



White Paper

Best Practices for Physicians and Medical Practices: Using Social Media to Increase Brand Awareness and Drive Visibility



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Being online and on social media is a mandate for healthcare professionals today. Here is why social media is no longer optional:

- Your practice can appear out-of-date or out-of-touch.

In order to successfully engage your core audiences, SPR recommends that medical practices and physicians pursue all of the following tactics including:

- **Implementing social media links in daily activities.**
- **Using hashtags strategically.**
- **Consistently following/joining relevant groups on LinkedIn.**
- **Taking part in discussions publicly and on an individual basis.**
- **Creating shareable content.**
- **Encouraging more feedback.**
- **Monitoring and reporting activity to measure its effectiveness.**



Before we go into the benefits of social media and why it's essential to take a more aggressive and proactive approach in this arena, let's first examine a few key characteristics of social media.

- Social media is not stagnant, and will not be effective for building brand awareness if you post rarely.
- Social media, at its core, relies on characteristic such as: real-time conversations, relationship building, participation and contribution, transparency, and finally, a focus on community¹.

Many are skeptical of the benefits to using social media in healthcare-related professions. Social media can help achieve many of your business goals including **marketing, recruitment, brand management, reputation management, and consumer relations**. The chart below describes additional goals that social media can help a healthcare business achieve².

¹ Marie Ennis O'Connor, Health2Dublin, Introduction To Social Media For Healthcare Professionals <http://www.slideshare.net/ennocnn/introduction-to-social-media-for-healthcare-professionals>

² Marie Ennis O'Connor, Health2Dublin, Introduction To Social Media For Healthcare Professionals <http://www.slideshare.net/ennocnn/introduction-to-social-media-for-healthcare-professionals>

Table 1. Healthcare Business Goals Advanced by Social Media

Communications
1. Marketing
2. Workforce recruitment
3. Brand management
4. Reputation management
5. Consumer relations
Information Sharing
6. Consumer/patient/health professional education
7. Health professional collaboration
8. Community creation
Clinical Outcomes
9. Wellness
10. Population and patient monitoring
11. Care management
12. Care coordination
Speed Innovation
13. Clinical trial recruitment
14. Surveillance, analysis, product development

Source: Global Institute for Emerging Healthcare Practices, CSC, 2011

Increasing Followers = Increased Awareness = Increased Participation/Engagement

By increasing your number of followers on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, for example, you are, in turn, increasing the number of people you reach with your message and their awareness of your offerings and industry knowledge/expertise.

Engagement and interaction with followers is a crucial part of increasing your brand awareness. Social media is a two-way street and many physicians are already onboard because they find value in communicating with not only current and prospective patients, but with peers in similar fields who can offer advice, tips, and added knowledge.

When other physicians and even potential patients engage with you on social media (i.e., “liking” a LinkedIn post or “retweeting” a post on Twitter), it will then be displayed in that person’s newsfeed and in the feeds of everyone in that person’s network of followers and friends on these platforms, hence reaching a broader audience.



Top benefits companies are seeing from social media marketing³:

- **89%** of respondents said that social media marketing has generated more business exposure.
- **64%** saw lead generation increase by using social media 6 hours or less per day.
- **69%** of marketers use social media to gather marketplace intelligence.
- **62%** of marketers using social media for 2+ years reported a rise in search engine rankings.
- **62%** of businesses with 10 employees or less reported that social media has reduced marketing expenses.

Other metrics to be aware of when stepping aboard the healthcare social media train⁴:

- **80%** of patients go online for health information.
- **66%** of American web users look online for information about a specific disease or medical problem.
- **44%** of American web users look online for information about doctors or other health professionals.

Benefits of social media for healthcare professionals and MDs⁵:

- **Improve visibility of your practice.**
- **Increase patient traffic.**
- **Forge deeper connections with your patients.**
- **Become a strong voice on healthcare issues.**
- **Promote your brand by creating meaningful content.**

Below we've provided six best practices for social media. These are suggestions and tips we've found useful and we always appreciate feedback. Whether you call, email, post on social, we want to hear what you think of the six best practices below.

