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What Makes You Click – The Art of Online Persuasion

The Internet is an immense and intimidating beast that can bring any business owner to their knees. It offers a plethora of avenues to promote your products and services, myriad website developers to choose from, social media platforms to select, blog providers, and online development tools serving as a virtual megaphone to your local audience. But despite the multitude of platforms at our disposal, it remains extremely challenging to break through and engage potential new patients online today.

While the web is undoubtedly your most cost-effective promotional tool, using it correctly is a tricky business and one that's ultimately psychological in nature. According to MECLABS Institute, the first research program to conduct rigorous testing in the new science of online behavior, the psychology of emotion plays a critical part in how people respond to your online messages. Consumers are fed up and very discriminating when researching products and services on the Internet today.

So, how do you use psychology to improve your web presence and influence current and potential orthodontic patients?

Understanding the Problem

Today's ADHD society wants information instantly at their fingertips that is clear, easy to digest, and persuasive in tone. Attractive and productive are not one and the same.

Most marketing programs today are focused on the company rather than the consumer. However, consumers today are more difficult to engage and conditioned to filter out all marketing noise that surrounds them today, especially with so many options and services available. It is not uncommon for consumers to shift their mind-set right in the middle of making a buying decision.

Below is a succinct explanation provided by MECLABS to describe today's consumer mind-set. Take a moment to think about your own emotional response when

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researching products and services online; take off your business owner hat and think like a consumer.

Consumer's Protest

- I am not a target, but a person. Don't market to me, communicate with me.
- When you say "sell," I hear "hype." Clarity trumps persuasion. Don't sell; say it like it is.
- I don't buy from companies; I buy from people. Stop bragging, it's disgusting. And why is your marketing "voice" different from your real "voice?" The people I trust don't patronize me.
- In all cases, where the quality of the information is debatable, I will always resort to the quality of the source. My trust is not for sale. You need to earn it.
- Dazzle me gradually: tell me what you can't do and I might believe you when you tell me what you can do.
- In case you still don't "get it," I don't trust you. Your copy is arrogant, your motives seem selfish, and your claims sound inflated. If you want to change how I buy, first change how you market.

My first reaction to the protest after reading this during a lecture offered by leaders in the Internet marketing industry was shock! As an Internet marketer, how do you respond to this attitude that is becoming more and more prevalent with consumers?



Reprinted from
The Newsletter for Members and Friends of Ortho2
April 2016 - Volume 34 Issue 2

The Misunderstood “Less Is More” Psychology

The objective of your online marketing is to influence or coerce a decision from visitors to pick up the phone or email your office. However, this is easier said than done. Online visitor perceptions are skewed by language, images, and mood.

Offering the latest and greatest technology available today and treatment delivery is a consumer must. However, when marketing online, consumers can't believe it if they don't perceive it.

Your goal is to develop your marketing sweet spot and keep things simple. The “Less is More” psychology does not translate into providing fewer content pages on your website or less written text on each page. The goal is to control the size, delivery, and the quality of your marketing message to its greatest advantage for consumer engagement.

Visitors emotionally perceive your professional competency by the overall appearance and design of your website within 3-7 seconds. Presentation is everything! Outdated websites that lack information of interest based on the mind-set of the visitor falls short of your marketing sweet spot. If your website is old and outdated and difficult to traverse, so are you. This is the reality of online marketing today based on the current consumer mind-set.

Is Your Website Controlling, Preaching, or Persuading to Build Trust?

1. Does your website offer all forms of engagement including images, written content, and video to engage the marketing sweet spot of all visitors?
2. Is the first thing they see “Schedule an Appointment”, “Write a Review”, or “Pay Online” before they have had a chance to figure out the lay of the land on your website? Be persuasive but not pushy.
3. Are your headlines clear and trustworthy to someone who doesn't know you and not open to misinterpretation? Not everyone can be the top or best orthodontist in the area.
4. Do you provide simple intuitive navigation, clear titles, and call to action areas so visitors can easily find topics they are interested in researching vs. what you want to tell them about yourself?
5. Is your written content devoid of descriptive fluff and questionable unverified claims? Is text presented in a simplified 5th – 9th grade level for easy understanding and bullet pointed for clarification?
6. Are your reviews posted on the home page from a reputable source like Google or Yelp, rather than run-of-the-

mill testimonials offered by John S. or Katy P. that you could have posted yourself as filler? Plugins are now available to post testimonials from major review sites directly on the home page of your website.

7. Do you showcase professional photos of your patients verifying treatment results? Do you offer a few high-quality, authentic before and after photographs of patients to quickly review?
8. Do you include professional video presented in two minutes or less, emotionally arousing, and intellectually compelling to allow visitors to form their own conclusions about your practice?

Social Media

Social media studies also suggest you follow the “Less is More” psychology. Rather than overflow your social media accounts with filler and fluff, seek out and present topics and posts with relevant, engaging verifiable information that builds trust in your practice. Use your social media as verifiable proof that your visitors' peers are benefitting from your treatment, patient experience, and community interaction offered by your practice.

The fastest way to bore visitors on social media is to only talk about and post photos of Suzy getting her braces on and Johnny getting his braces off. This is the kiss of death to a very discriminating online audience looking for the top spots to spend their limited time. A diverse interaction on different topics is required to “engage and sustain” on social media. Don't just post or tweet for the sake of posting or tweeting. Try to add value for your audience whenever possible to persuade visitors to seek out your services.

Reviews – Build Trust and Proof of Expertise

Choosing a credible, consumer-focused review platform, especially targeting Google and Yelp, is critical to building trust with prospective patients. While it may be tempting to pay for review services that make it easier to solicit glowing 5-star reviews, consumers are smart and can spot solicited reviews a mile away. If someone Googles your doctor name or practice name and finds over a hundred 5 star reviews on Health Grades and none or only a few on Google and Yelp, your trust level drops. The same is true if you only have a high number of reviews on Google only. A well rounded reviews program based on the “Less is More” psychology on multiple review platform wins in the long run.

An eConsultancy Survey uncovered that 68% of consumers actually trust reviews more when they see both good and less than stellar ratings. The best performing businesses methodically build a collection of legitimate reviews on different sources from real customers and don't sweat the occasional less than 5 star review. They understand that their success in the

long-run depends on building real trust with real customers. No one expects perfection when it comes to legitimate reviews.

As orthodontic practices try to determine just what it is that consumers want from them, consumers faced with more choices and barraged with more messages than ever before. Facebook is hovering around 1.2 billion users globally; Twitter and Google+ report 500 million each; who knows what the future holds. When will it plateau? And does it even matter at this point?

As humans, we want to share our experiences, connect with others and make a difference in the world whether it be by a business owner or consumer. And much of that is done through online interaction and visual storytelling. The real question is: how much digital rhetoric, fluff, and show is too much? ♡

About the Author



Mary Kay Miller is an Internet Marketing Consultant for the orthodontic profession specializing in, WordPress Website Design, SEO, Reputation Marketing, Local Search Strategies, and Exclusive Web 2.0 services.