

use the images to reflect on my work and improve my skills. They are also vital in helping patients understand their oral health for properly informed consent and protection against any dento-legal risks. I couldn't do my job without my camera.

In addition, the CBCT machine is integral to the digital workflow, as scans are merged with intraoral images to afford greater accuracy, confidence and patient comfort during dental implant planning and placement.

Finally, 3D printing is an area we are only just tapping into, but already we are seeing amazing things. I have found this particularly beneficial for fabricating surgical guides, which I use in the majority of dental implant cases. This workflow allows me to deliver safe and predictable treatment in a much shorter time frame. As the equipment develops, I even think it will go into 3D printing ceramics, which would be a very exciting thing for dentistry.

Why do you think uptake of some digital technologies has been relatively slow in the UK?

SC The initial cost of equipment is often the greatest barrier. Principals are running businesses and cannot always justify what is a substantial capital investment for a scanner or chairside milling unit. However, I would strongly recommend any dentists who do not currently utilise the digital workflow to look at the numbers again. For me, I see return on investment in substantially reduced lab bills, as well as an extensively reduced amount of waste – I no longer use impression material or plastic trays. The other massive advantage of this is that it is a much more sustainable way of providing dentistry. This is something I am very passionate about, as I believe we all need to consider how we can reduce plastic waste in our clinics and for our patients, while still maintaining health and safety standards. Electronic data capture and transfer significantly reduces the waste products we produce. It's not perfect – 3D printing resins are not recyclable, for example – but it is a step in the right direction.

Another benefit is that the learning curve for modern digital solutions is much shorter than it was. This makes the transition easier and allows clinicians to maximise on the potential benefits soon after introducing the equipment. My father is a prime example –

he took on the digital world after 35 years of practising traditional dentistry and he loves it.

Digital solutions will, of course, be more accessible as the technology develops and becomes more affordable. Competition in the market is a positive thing for clinicians as it drives innovation forwards and costs down.

How can dentists get started in digital?

SC Information is king. We are lucky that digital dentistry is a hot topic in the profession right now, so nearly every conference will cover it. At the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (BACD), we focus heavily on digital dentistry education. Events like the British Dental Conference and Dentistry Show provide more opportunities for clinicians to see what's available and have a go themselves, which is crucial.

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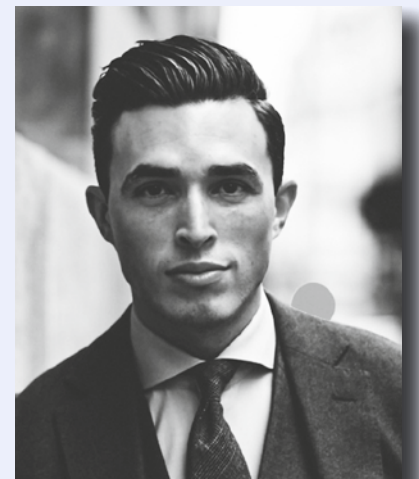
All digital solutions have their nuances depending on the practitioner's skill set and the treatment modalities they offer. There are many variations between manufacturers so it's often a personal decision on what equipment to invest in. For example, most systems are open source today, which provides flexibility and potential to expand digital capabilities over time. However, I personally chose a closed system because I have greater confidence that different solutions will integrate seamlessly as the technologies are designed to communicate with each other.

Can digital solutions be utilised outside the treatment workflow?

SC Absolutely – my primary mode of communication with patients is via social media. It's a great way to show that I am using the latest technology in practice, which is a massive unique selling point.

It also provides an opportunity to share oral health messages with more people in their preferred communication method. I tend to connect more with fellow millennials and I find these platforms very effectively reach both existing and potential new patients.

Despite the benefits, it is important to remember that social media is a double-edged sword – it normalises the exceptional. Cases presented by colleagues often show their very best outcomes, so it can be disheartening to compare your own daily work to those cases. It's the same outside of dentistry: many of the stunning selfies you see on Instagram are likely the result of someone's best pose, best light and best photography skills, while being only one of perhaps hundreds of attempts. These platforms should be used to inspire, not compare. Mental health is already an issue in dentistry, so it's important to be aware of and avoid the potential negatives of social media like trolling – which is something I have personally experienced throughout my career. Other than this, social media is a great example of utilising digital technology for the forward-thinking dentist. ♦



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