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## Practice**life**

# Keeping up with the world wide web

**Anne-Marie Lloyd-Jones** chats to **Naz Haque** about the ever-changing online world

Naz Haque has healthcare in his DNA. Although his Father worked for the NHS, his uncles are dentists, Naz hasn't taken up the clinical side of the profession. He's now working for Dental Focus, a DPAS Business Bites partner, helping dentists grow their practices by bringing his knowledge and expertise in all things Google to the high street.

The world of websites and Google is a mystifying one for dentists, so Anne-Marie Lloyd-Jones, customer relations manager at DPAS Dental Plans, caught up with Naz to break down this ever-changing world.

**Anne-Marie:** You describe yourself as a Google consultant and I'm dying to know exactly what this is

**Naz:** It's a very good question! I'm actually a 'Google certified square', the only one in the dental industry to my knowledge. This means I have gone through specific Google accreditation and am qualified to help dentists navigate their way through the mesmerising world of the internet.

The important thing for dentists to remember is that there are four billion searches on Google every day and 93% of all client buying decisions start with Google, so it's a pretty powerful tool that shouldn't be ignored. I work with practices that are doing okay but want to do even better, and help them to understand the digital opportunities that are available to them.

**Anne-Marie:** Which areas do you particularly concentrate on?

**Naz:** As most people know, a website is pretty crucial these days, but lots of practices have a website without understanding why they have it – they don't have a digital strategy. My job is to take their website and improve it with the aim of getting them to page one of Google, meaning they can be found by the right type of patients. Different dentists have different clinical interests: some want to concentrate on implants, for others it's orthodontics and if new patients don't desire these treatments it's easy for the dentist to feel unfulfilled. My remit is to create a strategy around the individual's 'why' and then build a digital strategy that attracts the right type of patients.

**If we can tweak the website and optimise it then there's no need to start again**

**Anne-Marie:** Does the process always involve a new website?

**Naz:** Not always. It depends on the individual case. The last thing a dentist wants to do is spend more on a website if they have only just invested in one. If we can tweak the website and optimise it then there's no need to start again. We recently worked with a practice in Luton that was looking to attract more patients for new facial aesthetics services – we successfully got the practice to Google page one and during the process we identified gaps and discovered that the site wasn't converting enquiries as well as it should have been. We used the data

from the site to make improvements and were able to achieve the practice's objectives without building a completely new site.

**Anne-Marie:** If you have two practices in the same area that want to be found for the same treatments, how do you differentiate between the two?

**Naz:** We work with a maximum of two practices from one area to avoid any such conflict. On Google page one there are only 10 organic (not paid for) positions, so to work for more than two practices wanting to be found for the same search terms in the same area just causes competition both for the client and us.

**Anne-Marie:** Word of mouth remains the most popular way of attracting new patients, so why is Google so important?

**Naz:** Dentists often argue that word of mouth is their



most powerful tool for gaining new patients, but word of mouth is limited to their patient base.

If a dental practice loses 20% of its patients every year for one reason or another, this leaves 80%, of which a small percentage will recommend the practice. The impact and growth of your word of mouth will be limited unless you can get this word of mouth onto the internet to a larger audience. The important thing is that you ask patients to post reviews online, otherwise great verbal testimonials just stay within a very small circle of people and your practice doesn't benefit.

**Anne-Marie:** Is Google page one really the holy grail or is this a bit of a myth?

**Naz:** It really is the promised land! First and foremost, you must deliver great service within your practice; this in turn will lead to great reviews and

changing. How can dentists insure against this happening?

**Naz:** A few years ago, it became mandatory to have a decontamination room in every practice where possible, and dentists had significant outlay to make this happen, but ultimately it has benefitted patients and improved standards of care. It's the same with digital – websites are not about the dentist, they are about providing the patient with the experience they deserve and demand. My main advice around this is if you want to protect yourself don't go for the cheap option as in the long run this is likely to cost you more, as you will need to constantly add things to your site to keep up with the changes.

