. Kyle Fagala (@MemphisBraces) advises, though,

^{††}Registered trademark of TikTok, Culver City, CA; www.tiktok.com.
^{**}Registered trademark of Facebook, Inc., Menlo Park, CA; www.facebook.com.

don't make it *only* about the teeth. A collage of close-up before-and-after photos is cool, but be sure to add a smiling profile picture. This can make a great statement for your practice, but don't force it! You must set up your office to document content, not create it (for a link to a webinar video clip, see the online version of this article at www.jco-online.com).

Tell Your Story

In 2016, as an addition to the familiar kind of post that stays on your newsfeed, Instagram

The Story is Where it's At

- Instagram Story: engagement
- What if I had my own reality TV show where I could reach an audience
- "15 seconds of fame"
- Disappears after 24 hours
- Features: polls, tag location, hashtags, stickers, tag an account



Fig. 4 Instagram Story content disappears after 24 hours. Posting throughout the day creates virtual office reality show.**

introduced a feature called Instagram Story, for content that disappears in 24 hours (Fig. 4). Because the content lasts only a day, we can post more casually in this format (for a link to a webinar video clip, see the online version of this article at www.jco-online.com). I start with a daily intro filmed on Wilshire Boulevard to welcome my viewers, and then I go on to document our day. I use Instagram to show patients what it's like to be at our office and what the patient experience is. We highlight patients who request to be on our social media or fun things that happen throughout the day. It's like having your own reality TV show. And it pays off (Fig. 5). We get people who know our office and everyone in it before they even set foot in our building, making it much more likely that they will convert to starts (for a link to a webinar video clip, see the online version of this article at www.jco-online.com).

Just Take the Picture!

One way to guarantee that no one sees what's going on in your office is never to take a photo or video. So snap away! At the least, you will have fun content to share with parents and families. When you share, that's a great time to ask their permission to post publicly. If you do post publicly on Instagram, make sure you have written or oral consent.



Fig. 5 Donovan, who had been following Dr. Prero on Instagram for four months, made these unsolicited comments on first trip to office.

The office should be a phone-friendly environment for your patients. The phone is your window to the world, giving viewers an inside peek at what your office is all about. If you see someone taking a picture, jump in yourself. Not all your social media promotion has to come from you.

Capture the Moment

When our patients finish treatment and view their smiles for the first time at the mirror, we have the cameras rolling to catch the often-emotional moments when they see their smile dreams come to fruition. The “smile reveal” is often followed by grateful hugs and cheerful tears. As Dr. Grant Collins (@TheBracesGuy) demonstrates so well, recording this experience for your patients can build a tremendous amount of goodwill that can benefit your practice greatly.

Educate

I believe the educational component of Instagram is the most powerful aspect of the platform. We are able to broadcast our message about the importance of orthodontic treatment and the specialized role of the orthodontist. We discuss the tools we have available to create beautiful smiles and the technology we invest in to get better outcomes for our patients. In addition, I attempt to educate the audience about dental terminology. Keep in mind that the dental knowledge of the average viewer is probably similar to that of a first-year dental student on the first day. This perspective will ensure that the widest possible audience understands your content. And remember, when you can explain something clearly, it creates the power of authority and brand awareness about your practice.

Consider posting content about the nitty-gritty details of your finished cases and techniques (Fig. 6). For example, I spotlight the height gauges we use through a video we posted about bracket placement (for a link to the video, see the online version of this article at www.jco-online.com). When patients start to understand the complexities of the straightwire appliance or a digital treatment plan setup, they can further appreciate the role of



Fig. 6 Instagram video demonstrates bracket height gauge as part of patient education.

the orthodontist and draw the logical conclusion that the same results cannot be achieved at home. You are in effect giving a tour of all the great things in your office every day, so that once again, when it comes time for that initial consultation, some of the work is already done.

Who Is Your Audience?

We may think we are targeting only prospective patients, but our audience is actually everyone. It is worth noting that orthodontic colleagues may watch your content; similarly, other dental colleagues and referrals will see what you post. Don't underestimate the effect—the staff members at those doctors' offices may engage with your content, which can lead to greater awareness of the services and expertise you provide.

The ultimate goal, of course, is to bring in new patients. But do not make every post into a hard sell. If you want someone to actually follow you on Instagram, you need to make it fun, and

sales pitches are not fun. By all means, slip those sales posts in every week or so. But the majority of your posts should be more casual—more like hanging out at your office. Trust that if someone follows you, they understand you are a business and want people to join your practice.

I encourage you to use Instagram to share your light in the world, educate your audience, and let your practice shine bright.