6 Best Practices for Social Media

³ *Social Media Today*, The Top Benefits of Social Media Marketing

<http://socialmediatoday.com/pamdyer/1568271/top-benefits-social-media-marketing-infographic>

⁴ Ragan's Health Care Communication News, 7 surprising statistics that impact online health care marketing

http://www.healthcarecommunication.com/Main/Articles/7_surprising_statistics_that_impact_online_health_8875.aspx

⁵ *Scott Public Relations*, Healthcare professionals and the digital PR battle – takeaways from Kevin Pho's book "Establishing, Managing, and Protecting Your Online Reputation"

<http://scottpublicrelations.com/healthcare-professionals-and-the-digital-pr-battle-takeaways-from-kevin-phos-book-establishing-managing-and-protecting-your-online-reputation/>

1. Create Shareable Content on a Regular Basis and Encourage Responses/Participation

How do you know if something would be considered shareable? There is no simple recipe for this—it will require trial and error. The best way to judge a good post from a mediocre post is to look back at previous posts that garnered a lot of attention or maybe very little.



Once you decipher which posts receive the most attention, try to replicate that as often as possible. We recommend posting updates weekly if not daily, but be careful not to overshare. We also recommend regular outbound message communications to all your direct connections (LinkedIn), in essence, a message that ends up in the email inbox of all your connections.

How do you get people to comment or participate?

Here are some ideas which will vary, dependent on your target audience(s):

- **Create a short poll/quiz.**
- **Ask questions that people can easily respond to** (“How are you adapting to the changing healthcare landscape?” or “We want to hear your stories” or “What was your recent doctor appointment like? Did you walk away feeling satisfied with the experience?” or “As a physician, what are the benefits of having your own practice?”).

Again, encouraging participation and discussion gives you direct insight into what people find most interesting and important. This data will help you refine your social media posts in the future and help you better understand how to effectively reach your audience and generate responses. Finding relevant topics of interest to your audience encourages them to return to your profile and see what’s new with the practice.

Pay Close Attention to Comments and Respond When Necessary or Appropriate

Monitoring comments is the quickest way to determine how people feel about your practice. People’s comments will often provide insight into new topic ideas or what they would be interested in hearing/learning more about.

Note: Allowing people to comment is highly important because it encourages dialogue (people talking about your brand or programs/services offered) and it also gives you real-time feedback on their opinions on company and industry topics. This also gives your company an opportunity to rectify any misunderstandings among key audiences, should they post inaccurate or negative information.

On that note, responding to posts where people ask questions or require a response will foster an open conversation, which is proven to resonate more positively with audiences than with companies that don't allow this dialogue.

It is better to allow comments than to be fearful of someone who might leave a negative one. On the off-chance someone does leave a negative comment, there are appropriate ways to handle it.

How to Handle Negative Feedback

The first approach would be to send a direct message (do not post on their 'feed') to that member and be understanding about how they feel and apologize that they may have had a bad experience. It is recommended that the administrator for the page delete the comment or negative discussion, but make the decision on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes negative comments bring about positive ones and the company must be aware that platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn are open forums and comments, good and bad, is something that will happen from time to time.

2. Cross-pollinating Your Social Media Platforms with Your Practice's Website

Connecting your social media platforms with your practice's website will generate more participation across your digital map. Cross-linking or cross-pollinating will increase traffic and visibility for your various social media platforms. For instance, linking to your website as often as possible in your LinkedIn/Twitter posts will help drive people to your website, creating more of an opportunity for people to explore and learn what you do and what services you offer.



Note: Every link you provide in a post should have a purpose. This means that linking to the homepage of your website won't be of much use. However, linking to the registration page for an upcoming event that is housed on your website is!

3. Engage with People/Groups Directly on All Relevant Social Platforms

Another way to associate your social media profiles with larger audiences is to directly link to a company ([@AAFP](#) – Twitter handle for American Academy of Family Physicians, for instance) on

a post that you know would pertain to them. By directing a post at a particular person or group, you are automatically included on that person/group's "wall" or "page," so anyone that visits that group will see your post as well.