**Anne-Marie:** Changes like website responsiveness and even the importance of reviews have been introduced recently; can you give us a glimpse into what's next on Google's horizon?

**Naz:** The truth is that Google keeps things very close to its chest, I visit Google once a month and every time I am blown away. They employ someone called a futurologist – which as its name suggests is someone who looks 20 years into the future and predicts what society, the economy, buying habits, etc will look like. What I can say is that in six to seven years' time websites will no longer be the number one place to be found and Google is already planning for this environment. The Google engine is highly intelligent and is no longer looking just at content and quality but also accuracy – which is why your third-party reviews need to back up the content on your site.

## Websites are not about the dentist, they are about providing the patient with the experience they deserve and demand

**Anne-Marie:** Is the need for Google optimisation as applicable to NHS practices as it is to private practices?

**Naz:** I think this depends on the practice. There are some large NHS practices that have sufficient patients to maintain their levels simply by using word of mouth. Also, because of the fee structure, NHS practices often cannot generate enough additional income to make an optimisation campaign worthwhile. But for practices wanting to transition from NHS to private I would certainly recommend that they consider their digital presence.

**Anne-Marie:** If a practice isn't doing all the things you have spoken about, is their website essentially just a nice 'online brochure'?

**Naz:** It's a good question, but the real question is whether as business people, dentists are happy to plod along or want to grow? Charles Darwin was right when he said that it's not the strongest or smartest who survive, but rather those who are willing and able to adapt. Exactly the same is true for dental practices: some dentists are being left behind because they are unable to meet patient needs. If dentists are not engaging with their patients digitally, they are failing to adapt to the environment and ultimately will have to face the consequences. **D**

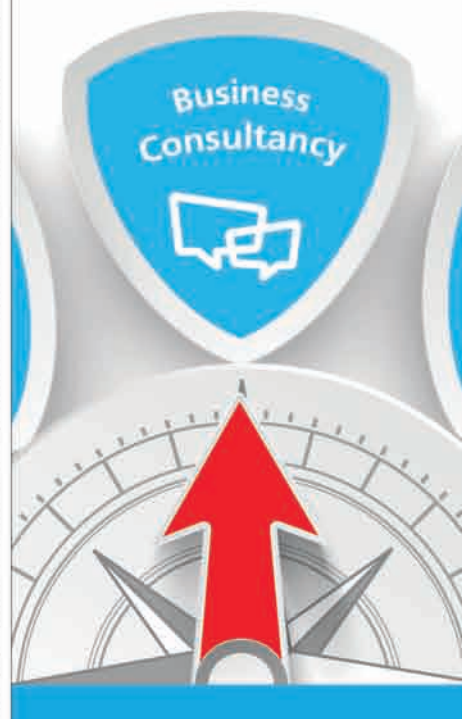
testimonials, which you must try and post online. Reviews are now a really important aspect in Google's ranking algorithm and patients really take notice of what other patients say. When a patient does a direct search for your practice, 50% of the right-hand side of the results page should be owned by you if you are maximising your opportunities.

**Anne-Marie:** What about bad reviews – how can a dentist tackle these?

**Naz:** If someone is going to leave a bad review about you there's very little you can do. Surely it's better to be aware of what people are saying and have the ability to respond, rather than burying your head in the sand? Treat it the same as you would in the practice. If you don't intentionally ask for reviews you won't get the desired results.

**Anne-Marie:** It seems to me that one of the things that annoys dentists about digital communication is that the rules of the game keep

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Naz Haque is a Google consultant at Dental Focus 'digital marketing specialists', a DPAS Business Bites partner. Business Bites brings together many of the dental industry's leading brands that work with DPAS members to help their practices grow.



Anne-Marie Lloyd-Jones is customer relations manager at DPAS Dental Plans. She joined the company in 2007 following previous roles in banking, education and team training. Anne-Marie heads up a team of practice consultants, primarily focused on supporting the ongoing needs of DPAS clients from the implementation of their dental plan to the provision of ongoing advice, guidance and in-practice support.

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