

ARCHIVED

Report

A PRACTICE DIVIDED

HOW OFFICE MANAGERS & DENTISTS
VIEW MARKETING DIFFERENTLY

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A PRACTICE DIVIDED

In most dental practices, the office manager runs the office while the dentist performs and manages treatment in the operatories. As a result, the two roles have very different experiences of the practice – particularly when it comes to evaluating which marketing and communication techniques are most effective with patients. This can create a divide in the practice, with office managers and dentists understanding and approaching marketing from very different points of view.

To confirm this phenomenon, we compared the responses from dental office managers and dentists to our nationwide digital marketing survey. And as expected, office managers typically value new marketing technology much more highly than dentists. Similarly, their responses are more closely aligned with patient preferences (as revealed in our 2013 nationwide consumer survey).

Working on the front lines of the practice (answering the phones, talking to patients, scheduling and confirming appointments), dental office managers get a firsthand look at where new patients are coming from, how marketing is performing and how new and existing patients communicate with the practice – information that is usually less obvious from the back office. The challenge then is communicating this insight to the other decision makers in the practice who may remain skeptical, or unaware, of these trends.

This report identifies the biggest discrepancies between how dentists and dental office managers currently view new marketing technology and offers a framework for how to communicate front office insight to the dentist, and incorporate it into the business decisions of the practice.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

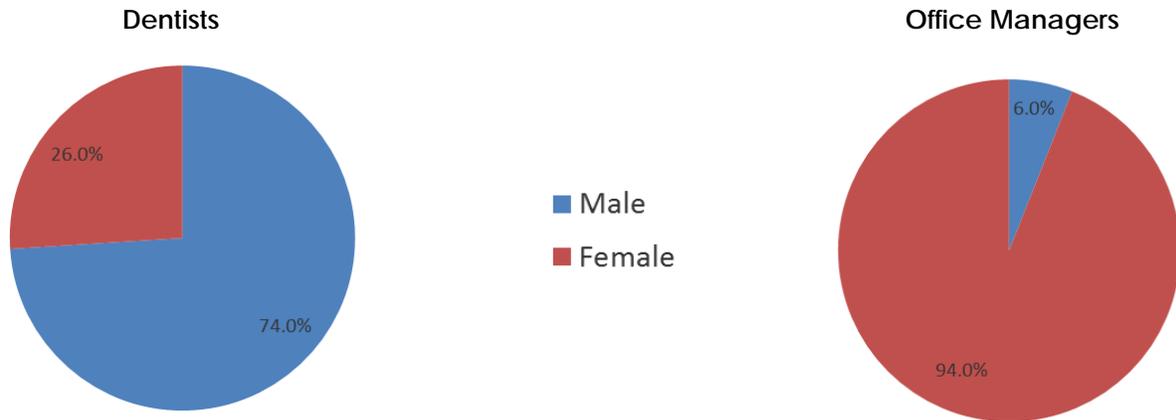
This report analyzes the results of an online survey for dental professionals – and specifically compares responses from dentists with responses from office managers. The survey and report were sponsored by Futuredontics and the American Association of Dental Office Managers. Respondents took the survey between April 1, 2013 and April 30, 2013, and a total of 1,779 completed responses were received to the survey during this time.

For the purposes of this report, only the 1,472 responses from dentists and office managers were analyzed (excluding those who self-identified as dental assistants, hygienists, front office staff, consultants, and “other”).

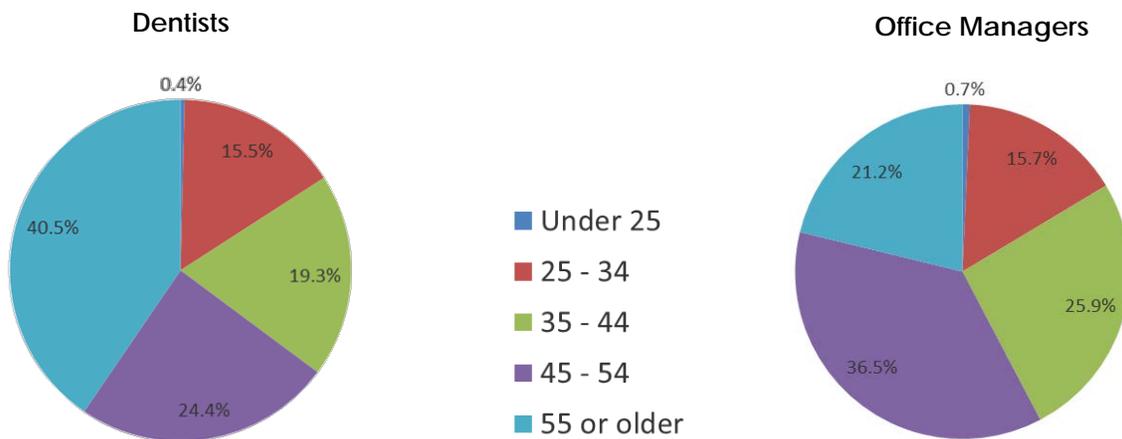
DIVIDES IN DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 1,472 respondents analyzed, 65.3% were dentists and 34.7% were dental office managers. Since this report will look at the differences in responses between office managers and dentists, we first wanted to acknowledge any meaningful differences in the demographic breakdown of these groups.