What is the difference between a retweet ("RT") versus directing a post at someone specific on Twitter (also referred to as a "mention")?

A *retweet* will associate you with that particular discussion or post. In other words, your retweet will come up in your own newsfeed, but it will also be seen by the broader audience that also looked at that original post. By directing a post at someone specific (@AAFP, for instance), you are linking your post directly on that person/groups wall/newsfeed. This means that your post will be seen by anyone that visits that person/group's page, thereby not limiting the visibility to those who looked at one post specifically.

4. LinkedIn and Twitter - Retweet, Favorite, Like, and Share Relevant Posts from Key Influencers or Organizations

While original content is the first prong in social media engagement, aggregating posts from key influencers or organizations is the second. Why is this significant? When you create original content, it is only seen by people who already follow you. To reach a broader audience, you have to utilize other people's network and readership.

For example, if you are trying to promote 'Physician Appreciation Week' and AAFP (American Academy of Family Physicians) posts an update on that same topic, that would be worth "retweeting" (for Twitter) or "liking"/"sharing" (on LinkedIn) because then your name will be seen by everyone who also viewed/liked/retweeted that post as well.

This stems back to the concept of SEO for social media. By associating your profile on Twitter or LinkedIn with a more well-known and well-connected company like the AAFP, for instance, this 'connection' will help your social media SEO and keep your profile highly visible among pertinent industry discussions. Not to mention, this illustrates your involvement in broader industry topics which helps display your knowledge and awareness of certain topics.

5. LinkedIn - Join Relevant Groups, Follow Relevant People and Participate in the Conversation



It is important to stay abreast of what other key people/groups are talking about and what they find important. This will not only give you access to newsworthy topics, but it will help you identify other key influencers as well.

Participate in the conversation. Much like you are encouraging people to engage in your posts and online activity, you should engage in

others. This is another great way to exhibit your interest and knowledge in relevant industry or trending topics, but it is also a great way to network and connect with key decision makers and your audience at large.



6. Twitter #Hashtags

Hashtags are particularly relevant in the Twitter-sphere. Twitter is primarily used as an immediate news source, meaning people obtain real-time information and updates on news. People are likely to follow you on Twitter if you generate information into “discussions” that they find interesting or relevant to them. To be seen on pertinent discussion groups, you need to use hashtags (#) which are typically followed by a word or phrase that describes the topic your post might fall under.

For example, your post might say:

Not sure how to ask your doctor certain questions? Review my ‘Tips for Your Next Visit’ <link to blog post>

You would then follow this post with some relevant hashtags, which could potentially include: #doctor #physician #doctorappointment #tips #talktoyourdoctor (keeping in mind the 140 character limit of course).

Now, when a person is searching on Twitter, they might search using #doctor, and your post would come up in this stream of discussion items if you decided to use that hashtag.

Note: Creating your own hashtags is beneficial too, for example, one for our own blog could be: #Einsightblog. We recommend conducting a quick research analysis on key terms on Twitter to find the hashtags that your audience uses regularly that would be relevant your practice and its programs. Think of this as SEO for the social media universe—you will garner more attention if you use terms that people are likely to search with frequently.

We are happy to elaborate on any of the tactics we have outlined above and answer any questions you may have.

SPR Success

Examples of our success:

- **SPR increased blog visitors from 2,500/month to 22,000 a month.**
- **Increased website traffic from 5,000 to 30,000 a month.**
- **We achieved first page and/or first position in SEO.**
- **Generated new referrals and new business goals.**

**Time period was approximately 20 months.*

In conclusion, social media is not the *only vehicle to drive brand awareness and visibility of your medical practice*, but it is a major driving force in the digital landscape today and should

be taken seriously when considering growth of a practice. Whether that is finding new patients or managing your reputation, the online world is a powerful force.

Questions? Comments? Call us today!

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Need a social media strategy? We can help!

If you found this white paper helpful, here are a few relevant social media blogs:

- [Social Network Comparison for B2B Marketing](#)
- [Don't Blow it With Social Media](#)
- [B2B Social Media Marketing – 10 Twitter Tips](#)





Contact us today!

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