

# Showcase Your Service: Social Media and Marketing Basics in a Dynamic, Over- Populated, Mixed-Message, and Highly Competitive World

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## KEYWORDS

- Practice management • Social media marketing • Internet
- Communication • Networking

At a time when patient selection is imperative, technology uses continue to evolve, and economic conditions critically influence both your practice and your patients, one might ask, “What is social media and why would I engage in social media?” Physicians are asking, “Where does social marketing fit into my marketing plan?” And yet others want to know if social media and marketing, can, do, or should coexist.

The answer to those questions is simple: Communication. Today social media and marketing in a manner that fits your brand, market, and tolerances are essential for you to stay visible, reach out, and educate, all the while negating the hype and danger of unqualified providers and the hysteria when bad news makes headlines.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an opportunity for people to connect electronically and informally. It is designed to make introductions, share experiences, build community, and overall link people with common interests. It can include chat rooms; blogs, like [RealSelf.com](#); networks, like Facebook and Twitter; or channels, like [YouTube.com](#). In the very intimate world of plastic surgery, it offers an opportunity to interact and learn more in greater dimension than traditional media, yet social media still allows patients to remain anonymous, if they so choose. With no-cost connections to potential interested patients who are listening, chatting,

networking, or simply observing, why wouldn't you engage in social media?

You may actively participate in social media. Or, social media may include you whether or not you choose to participate. Patients, staff, and community members—nearly anyone—can “socialize,” be it spreading the good word, gossip, or angst about a procedure, an experience, an outcome, or you. Importantly, social media is free; critically, social media can be beyond your control.

A way to get the most out of social media is to incorporate viral marketing. Viral marketing often uses social media to get more awareness for your practice. It is “the buzz” and is what you do to get everyone talking, sharing, forwarding, listening, and engaged in your message for reasons that sometimes have little to do with you or facial plastic surgery. It can be your catchy slogan that many people find so intriguing they Tweet it to all their friends. It is your commercial that never made the air but has had thousands of hits on YouTube. You may be surprised at how many different people you can reach through viral marketing and social media.

What are the different kinds of social media you can use to your advantage?

## Networks

Social networks range from personal sites in which you connect with or make “friends” and keep status updates, like Facebook and Twitter,

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to professional networking sites to post a résumé and keep in touch with business contacts, like LinkedIn. There are more specific networking sites for different ages, races, religions, interests, and really anything you can think of. The premise is that you establish yourself with a profile (information about you), and then you network with others on the site through blogs and chat rooms and interact via email and through instant messaging.

Networks can help you connect with your patients. But they can also be a place for your patients to say things about you and your practice (bad or good). These networks should only be used for social discussion, not giving advice or even soliciting patients. With such a variety, it is hard to say which you should join and which you should not, but even if you do not join any social networks you must monitor them, because you never know what your patients are saying about you to the entire virtual world.

### **Sharing**

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Whether YouTube, Flickr, or a multitude of other sites, sharing is a means to share videos, images, and stories. You could use these to post images or videos about your practice, but always do so with caution. Although these sites have millions of visitors a day, much of this content is not monitored and fairly unrestricted. For example, you may post to YouTube what you think is a video clip and will generate lots of views from those searching your area of expertise. But then a few days later you find someone else has taken your video and morphed it with a few different videos into a joke about horrible plastic surgery. It is important to choose which social media you use and how you use it carefully.

### **Blogs**

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A blog is an online conversation. People share experiences, ask questions, and engage in conversations through blogs. Similarly to social networking sites, blogs can be about any topic and anyone can create one. Some physicians start their own blogs to keep their patients informed and connect with them. It is a great way to keep your patients updated on the newest promotions or latest products from your practice.

The difficult part of any blog, or social media in general, is always keeping up to date. If you are not going to monitor your blog daily, you may miss questions patients ask. If you have not posted anything in months, you may give the impression that you are unorganized. Blogs can

be a great tool, but like any form of social media, you must monitor everything that you post or your patients post.

### **Reviews**

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Like vacation spots, restaurants, movies, and plays, reviews of physicians, medical procedures, and beauty products are now available online. It is important you know who is talking about you and where. On many of these sites a reviewer can remain anonymous and can say virtually anything about you or your practice.

The reality is that you cannot control what people write in a review about you if it is true. But if it is something false, you can contact the webmaster to get the issue resolved. Rather than battle, to limit the amount of negative reviews to which you or your practice are the subject, you must run your practice to achieve both quality outcomes and safety and to deliver a quality and personal patient experience.

### **Wikis**

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Wikis are sites with collections of Internet content that are interlinked and can be accessed by anyone to add content. For example, Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia where anyone can add information about any topic. Wikis carry scant, prolific, quality, or very poor information—all aimed at public education purposes. Some physicians have created their own Wikipedia pages; realize that in doing so you must consider yourself worthy of this type of exposure, willing to expose your practice and information about you to others who may edit or link to your the page, and willing to lose control of where and to what your information is linked.

It may be intimidating to jump into social media at first, but it is important to realize that social media is here to stay and will only continue to grow. Getting involved is easy. Staying involved requires motivation. Measuring the time input to be involved by you or your staff may not have an easy-to-measure return on investment.

Your argument may be that consists of individuals with aging faces who do not use Facebook—their children do. Consider this: those who use social media multiple times a day in the present are your patients of the immediate future. If you do not get social, your future patients will be less than impressed by your lack of Internet presence and will probably turn to a different physician they can relate to.

The future of technology is social media, so start posting, inviting, and commenting to get your social media image started, but do not lose sight

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