The most notable difference between the two roles was gender. Among our respondents, the majority of dentists were male (74%) while office managers were almost exclusively female (94%).



Respondents of both groups were similar in age, although dentists tended to be slightly older. The largest group of dentists, over 40%, reported that they were 55 years old or older. Almost the same percentage (36.5%) of office managers were between 45 -54 years old.

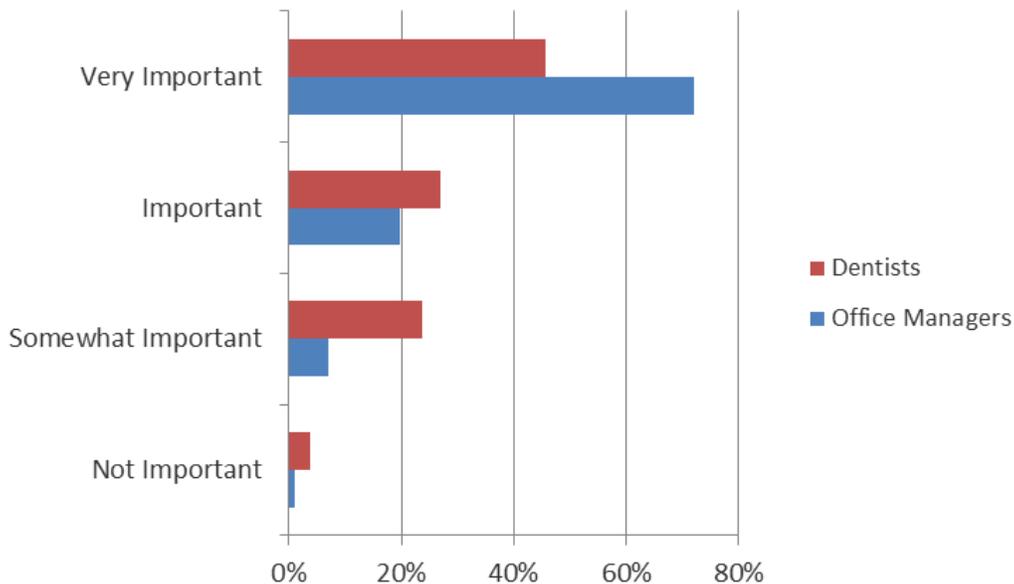


There was nothing significantly different about how long the two groups had worked in dentistry among our respondents. In both cases, the majority had been in the industry more than 15 years.

DIVIDE #1: THE PRACTICE WEBSITE

The dental industry as a whole has made great progress in recognizing the value of a website. However, when we broke down responses by role, we saw that **dental office managers are much more convinced of the value of a practice website than dentists**. Office managers overwhelmingly rate the practice website as “very important” (72.2%) compared to only 45.6% of dentists.

How important do you believe a website is to a dental practice?



The Marketing Reality

The evidence proves that a website is becoming more and more critical for a dental practice. According to our 2013 consumer survey, nearly a third of **patients say their choice of dentist is greatly influenced by the quality of the practice's website.**¹ Furthermore, they make decisions about the practice based on the quality, design and features of the site. In fact, 46.1% of consumers say a website's design is the number one criterion for discerning the credibility of a company.²

In other words, patients are making judgments — unfounded or not — about the quality of dentistry offered in the practice based on the website alone.

Steps You Can Take

- The most important thing is that the practice website is modern and regularly maintained. If it is, this is simply a matter of being more vocal about the successes of the website on a regular basis so those in the back office realize its impact.

- Make decisions about the website based on features that have the biggest effect on attracting patients (SEO optimization, “Request an Appointment” functionality, mobile compatibility, etc.) rather than aesthetics alone.
- Avoid using general observations like, “Our website is really out of date” or “Patients hate our site.” While these may be true, this type of feedback is easy to dismiss as anecdotal.
- Agree that all conversations should be framed around the specific benefits that would come from updating the site, or consequences of doing nothing. For example:
 - *“There have been so many changes to how Google ranks websites. Making sure our site is properly optimized will ensure our practice shows up when patients search for a dentist.”*
 - *“Our website still uses outdated Flash technology that doesn’t work on Apple devices. That means anyone with an iPhone or iPad won’t be able to find us online.”*
 - *“We need a dedicated mobile site. Our current site is unreadable to everyone who uses a smartphone, and that’s really costing us patients.”*
- Always bring the conversation back to whether changes will increase production and help attract more new patients.

ADDITIONAL WEBSITE RESOURCES:

Futuredontics has a **free whitepaper called “13 Warning Signs Your Website Needs Help”** that can arm you with specific features and statistics to help make your argument. You can even print it out for doctor to start the conversation.