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Google My Business: The Most Important Piece of Online Presence

Some of the most common questions about practice websites have to do with SEO: the science of optimizing your online presence so that Internet users can find you. Since more than 90% of consumers currently rely on the Google search engine, SEO really means optimizing your online information so that Google will find you.

When a buyer (or in our case, a patient) indicates an interest in a local business, that generates what is known as a local search. This happens automatically when city or state names, ZIP codes, phrases like “near me,” or other search terms suggesting a location are entered into the query box. The resulting list of businesses appearing within the box at the top of the results page is known as the “local pack.” This includes the first three businesses that Google thinks best represent what the searcher is looking for, a map showing where these businesses are located, and a “more places” link leading to other businesses that meet the user’s criteria. Below the local pack are the “organic results,” or the links to businesses ranked by a com-

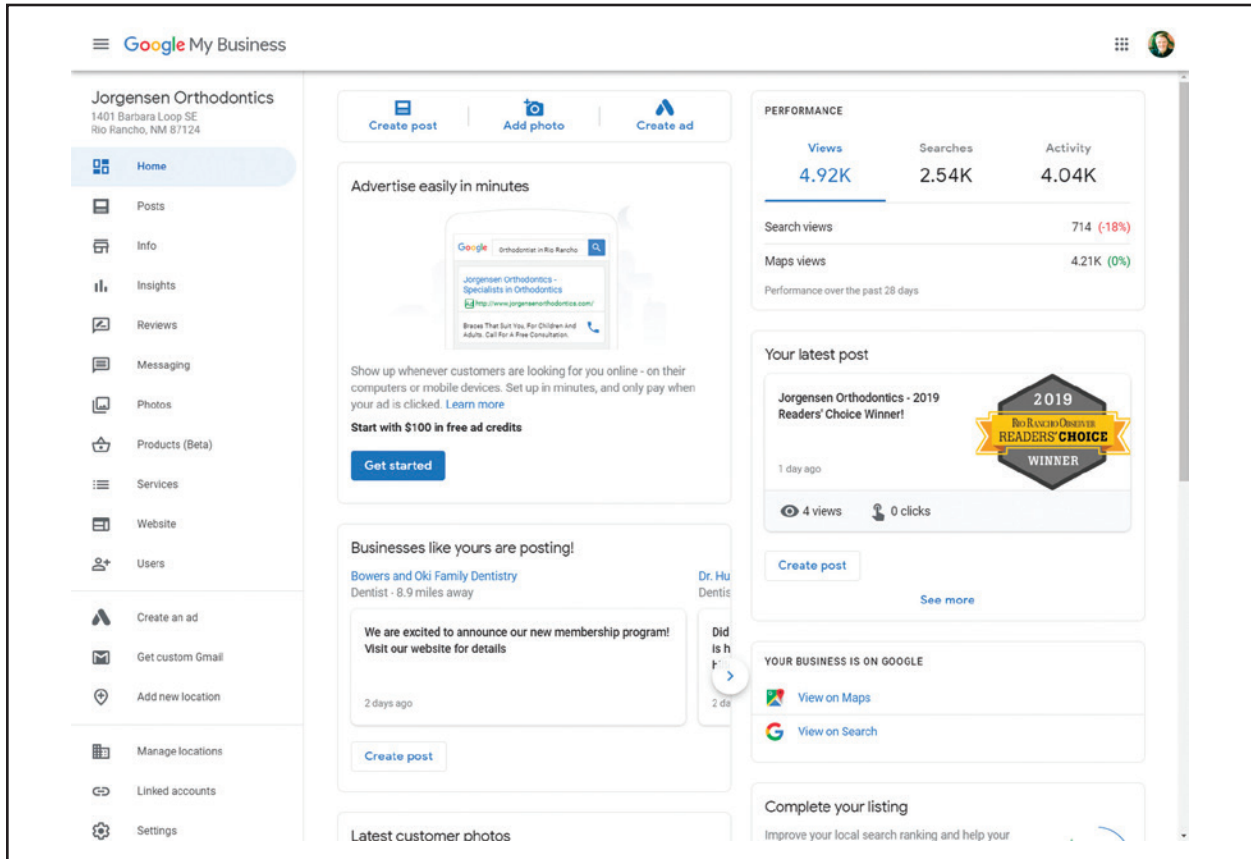


Fig. 7 Dashboard for Google My Business* (GMB). Listings generated automatically by Google can be monitored and customized here.**

plex formula (algorithm) that is beyond the scope of this article.

