

Dr. Ken Serota - Cracking the Social Media Code

Dr. O'Keefe: Today, I welcome Dr. Ken Serota who has practiced for many years as an endodontist in Mississauga, Ontario. I know Ken in a different capacity. Over many years, he's given me advice. Given me insights about the potential for the digital revolution to actually revolutionize the practice of dentistry. So today I'm going to ask him some advice that a late career dentist would ask of somebody who knows about the potential for digital and social media to impact on the practice of dentistry. Ken, let me frame a question for you. I'm a late career dentist, to date, I haven't social media as part of my marketing strategies for my office, but I'm just wondering if between now and when I sell my practice, maybe within five years if I actually should get the practice geared up to be involved with social media. What would be your concise top-level advice about that?

Dr. Serota: Social media is pervasive. There is not a business out there--and dentistry is a business--there's not no business out there that hasn't adapted it in one way or the other for sales, for marketing, for anything that pertains to getting engagement on the part of the customer or the patient. Depends on how you look at it. We are a clinical dentist. That's the patient. We are at the same time business people. That's the client base. An answer to the question on social media is driving the manner in which we communicate daily. You can walk down the street patients or anyone on the street isn't under her cell phone. Go in a Starbucks they're on their computer. But everybody in some way, shape or form is communicating technologically. The societal use of technology and social media is pervasive and it's not exclusive to North America. It is global.

Dr. Serota: So, accepting that as a reality is social media use is reflective of societal norms. It's, it's not an outlier it's something that people have come to accept. Now, in my, my perspective is it will define the culture of your practice. And why is that important? Because today with the oversupply of dentists, which is real, you have to become something different, something unique. Your style has to become distinctive. You can't be the same as another dentist who is kitty-corner to, um, it just isn't possible. It doesn't give you the aptitude the facility rep to bring people into your practice. For example, text message. It's routine. If I want to talk to my grandchildren, I have to text message them. But the same applies to your patients. That's how they're used to talking and communicating. So you could confirm and schedule appointments with them. Share Birthday greetings uh, ecards, whatever it takes.

Dr. Serota: The advantage obviously is that you're computer run in the office and so all of these things pop up, that's the algorithms. You can use it for anything is what I'm saying. Birthday greetings. You can use it for holiday messaging. The um, the advantage is that you, you could use it to promote your services. I find it disconcerting to walk down the street and see a dentist office that has a

sandwich board in front of their practice and saying, this is what we do. Uh no, you are not just doing that. You're a dentist, your team. You want to bring people in. You deliver oral health, not whitening and this, that and the other. So, the other thing that I think is crucial is that in addition to gauging people in terms of what you do as a dentist, you want to engage people who are coming into your practice with--satisfied people--who have been involved in your practice. And so, to me, that's video testimonials. It's not done to any great degree, which is unfortunate. You go to a website and you see these static little reviews and you know, you don't, it's questioning whether you believe it or it's low hanging fruit or it's been cherry picked. But a video testimonial on an iPhone, um, where you just say, you know, how was your experience? And they can be as effusive as they want. That's, that's a true testimonial to your practice. And those can be promoted on Facebook and LinkedIn and Instagram. And any platform that you choose--on YouTube if you have channel.

Dr. Serota: So, the point of social media is that you engage, you're talking about a two way communication. It's like speaking, uh, you can, uh, you can invite patients to be part of your Facebook page. You know, ask them when they come to the front desk, this is our website and position it in such a way; and this is we're on Facebook or on LinkedIn, you know, befriend us or let us befriend you. It is again way of building things. If you're on a Facebook forum with these people where they come to your Facebook page, they theoretically and they bring their family, their friends, their coworkers. It's a fairly simplistic way of reaching out. Now the other advantage is that there are metrics and all of these platforms, so you can keep track of patient retention and acquisition. You can see when they open an email blast, you can see what time of week, time of day, that sort of thing. So, it tells you a about your client base and patient base in terms of how to engage with them. The other advantage is that especially if you're selling your practice, and this is the key, you want to look progressive and you want to be progressive much as look progressive and invariably if a purchaser went into the file decks on your computer and he saw all kinds of people who are no longer on your re-care system, that's a concern.

Dr. Serota: But by the same token rather than sending out cards, whatever, if you've got these people in your computer database, you can send information out to them. And that's just another feature of growing your practice. Again, prior to selling. And face the facts as we get older, there is attrition. And so this is another way of bringing the practice on stream. And the other advantage from my standpoint is it allows you to have a uh, an ongoing discussion of a new of new patients--sorry, new staff members and the associate for example, or if it's somebody who's buying the practice, who are they, how do they fit into this team. What culture are they composed of, are they going to integrate with? Uh, it's just, it's such a way of letting people come inside of your practice and see who you are and what your practice represents.