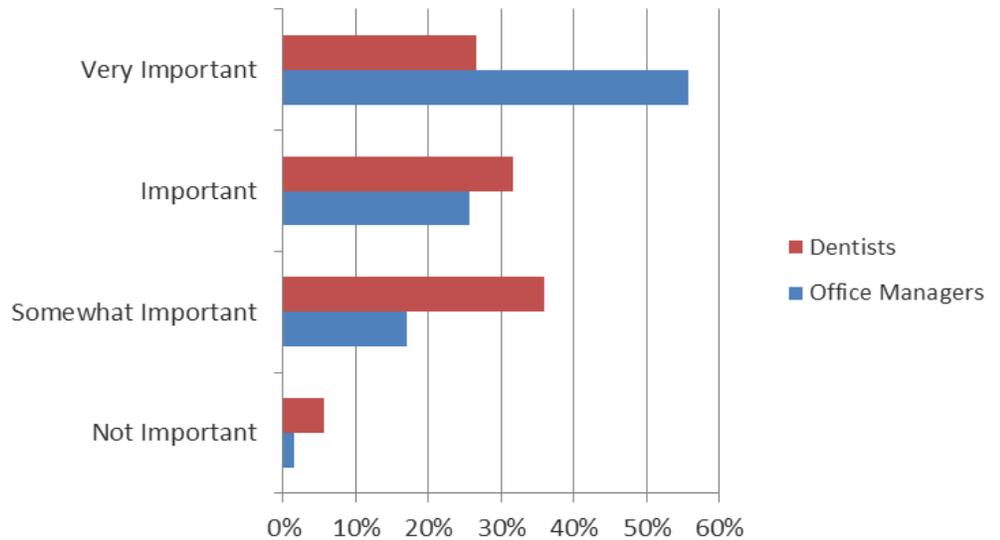
Our free, on-demand **Webinar called “Google Hates Your Website,”** hosted by founder Fred Joyal is another great resource, and reviews the most common challenges dental websites face – and how to overcome them.

To get a **FREE** copy of any our additional resources, including whitepapers, videos, webinars and more, visit www.futuredontics.com/MoreResources

DIVIDE #2: SOCIAL MEDIA

We saw the biggest separation between office managers and dentists in the arena of social media. Perhaps because they are responsible for practice communication, marketing and patient interaction, **office managers tend to value the importance of social networks to the practice. Dentists, however, remain largely unconvinced.** 81.4% of office managers rate social media as “important” or “very important.” Just over half of dentists feel the same (58.2%)

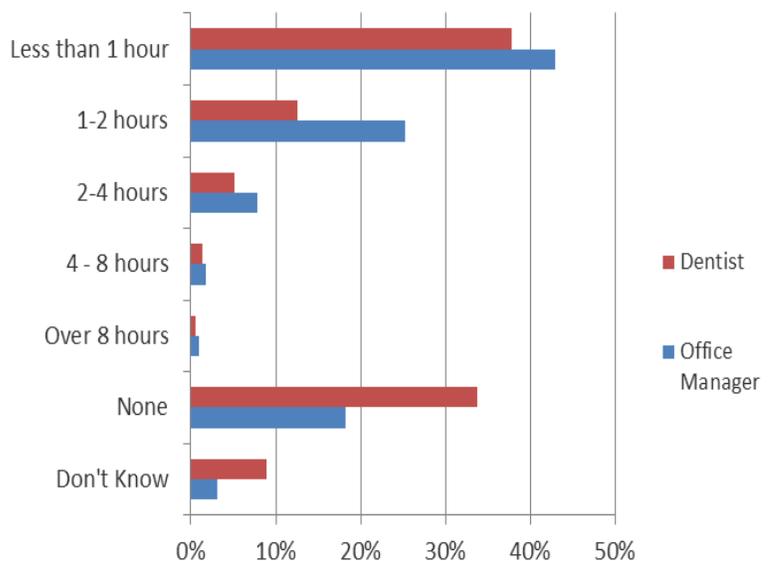
How important do you believe social media is to a dental practice?



There was also big difference in perceptions between the two roles regarding how much time is currently being spent on social media – with dentists almost twice as likely as office managers to believe that zero hours are being devoted to these activities.

Again office managers, who are likely the ones doing or managing these tasks, report more time was spent in general.

How much of the week is spent by the practice engaging in social media?



The Marketing Reality

Social media sites like Facebook are becoming an increasingly important part of dental marketing. Not only are these the sites where patients typically spend most of their online time, according to our recent dental patient survey, **24% would actually use Facebook to search for a dentist.**³

More importantly, interaction on social media has been proven to translate into buying behavior, with 51% of consumers saying they're more likely to buy a product or service since becoming a "fan" online.⁴

Because social media is still a relatively new phenomenon, it can be difficult for a business owner to justify spending a lot of time or resources – particularly because results may not be easily measurable. However it's important to note that maintaining a social media presence does not necessarily require a huge time commitment. There are easy-to-use resources that make it easy to interact with and monitor social networks – some of these will even help set up your profiles for you.

