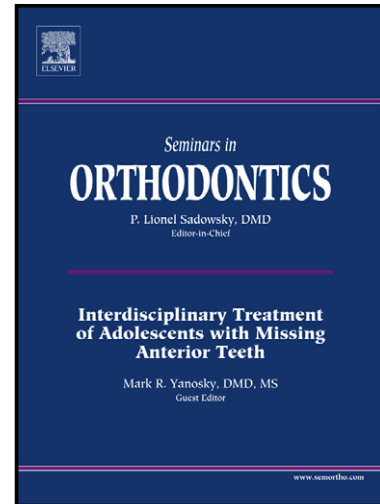


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Communicating Orthodontic Research Via Social Media

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COMMUNICATING ORTHODONTIC RESEARCH VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

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COMMUNICATING ORTHODONTIC RESEARCH VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

In this paper I am going to share my personal viewpoint and knowledge on how to communicate orthodontic research via social media. This is based upon many years experience of involvement with computers and recently writing a surprisingly successful orthodontic blog.

Like many people I have used the internet extensively in my work as an academic orthodontist, it is only recently that I have become aware and made use of social media in obtaining and disseminating research knowledge. This paper is, therefore, not based on any science; it is only my personal experience and other low levels of evidence. I am not going to reference any sources in this paper because they are all available using an electronic search. This is a paper about contemporary communication, which while having few restraints has great importance when considered in the realm of orthodontic communications.

It is also difficult to write a paper on social media because knowledge of this field is closely associated with age. This is because the younger generation of orthodontists will have grown up with the rapid developments in social media. As a result, I shall set this paper at the level of someone who has minimal experience of this continuously changing area. Finally, I will only discuss platforms with which I have experience. I will start with Twitter.

Twitter (It's not all about lunch....)

It is difficult to describe Twitter and the best way to think about it is as a social messaging site, which is based around sending short messages using a very limited number of characters. All messages are confined to 140 characters and are called "tweets". It is designed to be a method of quickly and easily communicating a message to a lot of people. All those who read your tweets are called your "followers". Each tweet can also be linked to an image or to a website that contains the information that you want to highlight. Tweets therefore can be linked to publications that you feel are important or ones that support your message or philosophy. Suppose for example, an article was just published relating to the long term care and responsibility of lower lingual bonded retainers. Suppose this article highlighted that long term, responsibility for oversight and maintenance of such a retainer was within the prevue of the general dentist. Finally suppose that the article contained step by step instructions detailing how to evaluate the efficacy of the appliance, the maintenance both by dental practitioner and patient, and the repair of this type of retainer if necessary. You might decide that Twitter is an excellent mechanism to make the citation of this article available to all of your referring dentists.

In December 2014 Twitter had 500 million users. People can send and receive tweets by phones, tablets and computers. It is, therefore, highly mobile and reactive. While the popular use of twitter can be classified as inconsequential chat, for example, elaborating on "what you had for lunch", it is also used extensively to share information and this is where it has a use in dissemination of research.

There are many organizations, journals, researchers and research opinion leaders who use Twitter to express their opinions on current research and to also highlight research findings and recent publications. My sources of information tend to be UK based but it is worth looking at and following such authorities as Hilda Bastian (@hildabast) who also writes a great blog called statistically speaking, Trisha

Greenhalgh (@trishgreenhalgh) a UK based medical researcher who constantly poses questions on evidence based care and Iain Chalmers founder of the Cochrane Collaboration (@iainchalmersTTi). He does not tweet much but when he does it is important and interesting. There are many others and I find them invaluable in keeping up to date with research.

When I consider actually sending tweets, Twitter is a great way of communicating information. However, it is important to take great care and work on writing good tweets. Essentially, you need to be brief and “to the point”. This is because you do not have a lot of space; only 140 characters. The best tweets are conversational and informal and provide straightforward information. If you want to explore this further there has been a vast amount of research on the use of twitter, the best time to send tweets and other complex uses. This can all be found using standard internet sources such as google etc.

I run my own Twitter account and I use it mostly to disseminate information about my blog, I also obtain information on newly published research papers and send this on to the people who follow me. I find it very useful and if you do not have an account, I suggest that you should open one, find some people to follow and only tweet when you have something interesting to say. There is nothing wrong with not tweeting. In the fine art of communicating, aural ingress is often far more useful than oral egress.

