

Social Media Strategies

THAT DRIVE PRACTICE & GROWTH & PROFITABILITY

by Diana P. Friedman, MA, MBA

Social media is one of the most engaging and pervasive forms of online interaction today. On average, Americans spend more than three hours per day using social media.¹ Even more important, the most valuable demographic groups for your practice are the ones most often frequenting popular social media destinations:

- 74 percent of women use social media sites
- 78 percent of users are between the ages of 30-49
- 72 percent are college educated
- 71 percent have annual household incomes in excess of \$75,000²

These are patients (prospective and existing) your practice wants to reach.

1. http://www.buffingtonpost.com/brian-bonigman/100-fascinating-social-me_b_2185281.html

2. <http://www.salesforcemarketingcloud.com/blog/2012/11/20-stats-about-how-social-media-influences-purchasing-decisions/>

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This information is critical to your practice because social media has become a primary information source and decision influencer for ready-to-buy consumers. An overwhelming majority (80 percent) of social media users prefer to connect with brands through Facebook. More than 78 percent of consumers say that a company's social media posts impact their purchases, while 74 percent rely on social networks to guide purchase decisions.²

"Making sure you monitor and engage with patients that reach out to you via social media will help you foster a loyal patient community that refers friends and family to your practice."

The social media world has become increasingly sophisticated and complex. The number of channels and connection opportunities continues to increase. It is extremely important to choose the social media channels that offer the most benefit to your practice and ensure your presence across those channels provides a strong, integrated practice brand. Communicating an effective, consistent brand requires professional writing and messaging

management. Your practice can ill afford to ignore or give only cursory attention to social media.

There are four primary social media strategies that will help your practice maximize the value of social media to build a loyal patient community and establish stronger referrals to drive new patient appointment requests.

1. Establish Your Presence on Popular Social Media Channels

There are thousands of social media channels, and new ones seem to crop up on a daily basis. However, a small handful of social networks tend to dominate consumer interest. Be sure your practice has a presence on these popular and strategic channels:

Facebook – Facebook continues to be the most popular social network by a country mile, with 1.2 billion users and growing³ (second place Google+ has about 540 million active users⁴). Additionally, 93 percent of U.S. adult Internet users are on Facebook.

Facebook is appealing because it's one of the most business-friendly social media sites. Businesses can create branded, customized Facebook pages and effectively drive traffic to their pages using multiple inexpensive marketing tactics. Your practice can leverage its Facebook channel to post a wide variety of multimedia content, educated visitors and much more. More importantly, businesses are documenting positive ROI from their Facebook presences – 70 percent of business-to-consumer marketers have acquired a customer through Facebook.⁵

Google+ – Google+ recently surpassed Twitter as the second most popular social network, and shows no signs of slowing (625,000 new users join Google+ every day⁶). In just two years, Google+ has evolved from a curiosity to what should be an important part of every business's social media presence.

Google+ has several attractive features for businesses. First, it allows you to create comprehensive, brand-focused Google+ pages that provide ample information

3. <http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/resource-how-many-people-use-the-top-social-media/>

4. <http://marketingland.com/google-bits-300-million-active-monthly-in-stream-users-540-million-across-google-63354>

5. <http://socialmediatoday.com/node/11656466>

6. <http://www.iacpsocialmedia.org/Resources/FunFacts.aspx>

about your practice. As the social hub of all things Google, you can easily integrate videos from YouTube, pictures, status updates and more. Plus, getting involved on Google+ is great for SEO.

Twitter – Though it may have lost its #2 spot, Twitter still boasts more than 500 million users. Like Facebook, Twitter is business-friendly: 88 percent of Twitter users follow brands, and 50 percent of companies with Twitter presences have acquired a customer through Twitter.⁷

Maintaining a Twitter presence need not be time-consuming. In just seconds, you can send out a tweet that reaches thousands of potential patients.