Steps You Can Take

- Start by simply agreeing that patients are heavily utilizing these networks. (Facebook is currently the second most popular site in the world⁵). If anyone in the practice doubts this, consider polling your patients while they're in the office to reveal how many of them are active on social media.
- **Set a minimum level of engagement** (the practice can't afford to be absent from major online spaces). If nothing else, assign someone in the practice who's familiar with social networks to set up a Facebook page and claim your business profile on the major reviews sites, Yelp and Google+.
- If you use a patient communication software like PatientActivator, enable the Facebook integration so patients can request an appointment directly from Facebook. This helps turn your social media into a source of new patients, as well as referrals.
- Quantify the time commitment required. Rather than asserting, "We need to be on Facebook," suggest allotting a specific amount of time for social media. Even 20 minutes a day to post something about the practice and monitor and respond to patient reviews is a huge improvement over not interacting at all.
- When a new patient comes to the practice, note the source that attracted them in patient software. This will gradually build a clear case for how many patients are coming to the practice from online sources.

ADDITIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES:

FutureDentics has several resources that should prove helpful in this arena. First, suggest that the entire team watch Fred Joyal's pre-recorded **Webinar, "Pain-Free Social Media,"** which specifically shows dental practices how to easily incorporate online marketing best practices.

Then, for help with how to set up a practice Facebook page, get our **newest whitepaper, "Facebook 101."** The whitepaper provides step-by-step instructions for creating your profile, outlines the reasons the site is so crucial for dentists and offers hints for posting content.

***PatientActivator** is our award-winning patient reminder and online marketing service – offering easy tools for communication, reviews, social media and more. In addition to unlimited live support, our team will even help set up and optimize your Facebook page, including adding a "Request an Appointment" function, your positive patient reviews, and special offers or coupons.

To watch our free Webinar, get a copy of our Facebook whitepaper, or learn more about PatientActivator, visit www.futuredentics.com/MoreResources

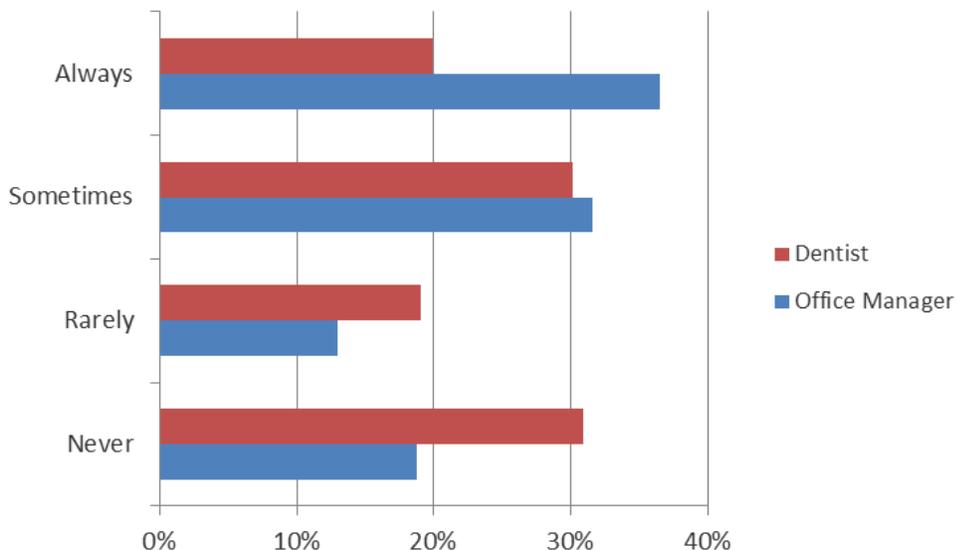
DIVIDE #3: HOW THE PRACTICE DEALS WITH REVIEWS

When asked about how the practice is currently interacting with patient reviews, dentists and office managers responded very differently. Office managers are more likely to report that the practice is already asking for reviews, responding to them and sharing them via social media. Dentists are more likely to report that the practice is not engaging in these activities – or that they don't know.

In terms of whether the practice solicits reviews, dentist and office manager responses are almost complete mirror images. 36.4% of OMs say the practice "always" asks for reviews, compared to less than 20% of dentists. Conversely, Over 30% of dentists say the practice "never" asks for reviews – while only 18.7% of OMs agree.

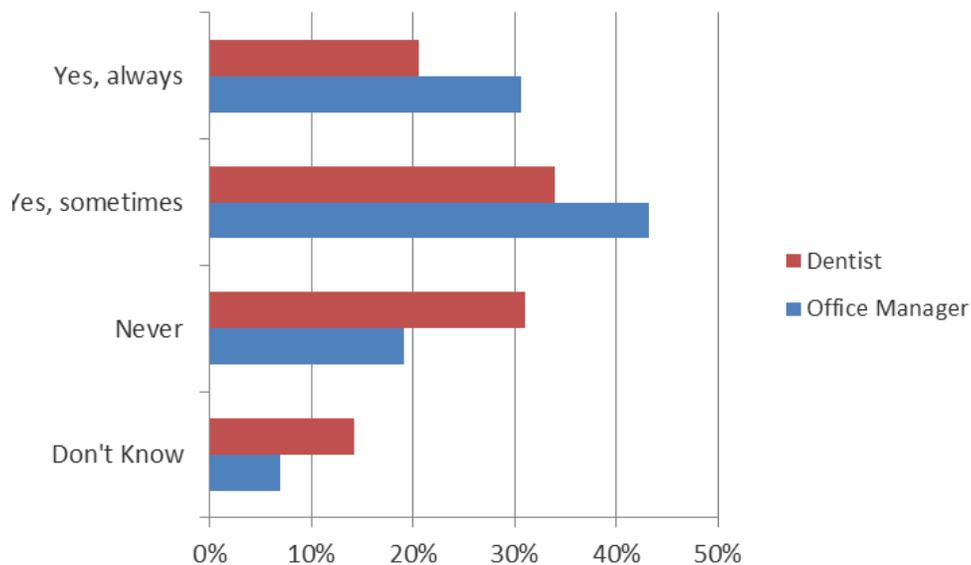
Across all questions about social media and reviews, dentists are twice as likely as office managers to not know the current level of practice activity.

