

The Power of Promotion: Using Social Media to Promote a Radiology Department

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The emergence of social media has provided medical practices with a new means of delivering content to a wide and varied audience. There are a number of different social media channels; however, each allows users to interact with each other, sharing and consuming content in a manner governed by rules unique to the specific social media platform. In this paper, we will introduce several common platforms, describe the advantages and disadvantages of each, and discuss how we have used each platform to connect to a target audience, highlight our department's educational content, and showcase our research.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, marketing in medicine has taken one of two forms: mass marketing or academic marketing. Mass marketing is a relatively new phenomenon in medicine and has focused on traditional methods such as billboards, print advertisements, and television commercials. Although the term "academic marketing" is a crass way of describing the academic output of an individual researcher or department, there is no denying that publications, abstracts, presentations, and posters all serve to promote the researchers, the research topic, and even the department in which the research was performed. The emergence of social media provides a new platform for delivery of content to a wide and varied audience.

Social media is a method of digital communication whereby users interact with each other, sharing and consuming content in a manner governed by rules unique to the individual social media platform. Social media has become a required mode of communication for most businesses in today's world due to its ability to deliver content directly to consumers, its massive user base, its relatively low cost for start-up and maintenance, and its ability for businesses to receive unfiltered feedback directly from the consumer. Whereas the general public and businesses have embraced social media, the medical profession has largely ignored this mode of communication (1,2). In this article, we explore our department's use of social media for promotion, education, and patient/collegial interaction.

DECISION TO PARTICIPATE

Before launching any social media campaign, it is important to understand your organization's policy on social media. In many cases, employers prohibit the use of social media or require approval from legal counsel or marketing and communication.

There are a number of reasons why organizations choose to limit the number of groups participating in social media. First, many organizations prefer a focused message to the consumer; if multiple groups are each promoting their own agenda, it may confuse the consumer and dilute the organization's message. Second, if multiple groups are using social media, there is an increased risk for a public miscue. Many organizations have had to make public apologies after inappropriate content has been posted on one of their social media channels (3,4). Finally, to stay relevant, content must be updated regularly on all social media channels. Many organizations are fearful of orphaned accounts that either serve as a reminder that a group has become stale or pose a risk in that hackers could take over and deliver unwanted content (5).

Even with these risks, we believe that there is value in having a unique social media account for a department. This is particularly important in radiology as most radiology practices do not have a direct relationship with their patients. Social media allows the department to interact with current patients and can help to show potential patients how the department differs from other practices. In a field that is becoming more and more commoditized, practices must show how they are different and potentially better than their competitors.

Once a department decides to use social media, its leaders should answer several key questions: Which platform should be used? Who is the target audience? What will the content look like? How often will new content be added? Who will be in charge of creating and managing that content?

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Like any endeavor, it is also important to know the measures of success. Each social media platform has its unique language and different ways to measure success. There are, however, some terms that are common to most social media channels: followers refer to the people that have subscribed to follow your content; impressions refer to the number of people that have seen a specific post; and engagement refers to the number of people who have interacted with a specific post. It follows that the number of impressions is always larger than the number of engagements.

There are a number of different social media platforms from which to choose. Throughout the remainder of this article, we will describe several of the social media platforms we have used, provide our answers to each of the aforementioned questions, and describe some of the metrics that each platform provides its users.

TWITTER

Twitter (Twitter, San Francisco, CA) is a predominantly text-based social media platform centered around interactions between users and followers through messages called tweets (Fig 1). As of September 2015, Twitter has 320 million active monthly users who send 500 million tweets per day (6). Tweets are messages composed of no more than 140 characters, providing brief but direct communication to all followers of a user. Each user has a handle, which is their username preceded by an @ symbol. Users can provide endorsement of others' tweets via actions such as a retweet (RT; repost the original tweet to followers of the retweeting user). Users tag their posts with hashtags (a word or group of words without spaces preceded by a # symbol). Hashtags allow users to group tweets with a similar topic. The most popular hashtags revolve around a common event such as the Super Bowl, the Oscars, or in the medical world, conferences such as Radiological Society of North America (RSNA).

Although Twitter is primarily text based, users can easily embed media such as links, pictures, and videos within tweets. Twitter's application programming interface (API) has spawned a broad range of third-party applications that provide increased functionality such as scheduling of content. Although the 140-character limit promotes concise content delivery, it often leads to the use of abbreviations to meet character limits. In addition, because there is a high volume of tweets per user, individual tweets can get lost in on a user's feed.

Twitter was our department's first foray into social media. We chose Twitter because of its small but dedicated radiology community as well as its ability to interact with others at conferences (7). We decided that our target audience for Twitter was our medical colleagues as well as patient advocacy groups. To reach our audience, we have constructed regular content around medical education and research. Examples of regular content includes live-tweeting educational conferences (#WeekendReview), alerting colleagues of new publications that either originate at our institution or may otherwise be helpful to our target audience, promoting our

departmental safety initiatives, and promoting our faculty's appearances at national and international meetings (8). As our other social media channels have grown, Twitter has played a central role in helping to deliver this new content. We post new content each business day and on average have 2–6 tweets per day. The departmental Twitter account is managed exclusively by one radiologist.

Metrics on Twitter are robust. Basic metrics include number of followers, number of retweets, replies (responses to tweets), and favorites (tweets starred by a user). These basic statistics can be found on the user's home page. Basic statistics for each tweet can be found within the tweet itself. Advanced metrics are also available. Besides providing users with the impressions, engagement, and engagement rate (ratio of engagements per impression), Twitter gives each user access to a wealth of detailed information via its free analytics package (9).

FACEBOOK

Facebook (Facebook, Menlo Park, CA) has the largest user base of any social media platform with 1.44 billion active monthly users (Fig 2) (10). Facebook is a text-based social media platform with the ability to embed photos, links, and videos. It is unique in that there is a platform specifically dedicated to businesses that incorporate pertinent, advanced analytics, and makes it easy to create paid advertisements to target consumers.

Facebook's business pages differ from personal pages in the way content is organized and in the way fans follow the content. One of the most important differences is that the page can be configured so that anyone can "like" the organization and follow their content. Followers of the organization can "share" the posts with friends on their own pages. Other key differences of an organization's page include the ability to post hours of operation, a business address, and phone number, and the ability for users to "check-in" at your location, review your organization, and even post content directly to the page.

Facebook differs from Twitter in a number of ways. First, whereas Twitter forces concise communication through 140 characters, Facebook allows users to be verbose. This freedom comes with its own challenges. To stand out, posts must capture the user's attention. Frequently, this requires an image as well as interesting text. Wordy posts are usually not appropriate on Facebook. A better tactic is to write a one- to two-sentence teaser and then include a link to a webpage with more detailed content.

The second difference between Twitter and Facebook is in the way content is delivered. In Twitter, each tweet is posted to the world. While the tweet appears on each follower's wall, it is also searchable through the use of hashtags. Facebook is more personal in that content is only delivered to followers. Even though hashtags are searchable on Facebook, users tend to use them less, making it more difficult to stumble upon content. Because of this, it is important to build a follower base on Facebook so that the organization's fans can help to share its content (11).

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