

Why we should all ♥ Instagram

London hygienist **Anna Middleton** investigates what social media has to offer the world of dentistry

Like many industries, the dental world is increasingly utilising social media to its benefit. Not only can it help to educate an online audience glued to their mobiles often on the go, but a presence online can also draw in new patients as dentists, DCPs and practices engage by showcasing their work and services in an entertaining and educational way.

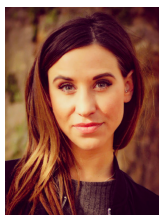
Online communities within the profession have also rapidly developed with the dawning of a digital age that has seen new partnerships and exciting collaborations spring up to spread key health messages and share invaluable content to a combined following.

Here, dental hygienist and social media queen, Anna Middleton, considers the benefits as well as the pitfalls.

How has it worked for you?

Having a presence on social media has helped gain an increase in new patients, with 50% of my business traffic this year coming from social media. I have also made new friends and regularly chat to other DCPs online. We have collaborated on making videos or posts and often attend various courses or events together. I have also been fortunate enough to have gained several professional partnerships through my online activity.

I was recently invited by EMS to become an ambassador for their guided biofilm therapy treatment, because they saw how I was using their products and utilising social media to change the way oral health messages are delivered.



Anna Middleton has three years of experience as a dental hygienist, having qualified as a dental nurse in 2011. She is a Philips key opinion leader and can be found on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook as @LondonHygienist



Is it an effective education tool?

More people are using the internet – especially social media – for their sources of information. For me, it has been vital in ensuring the correct messages get out there. The public are now becoming wiser and are turning to professionals rather than influencers for health advice and evidence-based facts. There are plenty of products being sold or spoken about online that are misleading and ineffective. Products such as teeth whitening toothpastes or gels that don't work are promoted daily. But, by offering the correct information, the public can seek treatments safely and they also get to know the 'safe places' online – it also means they avoid wasting money or potentially damaging their dental health.

Often, people will message me directly and ask me if certain products work or request advice about what is on the market. Positive and professional engagement is key. I have also started creating more video content, which means patients can then watch the advice back in the comfort of their home.

Is it okay to have fun with it?

Life is too short not to be having fun, especially at work where we spend a lot of time – look at how fun Dr Milad Shadrooh, The Singing Dentist,

makes dentistry with his clever and witty song parodies. He touched the hearts of the nation and really engaged with the public – especially children.

I think the key is to remain creative and unique but always professional. Just be mindful to keep work and personal separate when it comes to social media. Regularly review your privacy settings to ensure unintended audiences do not access information. That said, even the strictest privacy settings do not guarantee your information will be kept secure and any information you post could be viewed by anyone including your patients, colleagues or an employer.

Do you think it enhances the profile of dentistry?

Dentistry has evolved so much and social media has served as a platform to showcase that. Patients who may have thought they couldn't have certain dental procedures can now see other patient journeys and experiences. They can then make direct enquires without even having to step foot into a practice.

The focus on prevention and good oral hygiene has seen a rise in younger patients visiting, as they can see the value in investing in their dental care for the long term.

Does it make clinicians seem more approachable?

I have had many patients come to see me because they have seen the results of my work online or heard of me through word of mouth. Many still fear a visit to the dentist or have had a bad experience in the past. Seeing other patients have treatment, or hearing what they had to say about their appointment, has definitely increased the number of patients now coming in for treatment and it is helping to change perceptions.

How best to create a social media presence?

I have seen several profiles where dental nurses chronicle their day-to-day work or they manage the social media platform for their practice or dentist. If it is something you would like to do, then you can create an online profile and look at similar accounts for inspiration – but always find your own flair. In essence, be authentic and engaging but find your niche.