All the information used by Google to rank orthodontic practices in the local pack is derived from the business listing site known as Google My Business (GMB). Not only does GMB determine how your practice is ranked, but the information stored there becomes the response to any search-engine query. A GMB listing is automatically generated for every business that has a physical address (Fig. 7). Google obtains these addresses and rudimentary information about your business from other directories and listings it finds online (referred to as “citations”). The information that automatically appears in your GMB listing will be only as

***Registered trademark of Google Inc., Mountain View, CA; www.google.com.

accurate as the citations that were used to create it.

The most important action you can take with regard to your GMB listing is to claim and verify it. Doing so allows you to correct the existing information about your practice; provide additional information in the form of text, pictures, or videos; and respond to both positive and negative reviews posted by patients. In its ongoing effort to provide the best and most current information, Google now asks visitors if they are familiar with your practice by presenting them with questions it believes will help other consumers (Fig. 8). These may include: “Is this business family friendly?” “Is there sufficient parking available?” or “Are the bathrooms handicap accessible?” It is important that you monitor and respond to what is being said about your practice. Google also allows visitors to suggest

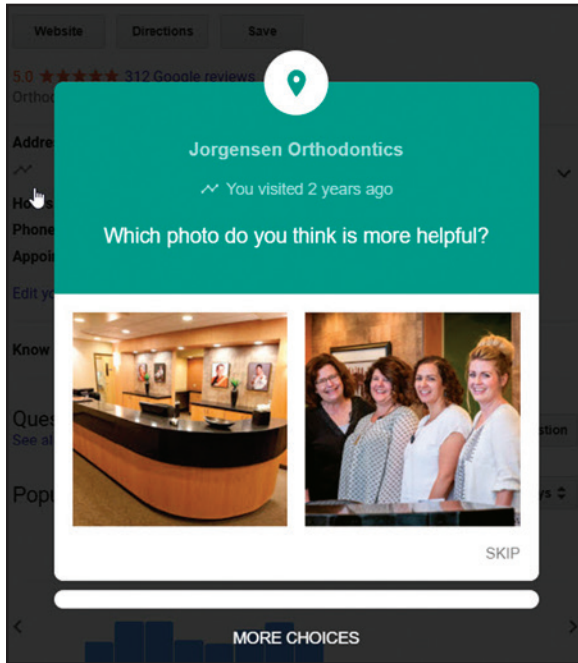


Fig. 8 Google asks visitors direct questions it believes will help other consumers. Monitor these responses to ensure accuracy.

changes to the details of your GMB listing. Claiming your listing and being recognized as the owner gives you the opportunity to review suggested changes before they are made public. Another feature that can be a source of misinformation is the Question and Answer section. Readers can ask questions about your practice, and other readers are then allowed to provide answers to those questions, accurate or not. By verifying your listing, your answers will be tagged “From the owner,” lending more credence to your responses.

Perhaps the most important components of your GMB listing are the orange star ratings that appear front and center in the local pack and the more detailed review screen that comes up when your business is selected from the list (Fig. 9). Google reviews are a critical factor when potential patients compare your practice with others. Good reviews (five stars) are essential, but the Google algorithm also considers the total number, age, and frequency of new reviews in its rankings. According to Google, business owners should respond to

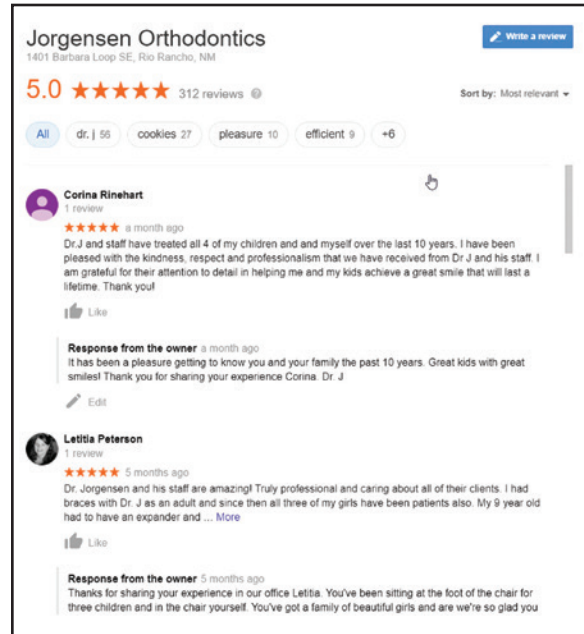


Fig. 9 GMB ranking depends on such factors as stars, frequency and number of reviews, and responses from business owners. Always respond to both positive and negative reviews.

all reviews—both positive and negative—to demonstrate that they are responsive to their customers.

The position of your practice in Google’s search results, as well as the accuracy of the data presented there, is perhaps the most important piece of your online presence. It is critical not only to find, claim, and update your GMB listing, but to consistently monitor it, since visitors can change your information and Google is constantly changing its platform.



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