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**Ian Berrow  
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Oral Ceramics,  
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#### ASK THE EXPERT LIVE

Date: 24th September

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# Dentistry Business

## The good, the bad and the ugly!

**Nilesh Parmar speaks to dental website designer Shaz Memon and tries to dispel the myths surrounding dental marketing and practice websites**

Shaz Memon has worked closely with me and my practice for several years. He offers a fresh perspective on all things dental and I believe is one of the true artistic designers out there. Not just limited to dental, Shaz's marketing expertise has seen him work with household names such as the BBC, House of Fraser, *Dragon's Den's* James Caan, McDonalds and Chopard to name a few.

**NP: So, Shaz, dental marketing, how does it differ to marketing in other fields?**

SM: The main difference is the depth of industry knowledge required in order to really excel a client's dental marketing strategy. It is tremendously important – much more so than with marketing, say a solicitor, eatery or retailer.

**NP: Why is that?**

SM: To successfully market a dental practice it is vital to understand the dental treatments and the dental industry. It is equally important to have an insight into what practices are being asked by new enquirers, the mind set and how many different types of marketing messages patients are being targeted with – all over. This knowledge is not something that can be acquired overnight, it is constantly evolving and the greatest success achieved has been being able to cut out the trial and error, and quickly hone into tweaking a campaign to work for a particular practice.

**NP: When developing a dental website is there anything specific I need to be aware of with regards to legality?**

SM: Yes, what is acceptable by the GDC. This is clear-cut but there is also some reading between the lines you need to do.

**NP: As an industry expert, how good would you classify the current mainstream dental websites?**

SM: A joke. I have studied hundreds of dental brands and websites and during my reviews it's clear that there is an abundance of generic or mundane designs with incorrectly

carved marketing messages. It is no wonder websites are not working for practices.

**NP: Have things changed over the last five years?**

SM: Yes, practices have started to market themselves more, which in turn has meant that patients are now more exposed to dental marketing and the treatment options available. The patient now has more choice than ever before and due to the 'special offer' craze is also more confused.

**NP: Is there anything I can/cannot say on my website?**

SM: All the information you present must be designed to help patients make an informed choice about their dental care. This sounds simple, but it means ensuring that all website content is never misleading, confusing or might exploit their lack of knowledge. This includes such seemingly harmless or generic claims such as 'we are the best in the area'. The only exception to this would be personal opinion, as in when a patient expresses 'you are the greatest dentist'.

**NP: So a designer must be aware of this, otherwise they may make a website that could get the dentist into a lot of trouble?**

SM: Simply, yes. For the uninformed or under-informed designer, these requirements can prove to be real pitfalls – and will decrease the effectiveness of the website – while also putting their client in jeopardy!

**NP: Would you say that print advertising, such as the Yellow Pages, etc. are no longer relevant to the modern dental practice?**

SM: *Yellow Pages* adverts are expensive and have yielded little return for a majority of my clients. An excellent website, brochure, adverts and overall marketing strategy can secure the future growth of new business and keep branding fresh and in line with that growth.

Dr Nilesh R. Parmar BDS MSc MSc was voted Best Young Dentist in the East of England in 2009 and runner up in 2010. He was shortlisted at the Private Dentistry Awards in the category of Outstanding Individual 2011. Nilesh has master's degrees in prosthetic dentistry from the Eastman Dental Institute and a master's degree in clinical implantology from Kings College London. Nilesh is one of the few dentists in the UK to have a degree from all three London Dental Schools and is currently studying for his third MSc in orthodontics. His main area of interest is in dental implants and Cerec CAD/CAM technology. Nilesh runs a successful five-surgery practice close to London and is a visiting implant dentist to two central London practices. Nilesh was voted the eighth most influential person in UK dentistry by *Dentistry Magazine* 2012, the youngest person in the Top 10. For more, visit [www.drnileshparmar.com](http://www.drnileshparmar.com).

Shaz Memon is the creative director for Digimax Dental. Showing creative flair from the age of 10 Shaz has been tutoring professionals in the creative industry since he was 18, and has gone on to win multiple awards for his work. Regarded as one of the most creative designers in the industry today, Shaz works with leading names such as BBC, FHM, Barclays, UBS, HP, Lennox Lewis, Hiscox, James Caan, House of Fraser and McDonalds to name a few, as well as being recognised in *Who's Who of Britain's Business Elite* under the category: Britain's Youngest Directors. [www.digimaxdental.co.uk](http://www.digimaxdental.co.uk)

**NP: Every other week I come across another dental marketing guru or search engine optimisation expert, who makes tempting promises... should I sign up?**

SM: I would begin by saying that there are salesmen and there are professional marketers with integrity. And as in anything, if the promises of the 'guru' seem too good to be true, they probably are. Most dentists are striving to grow their practice through great services and effective marketing. This makes them particularly vulnerable to the kinds of 'we can do it all for you' marketing promises.

Successful marketing and SEO require active, continuing knowledge of the processes, venues, and communication worlds they exist within – and this knowledge becomes even more intense when it's involved with targeting an industry-specific audience – and especially when that industry is dentistry.