Dr. Serota: The reason for all this is that there is a diminishing ratio of 10 patients. This runs again 1997 to 2005, 2014, based on the colour bars. This is just the way it is in major centres, uh, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Calgary, and Vancouver, the ratio is changing and not for the better. That's something that you need to recognize. Plus, attrition there is less than most people to access. So, by creating a community, you can bring your team and your patients, your client base together your patient list together. You're not an outlier. They are part of your family. And I think that's the key to social media. Above and beyond its culture, and but beyond that, it's family. And they become to know you on so many different levels of courses that you're taking, technology that you've introduced, what's happening to your team members. That's how you ramp up your practice. You amplify the value of the practice to both yourself and ultimately to the retail purchaser. So, having an active social media presence, how can I put this? It makes your office more inviting. Uh, from my stand point, it demonstrates that you're current. You're actively engaged in a social media presence, which is what they see when they go by retail. Uh, you know, they put down their email address and suddenly they're flooded with all kinds of invitations and you know, this is our price off whatever, you get caught up in that database. But in the case of a practice it's benevolent. It's not somebody trying to sell you, sell you, sell you. This is, you know, thank you for coming. This is what's going on inside and you can use whatever you want for re-care, et cetera. The thing to that amazes me is that e-transfers, you know, you want people to pay their bills? Have them Pay by e-transfers.

Dr. Serota: Okay. So, if you look at the numbers in North America, 241 million people are on Facebook. The numbers here are low with regard to Instagram, I think Instagram is probably one of the best platforms out there. The comments are usually short. They're usually, you know, we love you, you know, this is great. They're not, they're not this sort of lengthy commentary that occasionally can veer off into something that you don't appreciate it. Uh, not always, obviously. But YouTube channels, again, that's testimonials that um, you know, you were out on a philanthropic effort in a run for the...did a walk for the cancer association, whatever it is. You did a ride for the ROM (Royal Ontario Museum), you did a ride for this. It shows that you're part of the community. You belong in that community you're a constituent. You seek to, um, share your, practice, your team with things that are going on in your community. I think that's a very powerful tool. And similarly, on LinkedIn, increasingly, more and more dentists are putting up messaging; just not even on, on topic that, not even dental messages, but you know, we, we've done this, we've done that. It's just they're intriguing or compelling and it's not like kind of, well this is a root canal in your face. It's like this is what we do, this is who we are. And I think that's essential.

Dr. Serota: Um, similarly, if you take a look at the numbers and the degrees of participation, obviously you would expect that as people get older, what be dropping off, but they're still using it. They look at their portfolio, they talk to their grandparents.

If they're in excessive, say, you know, 50 odd years old. What's interesting though, is that the incidence of the use of the internet, Google, whatever, for 60 for 61% they're going to go looking after a seeking of healthcare information. 61% over 50 will look for health information and I'm not suggesting that they're always going to get the right information, but they are actively searching. They want a second opinion. That is something they can access freely without concern about offending anyone. On the flip side, those under those between 18 and 49 they are looking for healthcare, are looking for providers. They're too busy at work, they don't have time. They want to go into something that they can, you know, [inaudible]. They'll go to Google, they'll find search engine optimization. Some people will buy ads, other people will, you don't figure up advertising campaigns and they're at the top of the clicks. But that's how they're going to find you.

Dr. Serota:

So, um, these are the questions of why you don't participate. So, let's take a peek. It takes too much time. Yes, it does. It's requires robust posting. It requires involvement. But again, you can pick people from your practice. People that are comfortable with it, they can do it offsite, pay them an hourly rate to do it. They're not interested. Well, if your practice is getting [inaudible] today, I can't see how you're not experiencing attrition, that's just the nature of the beast. So, to be not interested is kind of shooting yourself in the foot. They're planning on doing in the future. Well, that's, that's a very reactive, not proactive. They don't know how to get started. You can go to, you can go to YouTube and anything under the sun you want to ask it's there. How do you implement it? You can go all of these companies that are marketing it, it's not an issue. I tried it, but I stopped. Well, I guess that's sort of expecting an immediate response. You're looking for intangibles and trying to measure it. It's like increasing your gross and it's not how it works. They don't see the value because again, they're not getting immediate response. It, this is something that is a part of your practice, but it's a question of, it makes it more robust. It introduces not really intangibles, it's just something that is slower than you would normally expect if you amped up your growth through running associated and extended your hours, whatever. It's different. Patients don't use social media. Well, the statistics that were just presenting shows, that's a fallacy. And it's too intimidating. Well, yes, but again, your team members will use it. They're more comfortable. They can outreach from the practice. Again, you're building a client base that makes you eminently more sale-able.

