

Secrets of the online patient journey: part 2

NAZ HAQUE, Google consultant for Dental Focus continues explaining the online patient behaviour, journey and how to ensure they contact you



Though patient Y does exist, often it's quicker to take a patient who has the Need and Want (N+W) and with the right conversation, coach them to make changing their smile a Priority (P) so that they become the buying patient, thus converting them into patient Y.

So in summary, N+W+P = buying patient (patient Y).

SO WHERE ARE THESE PATIENTS?

In my previous article, I mentioned how consumers (patients) respond to a stimulus. Once this stimulus has been triggered, the patient then embarks on a journey to experience the 'first moment of truth'. This is a critical moment because it's their first step towards tackling the factor which hinders their self-esteem.

Historically for a consumer, the 'first moment of truth' would be experienced when viewing a product in a shop or in a magazine. A picture is worth a thousand words because sight is the most powerful sense when winning a person's trust and overcoming their self-preservation filters. Consumers don't want to say that they made the wrong decision or a costly decision. Seeing the results first hand can help a patient to say 'yes!' faster than targeting any of their other sensory skills.

In the world of sales and marketing, we're competing for views. That is why billboards, TV, and print advertising can work. If you hear a radio advert, you'll call the company and they'll send you literature, which again reverts to sight. Sight helps to sell - is this a possible factor why digital smile design software is helping to increase private treatment sales?

At present, most of these viewers start their journey on Google. It's reported there are four billion searches a day on Google and 93% of consumers' decisions lead them to start their journey on Google. The keyword here being 'decision'. On Google, these patients will be presented with a page full of results to help address their intent and provide the first moment of truth. Hopefully, when patients do a Google search, they find your digital presence.

So what counts as 'digital presence'?

Your digital presence consists of the following:

- Website (practice or clinician)
- Practice videos (on your website and YouTube channel)
- Patient testimonials (videos and written on your website and independent platforms)
- Case studies (photos and descriptions on your website)
- Patient reviews (on your website and independent platforms)
- Social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, YouTube)
- Recognised directories (NHS Choices)

If optimised correctly, the website has the best chance of appearing on Google page 1, followed by social media accounts (if active and public), and then directory listings. All three platforms should provide relevant information, address patient concerns, and give them the opportunity to get in touch - but the website is the best place to control the patient's experience.

PATIENT BEHAVIOUR EXPLAINED

The consumer journey consists of three stages: information, research and decision. Patients go through a journey of seeking information, researching the options and then deciding who to contact.

These three stages can be broken down into six micro-stages.

1) INFORMATION STAGE

1.1 Problem recognition

The patient has experienced a stimulus and is not happy with the realisation that something personal needs to be fixed. Maybe their crooked smile or overlapping teeth creates a problem which needs to be addressed.

1.2 Information search

The patient seeks to find a solution to reduce or remove the identified problem. They may ask people they know, who've resolved this problem already. What if that isn't an option or the patient is shy or nervous? They go to Google, they also find the internet even more appealing as they can maintain their anonymity whilst searching for solutions. As patients seek answers, they'll narrow down their criteria and become more specific.

For example, a patient in London may move from carrying out searches such as 'dentist in London' to 'braces in London'. They'd narrow down the criteria upon realising not every dentist

can provide a solution, and braces is a common solution. Some patients may want a specialist and search using phrases such as 'orthodontist in London'.

2) RESEARCH STAGE

2.1 Evaluation of alternatives.

Evaluations are first carried out by reading the website and the online reviews, looking at case studies, watching video testimonials, and reading Facebook posts and website blogs. Patients will shortlist the systems that they feel can provide the ideal results.

The patient may then start carrying out specific searches such as 'Invisalign in London', which leads to consideration of who can provide the treatment. This results in a phone call or a website form enquiry, usually to book a consultation. They may already have started preparing this provider shortlist during the Information Search period.

2.2 Purchase decision

Patients may book consultations with multiple practices. These patients are evaluating which dentist is right for them. This is the second moment of truth. This experience can happen with two types of dentists:

One could unwittingly bore the patient to death with the technical aspects of the procedure and the treatment, maybe not help them to understand the value of the treatment and scare the patient away from fixing their problem.

The second type will listen to the patient, to understand the patient. They'll listen to their fears, their concerns and help the patient to see the value and benefits of the system this dentist is providing and confidently place a monetary value on the dentist's time, skills and knowledge. They'll win the patient's trust by showing that they genuinely care about solving the patient's problem.

At this stage, the patient may decide to go ahead. Guess which dentist they'd choose?

Information	Problem recognition
	Information search
Research	Evaluation of alternatives
	Purchase decision
Decision	Purchase
	Post-purchase evaluation

Consumer journey stages

3) DECISION

3.1 Purchase

This micro-stage consists of the patient parting with their cash and time. This starts with paying for the treatment, and is followed by experiencing the treatment and the service provided by every interaction with your practice. Management of patient expectations throughout this journey is critical because the patient is looking for continued care.

3.2 Post-purchase evaluation

The patient will experience the unveiling of their new smile. This is one of the most critical stages. This is the 'final moment of truth'. If successful, you'll create a raving fan and they'll remember you for life as the person who helped to improve their self-esteem. At this moment, you can ask for a referral, which will help to create a 'stimulus' for a new prospective patient and start them on their journey through the research, information and decisions stages to hopefully choose you.

As clichéd as it may sound, hopefully, you have realised that dentistry is what you do, but what you offer is a solution for people who are unhappy with their smiles to improve their self-esteem and love themselves more.

Over the next nine months, through four more articles, I will continue explaining the dental patient's online journey and what gives you the best chance of attracting them and getting them to say yes!

If you can't wait until the end of 2017 to get the entire plan, get in touch! [CP](#)

FACTFILE



Naz Haque is the Google Consultant for Dental Focus. Excelling in business strategy, Google

marketing strategies, digital marketing, and mobile and network computing, he has provided consultancy services for major blue-chip brands such as Apple, Microsoft, HP and Sony. Through Dental Focus, as an expert in Search Engine Optimisation, Naz has been helping dentists grow their businesses, attract more patients, increase their monthly revenue and achieve their dreams.

Do you wonder what your patients are looking for and where they are finding it? No prizes for guessing they want straight white teeth, but is that really what they're looking for? Ultimately it boils down to improved self-esteem. I believe patients are buying the ability to love themselves more. Whether it's the confidence to present a wide smile at a wedding, a public speaking opportunity or a significant event, when their needs (N), wants (W), and priorities (P) align, they go ahead with the treatment plan.

'A GOOD PATIENT IS A PATIENT THAT PAYS'

Have you heard the saying 'a good patient is a patient that pays'? We'll call this type of patient, 'patient Y'. Patient Y thinks there is something wrong (needs to love themselves more), wants a straighter smile (is looking for a solution), and has prioritised to allocate time (appointments) and money (your fees) to fix this problem. Now we know this, where do you find patient Y?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on digital marketing solutions and website design go to www.dental-focus.com or call **020 7183 8388**.