

Taking Social Media Beyond Marketing

You have the opportunity to help educate the public.

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

Social media can provide excellent marketing opportunities in health care. It allows you to promote your practice, connect and engage with current patients, and recruit new ones. The benefits of social media, however, are not limited to just marketing. Social media allows you to connect with colleagues, peers, and the community as a whole, promoting an exchange of information for a wide variety of purposes. Following are a few ways, in addition to marketing, in which health care professionals can make effective use of social media.

STAY ABREAST OF INDUSTRY ADVANCES

In health care, new discoveries and advancements are constantly developing. Social media allows you to have nearly instant access to the latest breaking news in your field. By following industry leaders on social networking sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn, you can easily stay up to date on industry news and share the information with your followers, keeping you—and them—informed of the most current happenings and relevant trends.

NETWORK WITH COLLEAGUES

Social media sites, particularly sites focused on professional development, such as LinkedIn, offer the opportunity to network with other health care professionals. Building this network can be useful for developing contacts for patient referrals, connecting with influential leaders in your field, and staying in touch with past and present colleagues.

COLLABORATE WITH PEERS

Worldwide, health care professionals have been using social media sites to collaborate and share information with their peers. From organized discussions on the latest medical journal findings to comparing research notes to even posting anonymous test images and results for feedback, professionals in the health care industry are rapidly discovering the ability of social media outlets to allow



A sampling of news and updates from Dr. Silverman's Twitter page.

them to give and receive input, opinions, and different perspectives from peers across the globe.

EDUCATE THE PUBLIC

Social media also provides a forum that you can use to help educate the public and your community. Some of your colleagues post educational videos on YouTube that provide general information on a health care topic related to their field. Others may keep a blog with helpful tips for readers. While these efforts may ultimately have a positive marketing effect as well, they allow you to give back to your patients in the form of highly valuable information that promotes general health and wellness. ■

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