

## **Social Media for Health Care – Amplifying Paid and Earned Media Messages in the Digital Age**

By Michelle Abdow, President, Market Mentors, LLC – a full-service marketing, advertising and public relations firm

The advent of digital media, including real-time communications tools like Twitter and Facebook, has significantly altered marketing initiatives. Because social media is a relatively new channel of communication and there are so many different options, it can be difficult to understand which platforms make sense for a health care practice and how to use them most effectively. This third installment of a three-part marketing series will focus on how social media is a great supplement to traditional marketing plans for health care and how they can be integrated with current initiatives for the best return on investment.

### **Social media is a supplement, not a replacement, for traditional marketing**

Many social media platforms are free to use, so it's a common mistake to think that replacing other paid-for marketing initiatives with social media will increase ROI. The bottom line is that while many of the platforms are free to use, the human resources and best practices to support social media take time and cost money. Let's explore those best practices and initiatives that maximize the ROI of social media initiatives.

### **Social media management**

It takes time to build out the infrastructure of a Facebook page or Twitter account, and it takes time to research content to post and reply to comments from the public. Successful social media campaigns have a budget to support the staff behind the screen including the development of a strategy and execution of the plan. Unsuccessful social media campaigns often result from good intentions, but a lack of expertise, forward planning for regular posts and untimely replies to public comments. A great example of this is that Facebook now rates business pages by the promptness of replies. If a business does not have the staff or hours allocated to monitoring social media accounts, questions go unanswered and negative comments from the public can damage a brand. A great solution to avoid this mistake is to build out a social media calendar with proactive posts for the month (or year if you have the time) that ensures regular sharing of relevant content. When the social media or marketing manager logs in to post comments, it's a great time to check for questions or comments from the public.

An important part of social media management is evaluating what is working for the brand and what is not working. Business accounts on social media often come with an analytics dashboard (or have them available for a fee). Analyzing which posts or content people are sharing with their followers or are driving the most conversions (clicks to your company website, filling out a form requesting more information, etc.) will help a business use social media more effectively over time. Again, it takes time to use analytics appropriately and learn what key metrics matter most for your business. This step is most often missed by businesses that trust an intern or inexperienced social media marketing associate to manage social media for business. Do not be fooled by your social media savvy niece or wet-behind-the-ears college grad that spent more time on Pinterest than going to class... social media for business requires a completely different skillset and uses different tools. You have a business plan and analyze it, and social media should be a part of it.

### **Enterprise solutions and analytics**

Another reason why social media is not truly free for business is that enterprise solutions for businesses are paid-for services. LinkedIn, for example, has a premium offering that syncs to client relationship management (CRM) software to track leads. A perfect example of enterprise social media solutions for health care would be public service announcement (PSA) campaigns on Facebook to create awareness about a new product, service or procedure. How can a PSA campaign be done effectively? With social media advertising options – an enterprise solution.

## **Social media advertising**

A really great PSA campaign for a new offering needs to be seen to be effective. On Facebook, only those that “like” your business page will see your posts and updates. While it is free to post content on Facebook, increasing your likes can be difficult without advertising posts. Using Facebook’s advertising features to promote content drives more people to like the business page and ensures that they will be seeing content published later. It’s an instant win for the current campaign and increases the audience for future announcements. Advertising options to promote content are available on most social media platforms.

Now that it’s established that social media management takes time and typically costs money to be most successful, understanding what platforms to allocate that budget toward is equally important....**which begs the question, what social media platforms are best for health care marketing?**

## **Blogs and other direct communications**

The health care industry is always rapidly changing, which requires constant patient education. A great way to provide information to patients is to write about what is new on a company blog. Like Facebook, increasing followers of the blog and creating awareness about the patient resource is important. Blogging tips:

- Wordpress is user-friendly blogging platform with excellent customer service
- Constant Contact and Mail Chimp are two of the best blast email services around, and do better than other services which can often get caught in email spam filters
- The blog should be integrated into your website
- Consider collecting email addresses from patients when they fill out forms prior to an appointment, and send out a digital newsletter that repurposes blog content
- Post blogs often – adding regular, relevant and new content helps improve search engine optimization (SEO – which is a marketing term used to describe how well a website is found through search, like Google, Bing or Yahoo!)

## **Facebook**

Facebook has one of the largest social media adoption rates, which means that more people can see and engage with content shared on this social media platform. What was once created by and intended for college students has now morphed into one of the most widely used social media platforms in the world. Additionally, Facebook has advanced analytics to help a business strategize and has powerful advertising solutions to help build an audience. Facebook post tips:

- Include visuals like graphics and videos – they are the most shared and liked posts, which helps build the audience
- Post articles that are related to the industry, including earned media articles featuring your company from public relations initiatives
- Status updates that compliment advertising increases the reach of a message; for example, if your advertising is branding based, Facebook posts should be too, or if ads feature a special offer make sure your Facebook posts do the same

## **Instagram**

While not all health care organizations have visual content to share, many dermatological procedures have powerful before and after photos. Take advantage of the highly visual nature of the dermatology industry to demonstrate the effectiveness of treatments and procedures offered by the industry. Additionally, Instagram adoption rates are much more popular with younger demographics including 20 and 30-somethings (Facebook demographics are rising in age) so including Instagram in a marketing strategy will increase the age demographics for a wider reach. Instagram tips:

- Share before and after visuals
- Use paid-for advertising opportunities to increase the reach of the post
- Save visuals and create a printed flipbook for patients to browse when they are in the waiting room

There are many, many more social media platforms that can leverage a health care brand and its services. Taking time to evaluate what the business goals are and researching which platforms are most helpful is essential for success. Social media can be used as a vehicle to share paid, owned and earned media, and is a great supplement to traditional advertising and public relations initiatives for health care organizations. By sharing blog links, TV commercials, print advertisements and news links, medical professionals are able to educate the public about health issues while increasing the audience that sees their original content.

Regardless of what platform(s) is used, remember to keep messaging on point and offer value to the general audience. A good question to keep in mind is “what’s in it for me?” from the perspective of your target audience. With all that said, social media takes time and expertise – if analytics platforms have you confused and you’re not sure where to allocate a budget, bring in marketing professionals to help so you can focus on what you do best – creating the best possible experience and outcomes for your patients. To learn more about marketing, advertising, public relations or social media as it relates to your practice, visit [Market Mentors.com](http://MarketMentors.com).