Blogs

This is an area in which I have a reasonable amount of experience (www.kevinobrienorthoblog.com). A blog is defined as a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web. It consists of discrete posts. Most blogs are the work of one individual, however, recently multi author blogs have been developed and the posts contained therein are written by a large number of

authors. Most blogs are interactive and allow the readers to leave comments on each posting. This feature allows for real time conversation. There are several blogging platforms that are available at no cost, for example, Wordpress and Blogger. The blog can be hosted by these organizations at no cost or the blogger can pay for hosting on any web hosting company (approximately \$100.00 per year). The advantage of this is that the blogger has complete ownership and control of the content.

How did I start?

In November 2013 I had some free time and decided that it might be a good idea to start writing a blog. I started by researching blogging on the Internet and came across a couple of books that I subsequently downloaded. These gave me very basic instructions and “walk-throughs” on how to set up a blog. They took me through the stages of selecting my blog software, deciding on a blog name, registering it and then putting it on the internet via a hosting company. At the end of my first day, I went from having nothing to a blog that was up and running and working very effectively. It was surprisingly easy.

My next step was to decide what to write about and since I was attending the British Orthodontic Conference in Manchester at the time, I thought that I would write a review of each day. I published the blog, publicized it on Twitter, and was surprised to find that it was read about a 25 times. I then expanded the posts to include descriptions and commentaries on clinical research papers as they were published by the Journals. As my confidence grew I introduced posts in which I made a personal comment or critique of orthodontic developments, for example, methods of reducing the length of orthodontic treatment. Over the next four months the readership of the blog grew to about 200 hits a week. Progress continued with increasing numbers of visitors to the site and in March 2014 I was attracting 4,000 hits per month. In April 2015 I decided to publicize the blog on Facebook and this

resulted in a marked increase in readers and hits went up to 9,000 per month by May and this number has slowly increased to 12,000 hits per month in January of this year. Readership is still increasing by about 1,000 hits per month. My interpretation of these numbers is that given the community in which we practice in, I believe that the blog is surprisingly successful.

I would be happy to provide readers of this article with information on setting up your own site. All you need do is contact me. None of this is particularly new or difficult and this is really based on my personal experiences.

Do some research

It is very easy to waste a large amount of time on making mistakes, particularly with software and hosting. So, you need to spend some time researching the best way to move forward. I did this by buying two excellent books that I found from among the many out there to choose from. In effect, they walked me through the process of setting up. These were very basic and take you through it step by step.

Get good software and hosting

There is a large amount of free blogging software and hosting. However, this can be rather basic, and you need to be careful what you use. Another important decision is whether you will use Wordpress or another platform. I decided on Wordpress because it the most popular blogging software and the support is good. Wordpress comes with many templates to which you simply add your content. I started with one of these but then I bought a more sophisticated theme from a development company. This was not expensive and it gave the blog a more unique appearance. I also decided to pay for hosting because I wanted a degree of independence.

Write good posts

This may be obvious but you need to write something that people want to read. Again, there are many books and websites from which to obtain information on how to write a blog post. In short I would advise you to write in simple non-technical language, try not to make your posts very formal and use nice illustrations to make the posts more interesting. Remember, people will read your posts on phones and other mobile devices, so they do not want to read long complex posts. You should aim to write something between 500 and 1,000 words at the most. You can also make the posts more interesting and understandable by inserting tables and other graphics.

When I initially started I concentrated on providing information on recently published research papers and then started posting my views on more controversial areas of orthodontics. I also posted several posts that I thought would be humorous. Ironically, one of these on "24 month braces" is the most popular post on the blog and has been read over 10,000 times. My advice is to try and provide a mixture of content that would appeal to the type of readers that you hope to attract.

Publicize the blog

This sounds obvious, but you cannot rely on simply writing good posts. With any blogging software you can set it up so that when you publish a post the title of the post and the content is circulated by other social media. I do this by linking my posts to Twitter, Linkdin, Google+ and my Facebook page. However, if this is going to be effective then you need to work on making sure that you are connected to many people through these platforms. As a result, it is necessary to work on building a following of people who are interested in what you have to share. I found that the best way of achieving this was to place an email sign up form on my site. This gives people an option of subscribing to the blog, so that when I published a post they got an email letting them know of its existence. It is very important to allow people to take their own decision to subscribe. It is not good practice to simply add all your

contacts to the blog email list. I am sure that people do not want to add to the large amount of junk mail that we all get.

Other platforms

There are, of course, many other platforms, for example Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn. I do use these for highlighting when a post is published and I also post the details of papers that I am going to discuss in the near future. However, I am not a great user of these in any of the other ways that they are used. I guess that I am too old now and it takes enough time to work on the blog.

