



There are various ways that LinkedIn can be used to enhance local visibility, strengthen local connections and even expand your patient base. **Kerryn Ramsey** investigates.

The right connection

Touted as the largest professional social network in the world, LinkedIn has become a handy marketing tool for business-savvy dentists. In Australia, it now has more than four million members and, not surprisingly, an estimated four out of five are professionals.

“As a dentist, LinkedIn is all about reputation management,” says Tracy Raiteri of Townsville Social Media Marketing, “so it’s important to have a well-optimised company page and complete professional profile. Then it can be used to build a network of prospects in the local area as well as industry leaders.”

Launched in 2002 by US software wiz Reid Hoffman, LinkedIn is primarily considered a B2B [business to business] tool, but it can also work effectively on the B2C [business to consumer] side. To utilise this, a dentist needs to be aware of various strategies and tools that can be implemented quickly and easily.

“For your dental business to rank high in a Google search, one of the most important things to have is plenty of consistent mentions of your business name, address and telephone number across the web,” explains Lachlan Wells, digital marketer at Optimising.

“Google uses these mentions to judge how reputable your business is. Having a business profile on LinkedIn is great for professional networking and employer branding, but for SEO, having another mention of your address and other details will help you to rank higher.” And this means that your brand will take up more

‘real estate’ in Google search and have a higher chance of prospective patients finding you.

As a LinkedIn member, it’s important to build your connections and endorse people you respect. They are likely to endorse you back, and that means they’re sharing your profile with their own trusted networks. It’s a way to build relationships with colleagues, businesspeople and patients.

Dr Quang Tran, practice owner of Smile@Norwest Dental Surgery in the Sydney suburb of Baulkham Hills, has found LinkedIn useful when expanding his contact with the local community. “Often after I meet someone at a function or meeting, I then connect on LinkedIn,” he says. “It’s also often people wanting to connect with me to promote their business.”

Dr Tran spends about 10 to 15 minutes a week browsing LinkedIn, mostly connecting or accepting other people’s invites.

As a busy practice owner, connecting with salespeople and managers of dental companies can actually boost your visibility and credibility. “If you’re mentioned on the website of a dental brand, and the publicity includes a link to your website, it can significantly boost your rankings,” explains Wells. “Google is looking for mentions of your practice on sites that are closely related to dentistry to judge whether you’re a leader in this field. If you truly believe in the product and there is no conflict of interest, it can work in your favour.”

Unlike social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, posting

is not the key element on LinkedIn. Tracy Raiteri says there's no point overdoing it—once a week is adequate.

Dr John Mamutil, practice owner of Brace5 in Sydney's Castle Hill, agrees: "I can see many people connect just for the sake of getting their numbers up but I have been selective to keep it to people who are relevant to my interest groups."

"I have found that placing short posts and descriptions are the best way to get people interested enough to make connections," says Dr Mamutil.

Over the past six months, his posts garnered a lot of interest and connections. "I do write about my orthodontics with a special focus on Invisalign, but that's also tied in with my strong interest in technology," he says. "So, that's why I do post a lot of material with the software development work that I do on the side—all related to orthodontics."

To expand your business through LinkedIn there are other strategies and tools to utilise, such as LinkedIn Groups. This can generate an impressive number of connections but it's important to start a group that has a broader appeal than just dental information. The only catch is that it's important to stay active.

Quote

Tracy Raiteri of Townsville Social Media Marketing

"As a dentist, LinkedIn is all about reputation management. It's important to have a company page and complete professional profile."

For Dr Mamutil, LinkedIn is not just centred around orthodontics. Professional-level photography, computing and music are all on the radar for this practitioner. "This spread has rapidly increased my connections over a short period of time," he says.

Most importantly, these business and interest groups provide a connection with colleagues who live in the nearby vicinity. Over time, this allows you to strengthen your relationship with members who are also patients, as well as generating prospective clients. Raiteri notes that when you join a group, make sure you add your practice's website or blog to the group to drive traffic to your site.

Another way to expand your practice's business through LinkedIn is with recommendations—it's a way to acknowledge dentists and specialists that you trust.

Undoubtedly, one of LinkedIn's most powerful tools is recruitment. This useful service lets you search for those who are actively looking for a job, but it's also a chance to reach out to established dentists, dental nurses and staff by offering them a new opportunity.

Overall, there's no denying that LinkedIn aims at the B2B market, but it can also improve your business by expanding your patient base. Dr Tran sees it as a trickle-down effect. "As a practice owner, I find LinkedIn useful mainly for social connections, reading interesting articles and participating in various professional groups," he says. "I don't use it as a tool to connect with patients but then again, I have actually connected with quite a few since we have similar interests. And having a healthy number of contacts is always a good thing for networking." □

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