

Promoting Oral Health Using Social Media



Social Media: A Fact Sheet

What is social media and why is it important?

Social media is a form of social interaction/networking where information is created, shared and exchanged in a virtual space through the internet. Social media offers the ability to reshare information and connect with a wider audience than traditional means of communication. Social media promotes collaboration, discussion and input from a diverse audience. Additionally, social media is inexpensive – costing little to nothing, and it’s widely accessible, with many users accessing applications anywhere and everywhere with mobile devices.

40% of cell phone owners access social media on their phone, with 28% doing it daily. Young people, Black Non-Hispanics, Hispanics, the highly educated and those with a higher annual household income are more likely to use social networking on their phones.

Who is using social media?

It isn’t just those under the age of 18! According to the Pew Research Center’s Internet Project (2014), 74% of online adults use social networking sites with about 85% of users being between the ages of 18 and 49 and 49% being 65 years of age and older. Men and women are using social media just about equally. In addition, income or education doesn’t play a major role -72% of high school graduates use it vs. 73% of those with a college education, and 79% making less than \$30K vs. 78% making \$75K+.

In addition to individuals, businesses, news outlets, organizations and institutions, and government agencies have begun to use social media to move their “product,” whether it be actual goods to purchase, the promotion of an event, or educational messages.

Why should we use social media to promote oral health?

Social media is inexpensive – with state budgets dwindling and little funding going to initiate communication plans and media and marketing of oral health programs, it just makes sense to implement a tool that is virtually free. Social media will also help to attract a new diverse group of organizational partners that you may not have thought would be interested in oral health; working together, you can keep the oral health message alive. By asking a question on social media, you’re able to actively engage with residents, stakeholders and decision makers. By posting tips, as well as links to other resources or news articles, you’re boosting oral health’s presence instantaneously. Adding videos and graphics allows you to engage a wider audience – remember, a picture can be worth a thousand words.

I’m sold... how do we get started?

First, check with your public information officer to see if you can establish a state oral health program account with one or two social media platforms that your office can manage (You’ll never know if you don’t ask!). If they aren’t too keen on you starting your own accounts, ask about the process for posting on their Facebook page or Twitter account. Remember, almost 100% of state health departments use social media, and most if not all are eager for information. Finally, check with your state’s oral health coalition – it’s their purpose to promote oral health, and the majority use social media. Be sure to discuss specific formats for sending the information, timelines regarding approval of the content, and the actual lead time needed to post , tweet, etc. ... you don’t want to be left behind if there is something important you have to share.

What are the primary social media applications?

While there are several different applications to choose from, these are the ones most utilized.

Facebook allows the user to develop a profile, acquire fans who “like” their page, post photographs and other graphics, as well as share and comment with no restriction on character count. The user is also able to “like” other pages, send a personal message to another user, as well as select privacy settings to determine who may access and post on their page. (71% of online adults use Facebook.)

Twitter allows the user to gain “followers” although the “tweets” are limited to 140 letter characters, and posted graphics are not readily seen but are accessed with an embedded URL. Twitter allows for retweeting – a form of redirecting the original message to increase the audience. (17% of online adults use Twitter)

Pinterest is like a scrapbook, collecting only graphics including photographs, drawings, cartoons, etc. of a particular theme or topic. The user creates boards where they “pin” the graphics they like. Most pins have a website origin, and they may be repinned by other Pinterest users. Because it uses only graphics, this application may be useful to a visual learner. (21% of online adults use Pinterest)

Instagram allows the user to take photos and videos and share them on other applications like Facebook and Twitter. A unique characteristic of the photos is their square shape, similar to an old Polaroid. Note that Instagram is strictly a mobile application. (17% of online adults use Instagram)

#whatisahashtag?

A hashtag is a word or an unspaced phrase preceded by the pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic. It draws attention to what is being posted, and a search for the hashtag returns the set of messages that contain it. Hashtags are used with Twitter, Instagram and even Facebook. Examples include: #NOHC14 #fluoride #2thbrush

How do you post on Facebook?

Step 1: Type an oral health message or cut & paste a link from a website or video into the box. If you’ve used a link, you’ll notice that an image has now appeared in the box. You’re now ready to backspace and delete the original URL from the box and retype your own unique message. Tip: When posting, engage your audience – ask a question, take a poll, ask people what they think.

Step 2: If you typed your own message you can add an image using the option at the top of the box or you can change the image that came with the website by uploading a new image using the option at the bottom.

Tip: Visual is better – it attracts attention.

Step 3: Now you’re ready to “post.”