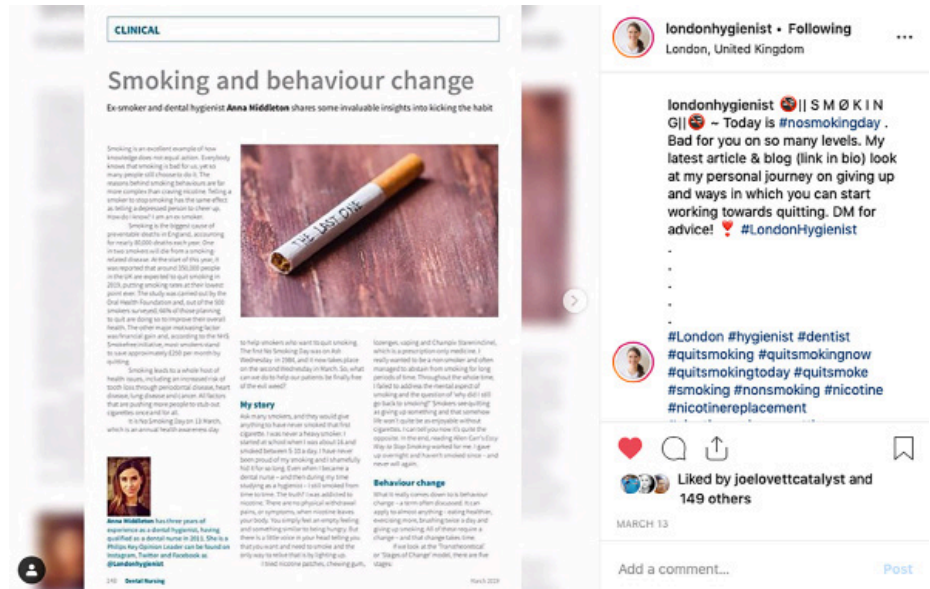
I like to share a mix of content – everything from facts, before and after images to press stories, personal achievements and other fellow DCPs' work.

You collaborate with dentist Rhona Esakander – is this a relationship that reflects the dynamic at work?

I first met Rhona when I was student hygienist and worked with her on Saturdays as a dental nurse. Our friendship grew and, once I qualified, it was not long before we were working together under the same roof. Using social media for our work was fairly fresh then and, over the years, we continued to grow and utilise various platforms. Our relationship is more than just a working partnership. Not many people get to say they go to work with their best friend. We work very closely together and we have worked hard to show how our roles are intertwined.

How do your patients react to your posts?

Patients love the before and after pictures. It's amazing the result that can be achieved just from a visit to the hygienist. Patients are always very supportive of my achievements,



too. They love reading my articles and blogs as well as following my journey as the business grows.

Social media is all about educating and entertaining – how do you achieve this?

I think the key is to apply the KISS principle – 'keep it simple, stupid'. The whole idea is that most systems work best if they are kept simple rather than made complicated. It is easy to over complicate various procedures or information with dental jargon, so I like to use analogies and even blend in humour – I am a fan of a pun.

What do you say to critics who seem uncomfortable with the dental team posting online?

Times have changed. By 2020, it is estimated 80% of content online will be video. Almost all content is now viewed on mobile devices and on the go. I have not received any criticism that I know of but I know others who have. I think it is because some people are stubborn and have a 'we have always done it this way' mentality. Usually the resistance is because there is a lack of understanding about social media and the rapid change in online trends. Other times some people can't be happy to see others doing well – you take that with a pinch of salt.

A click away

With a few clicks of a mouse or a scroll on a smartphone, what information could a patient or future employer access about you that you would not reveal during a consultation or interview? The information available is often not the most recent, but rather old photos, blog posts or long-forgotten tweets now immortalised thanks to the internet.

A number of issues arise with the increased use of social networking; in particular, patient confidentiality and professionalism. The principle of confidentiality is central to the level of trust between patients and the dental team.

In Standards for the Dental Team [4.2.3], the General Dental Council states: 'You must not post any information or comments about patients on social networking or blogging sites. If you use professional social media to discuss anonymised cases for the purpose of discussing best practice, you must be careful that the patient or patients cannot be identified. So, when using social media, you must:

- Maintain and protect patients' information by not publishing any information which could identify them on social media without their explicit consent
- Maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships you have with patients
- Comply with any internet and social media policy set out by your employer.'

The GDC also reminds us that 'your online image can impact on your professional life and you should not post any information, including photographs and videos, which could bring the profession into disrepute'.