How often does your practice ask for reviews from patients?



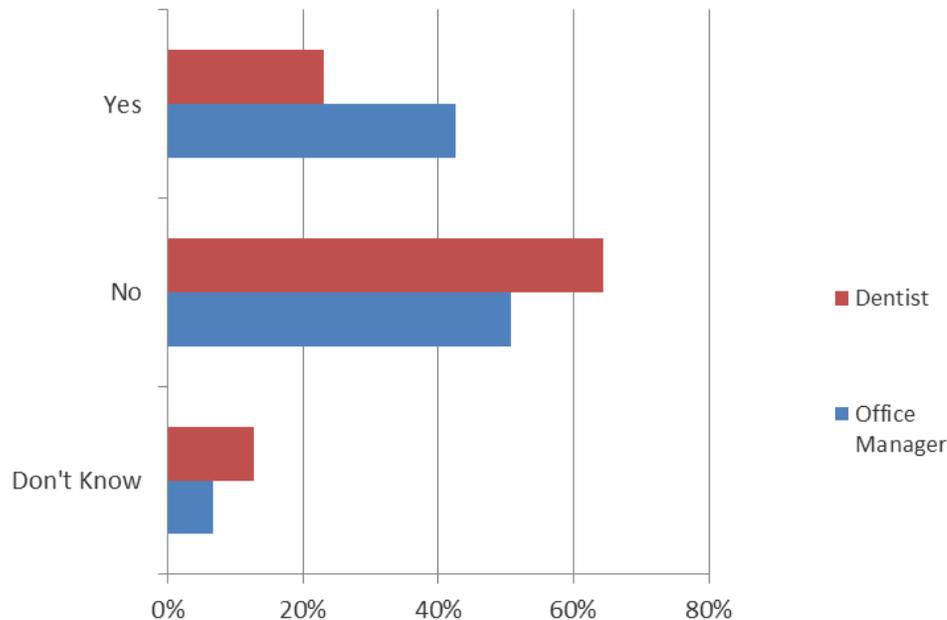
73.8% of office managers say the practice “always” or “sometimes” responds to reviews, as compared to 54.6% of dentists. 31.1% of dentists say the practice “never” responds, compared to only 19.1% of office managers.

Does your practice respond to patient reviews?



The results were similar regarding whether reviews are being shared on social media. 42.5% of office managers say the practice shares patient reviews on social media, compared to only 23% of dentists.

Does your practice share patient reviews on social media sites like Facebook?



The Marketing Reality

Interacting with reviews is an increasingly important step in the digital age. Studies show that 63% of consumers are more likely to patronize a business if it has ratings and reviews.⁶ Similarly in our 2013 survey, **70% of consumers reported that ratings and reviews from other patients influence their decision to visit a dental practice – up from 53% in 2010.**⁷

What's more, responding to negative reviews can actually pay off for the practice, either by minimizing the damage, or even resolving the issue. A Customer Experience Impact Report published in 2012 revealed that 92% of consumers would consider returning to the business they negatively reviewed if they received an apology.⁸

One likely reason that OMs report a higher level of activity is that they are the ones actually asking for and responding to reviews. However, the danger is that if the dentist isn't aware of how much is being done in the practice, it's less likely that he or she will be inclined to add additional resources when they're needed. This was certainly shown to be the case in our 2012 OM survey, which revealed that office managers' responsibilities are increasing without additional resources being added.⁹

Steps You Can Take

- Track the amount of time being spent on social media and reviews by the front office on a daily/weekly basis. If it becomes unmanageable, you'll have a log to refer to. (However, know that since dentists may remain unconvinced about the need for social media, they are not likely to add staff solely based on this issue – but it is another data point when discussing all practice responsibilities).
- Recap patient review activity in the morning huddle – sharing the best patient feedback and explaining how negative feedback has been handled. This is helpful both for those in the back office who may not be aware of reviews, and for those in the front office as a training opportunity.
- Have a practice strategy in place for how/when to respond to online patient reviews (and when it's best to leave them alone).
- If you use a patient communication software like PatientActivator, enable the social media features that automatically post positive feedback on to Facebook.
- Make it a policy to ask especially satisfied patients (those completing major treatment or with especially great results) to review the practice online. This is not the same as giving you a “testimonial.” New patients find feedback much more credible when it comes from a trusted, third party site – so enlist your best patients to help spread the word across the Web.