YouTube – Despite being known as a video network, YouTube is also the world's second-largest search engine. The site allows you to easily upload videos up to 15 minutes long, which can be shared with your YouTube community, posted on your Twitter and Facebook pages, and embedded in your blog and website.

When you notice a patient who is pleased or excited about their experience, ask if you can shoot a quick video of them talking about it, and get their permission to share it on your YouTube channel.

2. Maintain a Consistent Practice Brand

Most consumers divide their social media activities among several networks. As powerful new mobile devices enable current and prospective patients to access their social channels from anywhere, it's important for your practice to have a consistent brand identity across your social media profiles.

While the specifics vary by channel, a practice brand identity for social media should include consistent:

- Practice logo
- Color scheme
- Contact information
- Practice description
- Doctor profiles (where applicable)
- Links to important pages on your website (such as your Online Appointment Scheduling page)

With a consistent brand identity, your practice will gain important synergies and be sure visitors experience a consistent, professional-looking presence across all social media channels.

3. Engage Followers with Compelling Content

The more customers engage with a brand on social media, the more they are likely to purchase and the more loyal they become.⁸ The key to engaging your existing and prospective patients on social media is simple: post interesting and compelling content. Here are some tips for creating this content:

- **Commit to a frequent posting schedule** – Most users log on to social media several times a day. Committing to a daily (if not more frequently) posting schedule will help you maximize opportunities to connect with patients.
- **Adopt a consistent brand “personality”** – Your social media “personality” helps drive patient engagement, and every post and tweet should be

7. <http://socialmediatoday.com/node/1656466>

8. <http://blog.cmbinfo.com/press-center-content/bid/46920/Consumers-Engaged-Via-Social-Media-Are-More-Likely-To-Buy-Recommend>

instilled with it. While personality “traits” may vary based on your practice’s brand, generally you want to present your practice as helpful, trustworthy and friendly.

- **Post engaging content** – The types of content that has proved to be effective at generating engagement on social media include:
 - Contests or sweepstakes
 - Questions posed to visitors (the simpler the better)
 - Big, visually interesting graphics, photos and videos
 - Useful content such as ortho-related trivia, tips

4. Consistently Interact with Followers

Social media creates an ongoing two-way communication stream between you and your patients. By engaging with social media followers the right way, your practice can strengthen existing patient relationships and forge new ones. This involves more than occasionally responding to a message; it requires a consistent responsiveness and engagement.

Patients who post on your Facebook page or message you on Twitter expect a timely response if one is required. In fact, a recent study found that 50 percent of consumers only give brands a week to respond to their questions on social media before they stop doing business with them.⁹

If you delay responding to online patient feedback – or don’t respond at all – you send a message about your practice’s willingness to engage with patients. Unaddressed or deleted comments from a patient will negatively impact your online reputation. To avoid this, make sure to monitor and respond to all patient feedback, positive or negative, in a timely manner.

Final Thoughts

Social media is not only where your patients spend their time online but often where they prefer to engage and interact with your practice. Making sure your practice is on the social media sites most frequented by your patients is the first step. Just as important, ensuring all your social media outlets maintain a consistent brand that delivers fresh and compelling content will keep your practice on their digital radar. Finally, making sure you monitor and engage with patients that reach out to you via social media will help you foster a loyal patient community that refers friends and family to your practice. ■

9. <http://www.rightnow.com/files/analyst-reports/RightNow-Customer-Experience-Impact-Report-2011.pdf> More-Likely-To-Buy-Recommend



How does your practice utilize social media? Visit Orthotown.com/magazine.aspx and comment on this article.



Author’s Bio

Diana P. Friedman is the CEO of Sesame Communications. Sesame Communications helps dental practices harness the power of the Internet to accelerate new patient acquisition, build patient loyalty and transform the patient experience. The Sesame 24-7 Patient Engagement Management System provides an innovative and comprehensive set of solutions that help boost practice growth and profitability. For more information, visit www.sesamecommunications.com.

