

Leveraging Facebook to Brand Radiology

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Abstract

In the current health care climate, radiologists should consider developing their brand. Facebook is the market leader for social media networking in the United States. The authors describe how radiologists can leverage Facebook to develop and market organizational, group, and individual brands. The authors then address concerns related to the use of social media by radiologists.

Key Words: Radiologist, social media, Facebook, branding, patients

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INTRODUCTION

In the current competitive health care climate, radiologists should consider developing their brand. A brand is “a name, logo, slogan, and/or design scheme associated with a product or service” to differentiate it from other products or services [1,2]. A brand symbolizes all of the information tied to a group, an organization, or an individual and conveys what separates the branded entity from its competition [3]. Effective branding has evolved into a complex marketing strategy used to evoke emotion, loyalty, and a “relationship” to the customer [4]. A classic example of a successful brand is Starbucks coffee: despite the ease of making coffee at home, millions of people prefer to stop at their local Starbucks for their morning pick-me-up [2]. Successful branding has helped Starbucks distinguish itself from the competition. Similarly, successful branding can help radiologists and radiology departments and practices increase their market share by distinguishing themselves from the competition.

Today, the use of branding for radiology and radiologists seems to be an underdeveloped area. A study by the American College of Radiology in 2008 reported that 50% of patients do not know that radiologists are physicians [5,6], and roughly two-thirds of patients do not understand the role of radiologists in patient care [5]. Developing a

brand is an important part of any successful marketing strategy, and studies suggest that a successful marketing strategy can have substantial benefits for radiologists. For example, a study of an academic institution demonstrated that effective marketing resulted in growth of their referring physician relationships and referral base by 7.2% [7,8], and referrals for CT and MRI increased by 57.3% and 45.2%, respectively [7].

In this article, we describe how radiologists, radiology departments, and practices can use Facebook’s social media platform to develop and strengthen their brand. We also address radiologists’ concerns related to using Facebook for marketing.

FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM FOR MARKETING

Facebook is the market leader for social media networking in the United States [9]. As of March 2017, Facebook had 1.28 billion daily active users on average [10]. Results of the Radiologists and Social Media survey, conducted in the spring of 2015, showed that Facebook was the most popular social media platform among radiologists [11]. Many people and organizations use Facebook to leverage their marketing activities.

Facebook allows individuals and organizations to create free online profiles and interact directly with other users in real time. Profiles created for individuals are called “profiles,” whereas profiles created for official entities like celebrities and organizations are called “pages.” Facebook profiles and pages allow individuals and organizations to share content and to react to content via liking, commenting on, or sharing it. “Likes,” “comments,” and “shares” are known as “engagements.” Each “engagement” has the potential to be

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shared and reshared on different profiles or pages, which may lead to a domino effect. The “reach” of posted content, or the number of people who have the potential to see it, may increase exponentially in a very short period.

Slightly distinct from “pages” are “groups,” which are online communities of Facebook users with similar interests or goals. Individuals can join a group via their personal profile. Groups may be public and open, public and closed, or secret. Closed groups are searchable by the public; however, to gain access, one must be invited by a preexisting member. Secret groups are not searchable by the public, and again, to gain access, one must be invited by a preexisting member.

Facebook offers users the possibility of reaching millions of viewers who otherwise could not be reached. Compared with the cost of historical forms of marketing, such as flyers and commercials, the cost of marketing on Facebook is relatively low [12,13]. In contrast with classic advertisements such as print, television, radio, and billboards, which have finite lifetimes, marketing materials posted to Facebook can be available indefinitely.

OPPORTUNITIES TO USE FACEBOOK FOR BRANDING

Branding of Radiology Within Larger Organizations

Many health care organizations use Facebook pages to market their locations, services, physicians, partnerships, and so on. Through its Facebook page, a health care organization can educate patients about medical diagnoses, share best practices with the community, keep the community apprised of any changes in the organization’s policies or practices, and accept feedback. Early data support the concept that aggregate measures of patient satisfaction on social media correlate with historically accepted measures of hospital quality [14].

A Facebook page, in contrast to a traditional website, allows immediate online interactions between patients and the health care organization or even among patients in similar situations who wish to share and communicate. Facebook pages may be used to post question-and-answer sessions, educational live interviews or videos, or links to articles clarifying current or former controversial topics. Facebook pages may also be used to improve relationships with referring physicians, resulting in increased referral base and volume. All these marketing activities on an organization’s Facebook page strengthen the organization’s brand and may increase the organization’s perceived value in both the local and online communities.

Branding of Radiology Practices and Departments

Branding a radiology practice can help differentiate it from the competition [2]. Practicing outstanding clinical radiology is simply not enough to distinguish a practice from the competition [15]. As a package, the patient experience, referring physician experience, imaging quality, and report quality all must be superior [16]. Facebook can also be used to brand radiology practices to both patients and clinicians. In evaluating radiology practices, patients will most likely consider radiologist knowledge and expertise, the imaging modalities available, and the practice’s reputation [16]. Through its Facebook page, a radiology practice can post educational profiles of its practicing radiologists, patient satisfaction scores, clinical quality metrics, current imaging modality accreditations from the ACR, patient safety measures, such as rates of complications from procedures, and operational metrics, such as next appointment availability, report turnaround time, and time to answering phone calls. Finally, a practice can use its Facebook page to educate referring physicians and patients, for example, through publishing a case of the day, links to current Imaging 3.0™ initiatives [17], or notices of local health events sponsored by the practice.

Branding of Individual Radiologists

In personal branding, brands are used to market people and their careers [1]. Some private practice and academic radiologists may be reluctant to consider personal branding as they are part of a group. However, radiologists should consider developing a personal brand as part of the Imaging 3.0 culture transformation [17] intended to help improve radiologist visibility. Radiologists are stereotyped as doctors who sit in a dark room all day [17]. Effective personal branding can overcome this stereotype and help put a face to the field of radiology.

Radiologists who wish to use Facebook to develop or strengthen their personal brand should begin by creating pages separate from any personal Facebook profiles they may have. This allows radiologists to brand themselves while filtering what the general public can see. Posts on a radiologist’s personal Facebook profile will not be seen on his or her professional Facebook page.

For branding through a professional Facebook page, an easy way to start is to add a professional photo, details of one’s educational background, and a personal mission statement. Additional content that can be posted includes question-and-answer sessions, photos, treatment

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