ADDITIONAL REVIEWS RESOURCES:

For tips on how to deal with reviews, download Futuredontics' **free whitepaper “Dealing with Patient Reviews,”** which outlines the major reviews sites, best practice for handling negative feedback, and tips for soliciting positive feedback.

If you're currently using **PatientActivator**, you can also call our live support team anytime to set up a Reviews Builder campaign to collect more positive feedback across all the major reviews sites.

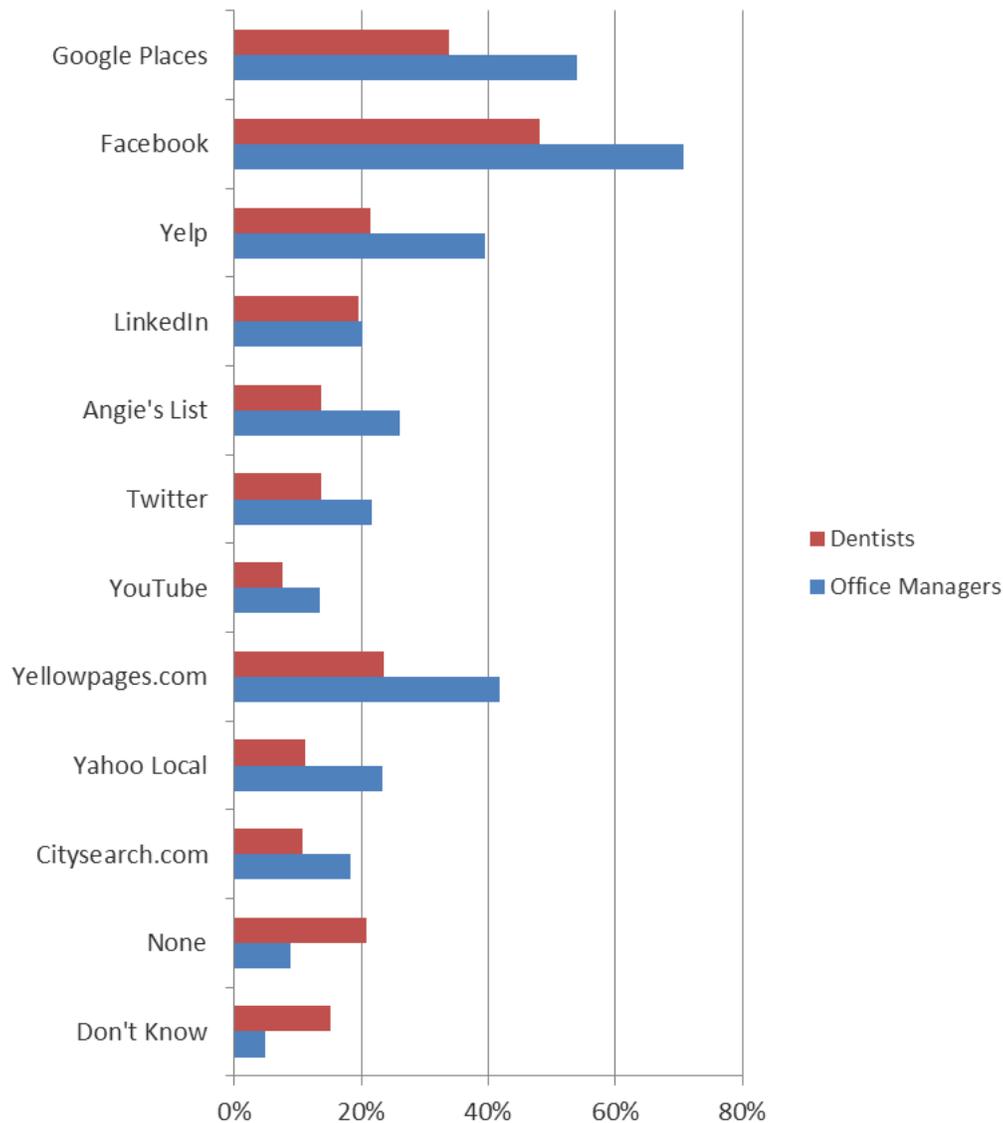
Patient Activator also can send **automatic surveys** to patients, then post this feedback on a custom reviews microsite, as well as on Facebook.

To get a free copy of our patient reviews whitepaper, or for information about PatientActivator, visit www.futuredontics.com/MoreResources

DIVIDE #4: ONLINE PRESENCE

Dental office managers appear to have a much higher level awareness of where practice information exists online than dentists. They are much more likely to indicate the practice has a business profile on every major site – in many cases over 20% more likely. Office managers also report a higher level of involvement on these sites than their back office counterparts, as well as a higher degree of monitoring being done in the practice.

