The social revolution
Networking sites offer a great means of promoting your dental practice

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Imagine if you would, a time when there were only three analogue television channels—closing before midnight, no mobile phones and no home computers. The World Wide Web was unheard of. Letters had to be posted. That was my childhood. If you had told me I would be on Facebook this time last year, I would have laughed, told you I didn’t have enough time and refused to consider it.

I only learnt to use predictive text last year, thanks to the patience of a 14-year-old patient—though I still haven’t come to grips with shorthand text much to the amusement of my friends. They say I send books not texts.

Thankfully, our wonderful administrator (also my husband) set up a profile for me as the company and a page for us as CPDforDCP Ltd on Facebook last year. Six months on, we have more than 1,900 friends and it has allowed us to interact with dental professionals all over the country and produce courses tailored to their needs. Some of our courses are never advertised off Facebook, as they are filled up directly from there.

Listening to our friends in the business and being part of many groups has given us an insight into which direction we should be heading in our 2011 planning—all of this from the comfort of my own living room with a cup of tea in hand.

Facebook offers information and answers; there is a list of instant information at your fingertips and if you don’t know where to look, you can ask one of the many groups, such as Dental Nurse Network or UK Dental Hygienists. On Facebook, someone invariably knows the answer or connects you to someone or some business that does. Many forms of CPD (free and otherwise) are recommended and links posted to these are available to everyone.

I have had conversations with oral surgeons from Israel, special needs’ dentists from Germany and found many great articles through the groups’ suggestions. On the site, business coaches offer advice, and other businesses support each other. Perhaps I am starting to make it sound like a commune, but that is because that is what it reminds me of. There is a social side to this too, providing an environment for friendly debate and discussion, and an occasional moan too. There are many fun groups, such as the one that managed to get Rage Against the Machine to 2009 Christmas number one, demonstrating the power of this site.

Not just the little people
The British Dental Health Foundation said the following in a recent press release: “Since introducing the online strategy a little over two months ago, the British Dental Health Foundation has seen traffic to its website increase by more than a staggering 55 per cent.”

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The Foundation posts a variety of oral-health advice, dental research and industry-based news.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, is astonished by the speed of its success: “When we first stepped into social networking we hoped that it would bring us closer to the public as another means of getting across good oral health messages. Our plan was long term, to grow a steady following gradually and slowly increase traffic to the website but its growth has already surpassed all that we imagined. We trebled our three-month target within the first three weeks and these figures have continued to rise.”

“We are making new relationships with people of all ages, from all backgrounds on a daily basis—we really have fallen on our feet with it.”

Not just for professionals
There are many dental practices now on Facebook, with their patients as group members, using it to share newsletters, promote the practice and interact in a positive way to develop new business. Companies can talk to their patients directly and much business is conducted through Facebook and other social networking.

There are many forms of social networking that work in a way similar to Facebook: Twitter (am too scared of this site, might like it too much and start boring you all with my food choices and colour of socks—less is more), YouTube (watch out as we are on our way), my space and many others. There are even companies that will manage these pages for you and your company so you can access your clients in as many different ways as possible.