**NP: What questions should I be asking my web designer?**

SM: You want to ask questions that can identify their expertise in marketing – specifically to dentistry, not just if their websites look nice. Just a few should quickly reveal their depth of experience. You might want to start with:

- Have you produced work for dentists before? If so, what type and how many projects?
- How was success measured?
- Are you familiar with all the dental treatment options that I offer? Explain...
- Understanding of your placement – NHS/mixed/wholly private, how this should affect your marketing?
- Do they understand conversion-led design?

**NP: Conversion-led design – that sounds very fancy, what is it?**

SM: Anyone can knock together a website, logo, advert or brochure. Will this work and actually turn a viewer of your marketing into someone who wants to pick up the phone and call you? Does it transmit the correct tone through design and copy that could achieve results? Often not.

**NP: A lot of dental websites look the same to me, why are so many ending up with the same style?**

SM: This is – unfortunately – very true and you've hit on the very thing that dulls most online dental marketing: it is very nearly generic. The problem is that dentists wanting to create an online presence that makes them stand out from the crowd are being forced into these generic websites. The end result is patients who are simply 'tuning out' of these websites. The same images, same style, same templates have created a marketing nothingness.

I believe dentists have encountered this problem because when they call a 'dental marketing company' they speak to 'salesmen' – not a marketing designer. The project is then often shunted to a low paid or junior designer who puts together a new website based on previously used styles. The project is churned out as quickly as possible so they can move on to the next job. The sale is the important element, not expert design or marketing.

It disturbs me that dental practices too often spend money on websites that do nothing to market their brand or support the success of their practice. The same financial outlay – to an expert dental designer – would ensure the job was done right and the dentist would see results. We do not use templates or stock layouts – everything is created bespoke, from the moment we begin working with our client – and we believe this is how it should be.

**NP: How often should a dental website be updated, in terms of style and look?**

SM: At least every 24 months.

**NP: I guess that means mine are due for renewal! So, how important is branding for a dental practice?**

SM: It is absolutely crucial! Many practices place intense focus on getting a website created and ignore the branding they have in place. One of the first things I ask when working with a new dental client is – 'can I see your logo?'

Think of it this way, your brand is on every piece of marketing material you create, so it needs to speak to and promise who you are correctly. This means your website is only as good as your brand and your logo.

Very often, just a few tweaks to a logo you've been using for 10 years can make a world of difference. Many of



**Author and interviewer Nilesh Parmar (left) and web expert Shaz Memon (right)**

my clients have been reluctant when I've suggested they improve their logo before we even touched their website. Yet once done, they are very pleased that they agreed to such changes and can see the fresh impact that has been created. New start-ups have a great opportunity to create a powerful brand from scratch.

**NP: Time to talk figures, how much should I be paying for a dental website?**

SM: For a great website – on average £3,000. We have packages ranging from a lot less to a lot more, but I feel a practice should invest this much into their practice website to visually get the most out of it. This isn't a choice of luxury – between spending £250 on a practice sofa or £2500 – this is an investment where you need to get the most return going forward for your practice.

**NP: Couldn't I just do it myself?**

SM: Yes – you could do it yourself. And you could also do your company accounts as well as service your car and make your own clothes, wait a minute, maybe people should be their own dentists? I'm sure there's a YouTube video on doing your own root canal!

Joking aside, think of it this way, you can pull your own tooth out and risk infection and extended damage or you can pay an experienced dentist to skilfully extract your tooth without pain or risk. To summarise, as with many things in life, you have to pay a bit more for quality!

**NP: Search engine optimisation? What's that all about and is it worth the money?**

SM: Simple answer is yes. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a complex, ever-changing process that is essentially about getting your website to appear in the search results. It is about matchmaking. Trying to establish within the Google (or any other search engine) indexes that your website should be displayed towards the top of their search results for a particular key term.

Some clients think of SEO as something that will magically make their website appear for a search phrase such as 'Dentist in London' if their website just went online and they are a dentist in London. Unfortunately, they are not the only dentist in London and with a number of practices all competing for spots on the first page of search listings – getting to the top can take time and expert work. Done correctly, an expert SEO web designer can get a website to the first page of Google. The pinch here is how to determine if your web designer is also an expert in SEO.

When paying for SEO, be sure to ask when you can expect to see results, will paying this amount get me to the first page for the search terms discussed, and can you prove that these search terms, such as 'Root Canal Service London', are even being searched?

It is fairly easy to be listed on the first page for keywords that no one really searches – the tough thing to accomplish is a first page listing for the broader keywords, such as 'Dentist London' – and this is where time and expert use of available SEO data comes in.

**NP: That's great Shaz, you have cleared up a lot of myths surrounding websites and marketing. Thank you for your time.**

For further information contact Nilesh by email at [drnileshparmar@gmail.com](mailto:drnileshparmar@gmail.com) or Shaz on [shaz@digimax.co.uk](mailto:shaz@digimax.co.uk)



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**Larry Browne**

L S Browne Technical Services,  
Surbiton

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