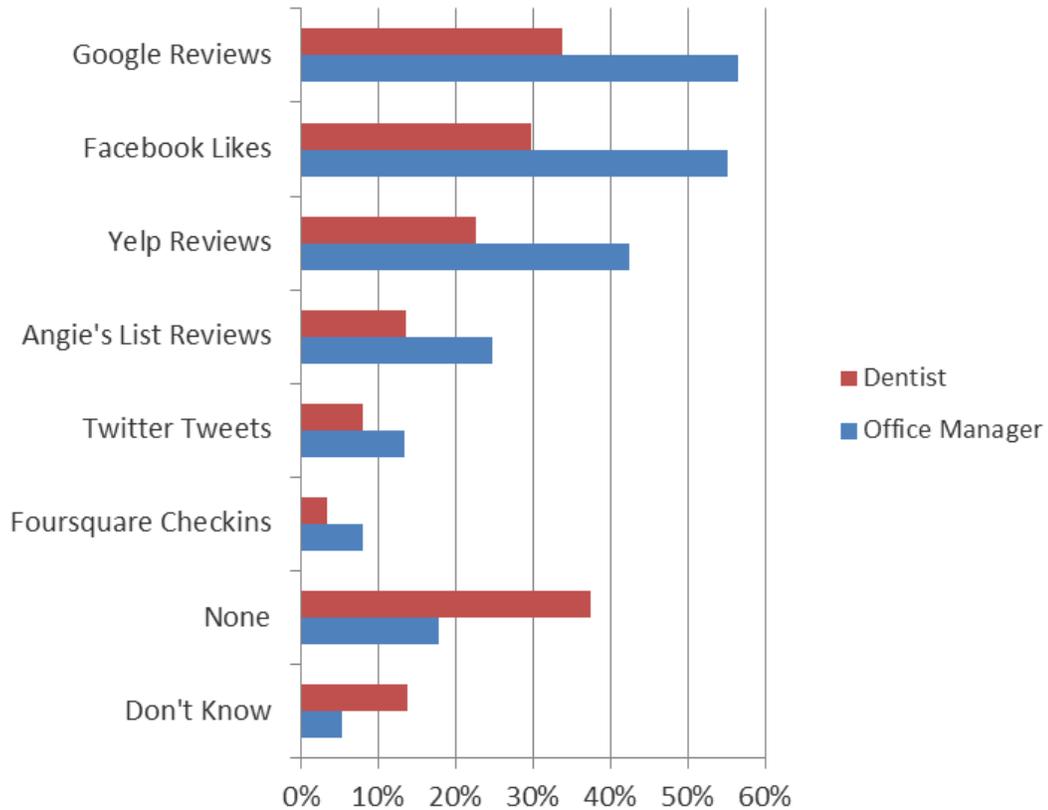
Does your practice have a business profile page on any of the following sites (check all that apply)?



Dentists are three times as likely to report that the practice has no profiles at all, or that they don't know.

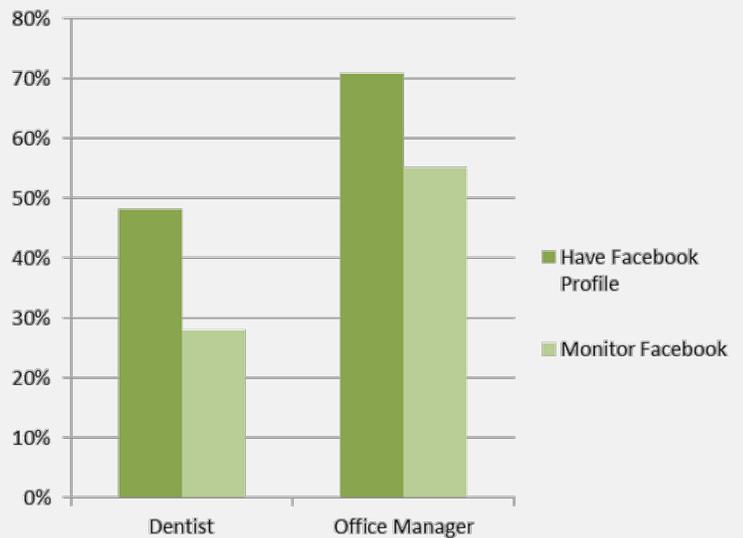
We saw a similar divide in responses to whether the practice monitors these sites. Office managers are far more likely to indicate the practice monitors their online interactions than dentists. Dentists are more than twice as likely to say the practice does not monitor any of these – or that they don't know.

Does your practice monitor any of the following (check all that apply)?



EDITOR'S NOTE: Facebook stood out in the responses from both groups in that there was an unusually large discrepancy between those who have a profile and those who actively monitor it.

This suggests that while dental practices are hearing the message that they need a Facebook presence, there is still a lack of awareness about its true value and/or how to use the site effectively – and this seems to be the case for both office managers and dentists.



The Marketing Reality

Traditional methods of searching for a dentist (e.g., Yellow Pages) are rapidly being replaced by a myriad of online sources. According to our recent consumer survey, six out of ten patients are now using search engines (e.g. Google, Bing, etc.) to find dentists. 55% are conducting their searches via online directory sites like Yahoo Local. And ratings-based review sites like Yelp play a role in almost half of dentist searches.¹⁰ That means that being absent or having incorrect/incomplete information on the major online spaces can render the practice invisible to a huge majority of would-be patients.

To maximize the benefit of online searches, dental practices need to have complete practice information across all the major sites. The more online locations that point back to your practice, the more likely that search engines will find you relevant when consumers search for a local dentist. And this information must be consistent and complete in order to affect Google and other search engines.

