

# Who Uses Social Media to Search for Health Care Information?

A closer look at the consumers who use social media as a health care resource.

**BY CARY M. SILVERMAN, MD, MBA, AND SHAMA KABANI**

It seems that the average consumer uses social media for everything today. One can track an entire family history through online records, speak to clients all over the world through video conferencing services, and even access one's bank account and bills with the click of a button. Given that people are turning to the Internet and social media sites more than ever, it only makes sense that health care companies have a presence on these services so that they, too, can better connect with their clients.

Before crafting your digital marketing plans for your health care site, it is first important to examine who exactly is using them to search for health care information. An in-depth survey by Kantar Media did just that.<sup>1</sup> This survey, including data on over 165 million adults, looked at the reasons why people might search for health-related information on the Internet. Here are some of the more interesting findings:

- Of those surveyed, 53% in the Kantar Media study said that social networking was their main reason for accessing the Internet in the last 30 days; 4% used Facebook or Twitter to obtain/research the health care information they accessed.
- In the United States in 2012, 55% of Internet users employed social media with a focus on health and wellness. Among them, 26% visited sites with user-generated content like Wikipedia, 23% watched informational videos, and 23% viewed blogs about a given health topic.
- Nearly 25% of survey respondents reported that they use social networking sites frequently or occasionally as online health resources (a percentage that has grown every year since 2010).

As for who the people using social media sites to research medical and health information are, Kantar's Media study found the following:

- The age group that is most likely to use the Internet for health research is 35- to 44-year-olds, followed by those aged 25 to 34, and then 18- to 24-year-olds. The use of social media sites for health care purposes dropped off dramatically at age 45 and continued to decrease with age.
- Consumers with chronic conditions are much more likely to use social networking sites as online sources of health information. Some of the most common conditions include depression, diabetes, migraines, bipolar disorder, and anxiety.

Knowing these important social demographics when creating the digital marketing plan for your health care business can greatly improve the success of your overall social media strategy as well as ensure that you are targeting the right audience in your posts. The sites where users sought health care information were spread pretty evenly across the board, so it is important not to focus all of your content on just one social media channel.

Were you surprised by any of these numbers or statistics? Be sure to let us know your thoughts about the survey and social media for health care! ■

*Shama Kabani is a best-selling author, speaker, and president of The Marketing Zen Group in Dallas. Ms. Kabani may be reached at [shama@marketingzen.com](mailto:shama@marketingzen.com) or via Twitter @Shama.*

*Cary M. Silverman, MD, MBA, a LASIK and refractive cataract eye surgeon, is the medical director of EyeCare 20/20 in East Hanover, New Jersey. Dr. Silverman may be reached at [csilverman@eyecare2020.com](mailto:csilverman@eyecare2020.com) or via Twitter @TheLASIKdoc.*



1. Health Bridge. Consumers using social media to obtain healthcare information. Accessed August 7, 2013.