Words of caution

If you start using social media it is also wise to be very cautious. We are all aware of celebrities and politicians who have made mistakes with inappropriate use of social media. This is particularly important for us as health care providers who supposedly operate within and conform to a set of professional ethics. Most of our regulatory bodies have policies on the use of social media and it is essential that you follow these. Penalties can be severe and it may be possible to lose your licence to practice. The three most important caveats are that you should not post any information on patients without their consent; you should not make derogatory comments about patients, other practitioners, particular vendors and their products or services; and finally, you should not be posting any inappropriate or offensive content.

Apart from these issues, the following are several pieces of advice that I believe are relevant and important. First, you should read everything that you intend to post on any media very carefully - **several times**. If possible, leave several hours before posting and read it again. As a general rule, do not post any content when you are tired; nor should you respond to messages late at night or when you cannot give required responses your full attention. I have learned from my mistakes in this area, when I have responded to comments on some of my posts, without being sufficiently careful or polite with my responses. These have caused problems that

took some time to resolve. One solution is to imagine that you are talking to someone in a very public venue. This in and of itself tends to make you more polite.

Communicating research findings to patients and public

I only really have experience in communicating research to other dentists and orthodontists, but I have been made aware that several lay people follow my blog. They have fed back to me that they find it a very useful source of information and I hope that one day I can publish lay versions of my posts. Consider your patient base and potential future patients. Is there specific information that you want to expose them to. In this way the use of social media to do so becomes a very powerful marketing tool.

If you are going to do this on your blog or website, it is very important that you make the information understandable to people who are not orthodontists or dentists. Don't overcompensate and make it too simple. Soliciting feedback will let you know whether the level you are "speaking" at is appropriate. It is possible to use electronic means that give you an indication of the "readability" of your text and one of these is built into Wordpress. One suggestion is to write the post and then show it to a person who is not a health care professional and ask them if they understand it and ask them for suggestions on how to make it more readable or understandable.

It is also important to make sure that any claims that you make regarding the treatment you render is supported by evidence. The regulations on the content of websites vary from country to country, but the important concept, both from an ethical and legal perspective, is that you should not mislead your patients. Doing so may lead to administrative and civil exposure from regulatory bodies and patients who can show an "injury" due to the false or misleading posted information found on your blog or website.

The future

As we all know the internet is a rapidly changing environment and I have no idea what forms of communication and dissemination we will be using in 5 years. But one important current issue is open access to research information. Open access means unrestricted on line access to research publications. There are two main ways that an author can provide open access. These are by archiving their publications in an open access repository, for example a University library. The other way is by publishing in an open access journal. This latter method is provided by the *Angle Orthodontist*, which to my knowledge is the only open access orthodontic journal. However, other journals do give access to some papers.

The main driver behind open access is to increase the dissemination of research findings. Currently most journals restrict access to subscribers, society members, or large educational establishments. As a result, access to potentially valuable research information is restricted. I am sure that we have all experienced "hitting the paywall" when we are searching for a particular journal article. This is particularly ironic when research is paid for by public funds; yet the results are not available to the public who funded the research.

The argument against open access is that someone needs to pay for the cost of the Journals' editorial process and editor, the peer review mechanism and the publishing of papers. Methods to overcome this have been made by enabling authors to pay for the publication of their paper, so that it can be open access. However, this may only be possible if they hold research funding or have other resources.

It is also interesting that while the open access movement has grown, there are perhaps more ambitious suggestions that authors can publish their research papers on their own websites, blogs or their University websites. This is possible now for papers that have been refereed and it is acceptable to publish a "pre-publication" version of a paper. However, it is also possible to publish a paper that has not been

refereed on a website. This means that readers will need to draw their own conclusions on research reports by using their research knowledge and training which in many cases, if the readership is public based, may be minimal to non-existent. Even if the readership is professionally based, self publication may be a viable means of distribution as there are many cases wherein refereed papers have been found to lack certain quality or validity. In summary, going forward via self-publication may be a viable method for dissemination but it is probably going to be several years away as there are considerable obstacles to progress.

The future is hard to predict but I suspect a large amount of dissemination of research findings and opinion will move to blogging platforms and other forms of social media. There is a danger of this being overwhelming for the clinician scientist and we will need to improve our skills in interpreting research and become selective in our reading. The future of research dissemination is completely unknown but for some of us it is exciting and fraught with positive possibilities.