Dental office managers appear to be much more aware of to the practice's online presence. But as we saw in our 2012 office manager survey, they also report a high level of anxiety about not being able to devote enough time to managing it because of the dozens of competing office responsibilities.

Steps You Can Take

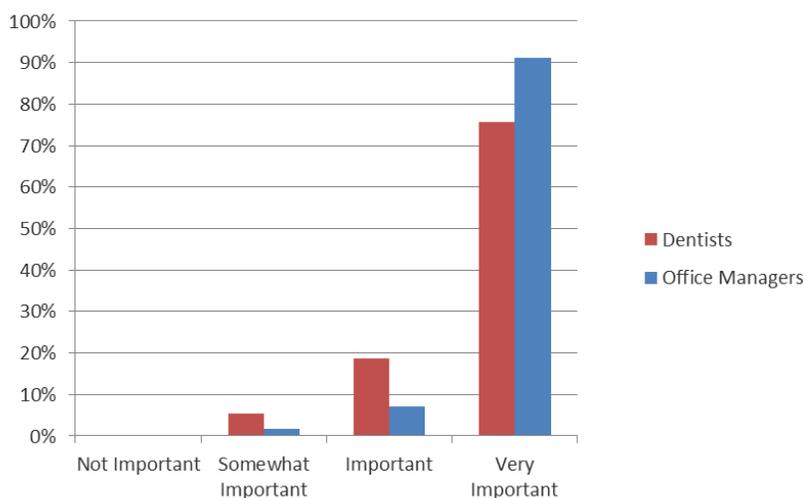
- As with social media, start by simply agreeing that patients are using these methods to find the practice.
- Be clear that there's real SEO (search engine optimization) value to, at a minimum, claiming the practice profile on directory sites – and verifying that all info is complete and uniform increases your searchability.
- Suggest that someone at the front desk be given time to claim the practice's business profiles.
 - This can be done during the slowest hours of the day.
 - Make sure every site links back to the practice website, as this significantly boosts your relevance with Google, etc.

SOME COMMON GROUND – PATIENT REMINDERS

While the focus of this report was on the ways dental office managers and dentists view marketing differently, it's worth noting that there was one notable area of agreement. Both office managers and dentists overwhelmingly recognize the importance of appointment reminders to the practice, with 91.1% of office managers and 75.8% of dentists rating them as “very important” – and less than half a percent saying they were not important at all.

This also provides a powerful example of what happens when office managers and dentists see eye to eye. According to our 2012 survey, nearly 80% of offices have invested in automated software to manage this universally valued task.¹¹

How important do you believe patient appointment reminders are to a dental practice?



THE FINAL WORD

Both dentists and office managers have a valuable point of view within the dental practice – and the key is making sure both perspectives are considered when managing the business. While this report revealed that in the arena of marketing, office managers are generally more likely to recognize the value of new digital approaches earlier on, this may not always be the case for every practice or on every issue. The true takeaway from this analysis should be a renewed emphasis on active discussion between both halves of the dental office – pairing personal insight with real data and industry research.

It's also important to remember that, just as the online world has grown, so has the number of marketing tools available – many of them designed exclusively for dental practices. In the case of websites, social media, online reputation and patient communication, these products are a cost-effective way to keep up with important new marketing activities, without diverting hours from the front office.

As sponsors of this report, both AADOM and Futuredontics have strong educational initiatives around new issues in dentistry, including interactive Webinars, whitepapers and more. For a list of free resources, as well as the dental marketing products available from Futuredontics, see the final page of this report.

ABOUT FUTURE DONTICS®

Futuredontics®, parent company of **1-800-DENTIST®** and **Patient Activator®**, is the nation's leading provider of dental marketing services. Since 1986, the Los Angeles-based company has dedicated itself to developing powerful products that help dental practices thrive.

Recognized as dentistry's premier new patient leads program, the company's flagship 1-800-DENTIST service has helped over 9 million dental patients nationwide connect with member dentists. Every day, thousands of patients get personally matched to dentists through their 24/7 call center or via 1800dentist.com.

PatientActivator — Futuredontics' communications, social and online reputation solution — increases production and boosts the practice's online presence with automated appointment confirmations and tools for marketing, social media, reviews and much more.

Futuredontics also offer an extensive library of dental marketing resources – including whitepapers, webinars and videos. With unlimited live customer support, dentistry's best marketing products and North America's largest dental referral website, Futuredontics is the proven way for dental practices to grow their patient base and increase production year after year.

For more information about our dental marketing services visit us at www.futuredontics.com

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For info about our suite of dental marketing products, call 1-855-230-1313.

ABOUT AADOM

The American Association of Dental Office Managers (AADOM) is an organization of professional office managers, practice administrators, patient coordinators, insurance and financial coordinators, and treatment coordinators of general and specialized dental practices. The largest association of its kind, it is their mission to provide members with networking, resources and education to help them achieve the highest level of professional development.

For more information about AADOM please call 732-842-9977 or visit dentalmanagers.com. You can also email: info@dentalmanagers.com.

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