Dr. Serota:

And the key here is the fear that I see as a concern is negative reviews. Well, you put yourself out there, uh, you know, you can have a, a receptionist that isn't polite--that's as damaging. On social media and now that it's available and you're going to Yelp or whatever. And people say what a, what a horror show, that was just the most unpleasant experience in my life and they were only interested in money. Well, whatever. Those are people, you know, it's kind of a, you know, they have, they have a forum and they're going to stay something.

people like to do, that. There's a thing called reputation reclamation and it's not a science, but it's a concept. So, if you monitor these sites or whatever it is for negative reviews, the faster you get back to the more positive your response, the easier it is to spin and flip the negative response into something positive. People see you answered. You, um, you know, that's, that's not a normal experience in our practice. It's unfortunate that's what you experienced. How can we help you? What can we do? Here's my email, here's the office. Here's the office number is my cell phone--I'm not sure, I don't know that I wouldn't do that, but here's a way to connect with me. Here's a way to connect with me and I will take care of whatever is concerning you. That's empathy. It's just, you know, you're, you're professional and you're empathetic at the same time. Anybody reading the string of posts would have to find that very exciting.

Dr. Serota: So, the question is, what do I put out there? And the answer is very simple, anything about dentistry. Dentistry related news items perhaps or you know, or a reflection of how things are changing, technology advancements, you know, robotic whatever in terms of crown preparations. I don't like specials special, excuse me. I don't like special offers and coupons. To me that's the meaning it's done but doesn't sit with me. That's not professional. Staff photos I like because you don't have to mention particulars this the name we can talk about backgrounds where they went to school, what their hobbies are, but they're alive and for that matter you could actually have them do a voice file and you're not just looking at the list. You know, this is Sharon, this is Jane, this is John. And let them talk at you when the website. Office updates and information. Blogs. I'm convinced that the most effective way of bringing people in your practice is blogs. The usual holiday greetings. Um, you know this, that--and you can, you can basically do them demographically. Not everybody celebrates Christmas. Happy holidays. Um, fun non-dental poss.

Dr. Serota: You see something, you know, a dog dancing or something, you share it. These things are all over the internet. Patient photos, if they agree. Again, that's video testimonials. Um, and office news, uh, they had been in that practice for ages. They want to know what's going, that's ecosystem. That's family, that's culture. Somebody just had a baby--congratulations. Whatever it happens to be, you continue to involve them in the core of your practice. And if you're transitioning out and want to be well compensated for all those years of work and effort, then raise the consciousness of your patient base and show who's ever purchasing it as you bring them in and bring them on board and make the patient base aware of it. They become part of that community by default.

Dr. Serota: The, the message, the take home message from all of this, John, it's, it's, there's a myriad of issues to discuss. This is a short period of time, but these are the primary issues of concern and value. Your office looks to be engaged. It is engaged. You are, uh, you're welcoming to your patients. You're continuing that connection even when they're out of the practice. You don't disappear for

months and months at a time until the next re-care appointment. We were always there. It demonstrates that your office is dynamic, not just you know, standing your ground, you know, grass is growing underneath your feet, that kind of business. You're dynamic. You are out there, you are progressive, you are progressive in what you're doing in terms of continuing education, what your team members are doing in terms of community affairs, philanthropy, what you support in your community. You have to create a vital office that is not simply a receptacle. It has to provide. It's a crucible for all things in the area in which you practice, and you are family.

Dr. Serota: I can't emphasize that enough. Your family. If you treat people like your family, they become your family and that's the power of social media, the true power of social media. And if you want to sell your practice, then you welcome the purchaser. You make him a member of your family, or her, excuse me, make him or her a member of your family your community, and the transition is smooth. It's not like somebody just took over who is he? and I love the previous dentist. They've already had the time to make contact with the connections and you're bringing them into a more progressive, more future focused, if you will, practice and the transition is smooth, clean, you know. It's not like they suddenly, who's this guy? Who's this lady who came in? You're part of the team to begin with. And that's the value of social media in terms of transition.

Dr. O'Keefe: Ken, thank you very much for your insights about this very important area. What I take away from all of this is that no matter what new technologies exist out there, dentistry is still a people business and communicating and being honest and open and transparent is the key to success in any professional. And dentistry is a particularly good example of a people profession.