

MODULE 4B

The Facebook Algorithm

» How do people use Facebook?

In this module we're really going to have some fun! We're going to pull back the curtain on the Facebook algorithm and look at some specific techniques to make it work for your practice. Let's get started!

How do people use Facebook? The key to this social media platform is what's known as the "feed". This is where a constant stream of information is posted by other Facebook users. The feed is where every Facebook user goes first to check up on the people and businesses that they are following. With 900 million users, each of which have a following of about 200 friends, as you can imagine it would be overwhelming to be bombarded by all the things that your 200 friends are doing at any given moment.

To combat this, Facebook uses an algorithm to prioritize what you see in your feed. This means instead of seeing all the posts from all of your friends, you would only see those that are most relevant to you. The challenge as a business is how to make your posts relevant to your followers so they show up in their feeds, and how to work the Facebook algorithm to our advantage.

» The Facebook formula.

The Facebook algorithm that prioritizes feeds is what's called "Edgerank", which is a function of a number of variables. Don't worry - we're not going to get into astrophysics! We'll break it down into its simplest form.

The first variable is **affinity**, which means that if people are interacting with your page, then your posts will show up at a greater rate in their feeds. This formula is all about interaction. For example, if someone goes to your page and clicks "like", that signifies a point of interaction, and your posts will start to show up in their feed. If, however, over time there's a lack of interaction between your business page and that user, your posts will begin to fade from their feed and decrease in visibility. To boost this variable, we have to make sure we're interacting with our clients, and in a moment we'll examine some specific ways to do that.

The next variable is **weight**, which corresponds to how people interact with your page. So, where affinity stands for *if* people are interacting with your page, weight stands for *how*, or the quality of their interactions. For example, if someone comments on one of your posts, this indicates a greater degree of effort versus just clicking the like button. So, we want people to comment, share and like your posts, in that order, to trigger the maximum amount of weight and therefore the greatest amount of visibility on their feeds.

Finally we have time, or more specifically **time decay**. Facebook wants to keep content fresh, and therefore organizes posts on a user's feed by how recent they are. Over time, the visibility of your posts will decrease as they're replaced by newer posts. It's really an intuitive concept. In order to take advantage of this variable, we want to post at a time that has the greatest chance of being seen by your audience.

Research suggests that there are 3 key times that have the greatest activity on Facebook. The first is 7am, just before people leave for work, then 5pm, just before people leave work to go home, and finally 11pm, just before people go to bed. So, this begs the question: do you have to be at the practice at 7am, 5pm and 11pm just to post on Facebook? I don't think so. This platform has a scheduler that allows you to post at specific times in the future, so you can pre-load your content and have it published at these specified times. My advice is to work with the editorial calendar in the toolbox to facilitate this.

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» Developing engaging content.

A great way to entice your followers to interact with your Facebook page is by using pet related games and questions. For example, you could post a picture of a mixed breed dog and then ask your followers to guess what type of dog it is. By urging them to comment below with their answers, you are prompting further interaction which will increase your affinity and your weight, ultimately increasing your practice's visibility.

Let's consider a real-life example that involves a practice that started out with just 36 followers. After posting an image and asking a similar question as the example provided above, it elicited 7 comments. Imagine what that would translate to if they had hundreds of followers!

The name of the game is engagement, so you need to find ways to pull people into your page and prompt interaction. It's important to be creative, and here are a few examples to help get you started.

One great idea is the “fill in the blank to win” game, based on the popular game Hangman. Choose a theme and urge your followers to guess what the spaces represent by commenting below. As the game of the week, each day you can go on and fill in one of the letters yourself. This will spur fun interaction, and you can also offer a prize for the winner at the end. What you will find is that you will get all kinds of guesses and it will really generate fun feedback.

Another idea is to use a hot button that really gets people talking. Naturally, people tend to be either dog or cat lovers, and if you give them the opportunity to elect one or the other as president, you’re sure to get an earful! Remind your followers to comment with their vote and you’ll be sure to get some interesting input, all furthering your affinity and your weight.

The next few ideas are based on the “if/then” premise, and because people view their pets as having such unique personalities, they are sure to have plenty to say. An example would be asking a question like, “If your pet could order any meal, what would it be and who would it be with? Comment below, and tag the friend.” Tagging is a way to alert one of your friends that something is being said about them, and in this context your followers will be bringing all of their friends to your Facebook page, increasing its visibility. Therefore, a great strategy is to always add a “with who” to all of your games and questions.

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The last example is to use an inkblot and encourage your followers to comment with what kind of animal they see within the image.

Remember, the key is for your Facebook page to foster your clients’ creativity. The more interaction you can produce, the greater your practice’s influence, and the more fun it is for all of your followers. So, create those games and contests, publish them on your page and watch your Facebook following grow.

I look forward to seeing you in the next module!