

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING TOOL

Your most powerful communications platform.

BY CHRISTINE SCARLETT



I have a love/hate relationship with social media. I used to think of websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as enormous time-sucking machines that acquaintances used to share photographs of their dinners or to rant about politics. However, after owning and marketing a successful business and now marketing a large ophthalmic practice, I have come to recognize that social media is the best and most cost-efficient way to reach people.

WHAT IS IT?

Unless you have been on a desert island for the past 10 years, you know a little about social media, but what is it really? If you are not personally connected on a social site—or if you never log in because you are too busy or you are just plain uninterested—here is the answer in a nutshell: everyone has his or her own news feed. I like to think of it as a newspaper (old school, I know). This feed is full of customized news, information, photographs, and updates from businesses, news sources, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances that the user has selected to contribute. Every time the user logs in on a computer, tablet, or smartphone, the feed is refreshed with the latest updates.

WHY IS IT POWERFUL?

According to recent studies, people in the United States check their social media newsfeeds 17 times per day on average; that is at least once every waking hour.¹ You might imagine that this statistic applies to teenagers, but actually, the compulsive users are adults between the ages of 25 and 54.¹ Also interesting is that the over-65 demographic is now driving growth.²

Social media users are addicted, but how many people are on social media? Sixty-five percent of the US population is on one or more social media sites.² Of those who use the Internet, 76% of Americans use social media.²

Effectively leveraging social media with a clear message from your practice puts you directly in front of people in the most personal way possible and with the highest frequency. By setting up the correct demographic targets, you can make sure you are paying to get in front of the people you want.

HOW DO YOU USE IT?

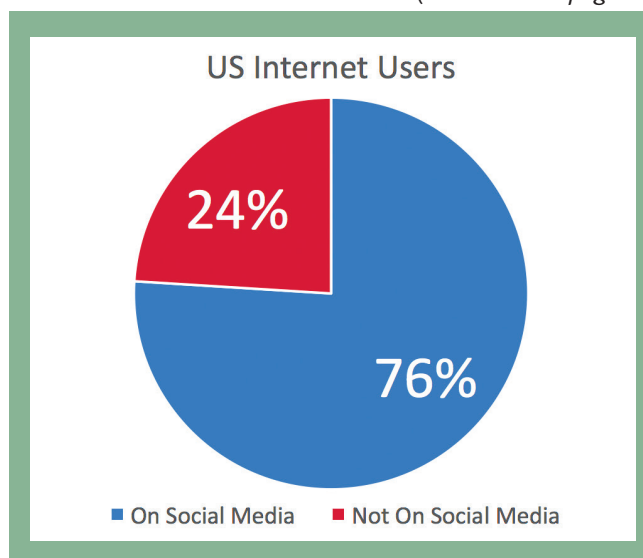
Because Facebook is the largest and most popular network² and will yield the highest return on investment, it is the focus of this article.

Your audience can be broken into three categories:

1. Existing relationships: current patients, referring doctors, employees, etc., who are connected with you on social media. They “like” your Facebook page.
2. Interested parties: doctors, prospective patients, and others who have liked your Facebook page but who have not formed a relationship with you yet. They are curious and want to know more.
3. Your new audience: your targeted, prospective patient demographic.

The posts you release on your Facebook page will build the perception you want among people in the categories of existing relationships and interested parties. You can foster trust and goodwill by sharing updates such as photographs of your practice’s community involvement or charitable contributions as well as information about yourself as a physician and about the rest of your team. Updated news will build loyalty among your patients and referring doctors and allow prospects to get to know you, thereby encouraging them to become patients.

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AT A GLANCE

- Social media is the best and most cost-efficient way for your practice to reach people.
- Sixty-five percent of the US population is on one or more social media sites.
- Posts you release will build the perception you want among people who like your Facebook page.
- Facebook ads will target the new audience you want to reach.

You may pay a small fee to promote your posts and make sure that they reach the widest audience possible—your existing fans and their friends. Your page is also a valuable tool for patient referrals; as patients engage with you on social media, their network sees the engagement—digital word of mouth.

Facebook ads target the new audience you want to reach. This is one of the most cost-effective pay-per-click or pay-per-impression options available. Thanks to the depth of information Facebook obtains from each user, this advertising strategy also allows incredible demographic targeting. The key to successful advertisements marketing your surgeries and practice is for them to link to a separate landing page for each procedure that provides succinct education, offers clear contact information, and includes a lead capture form. The idea is to turn views into clicks and clicks into leads.

It is important to keep your images and branding consistent and to establish a clear identity, because so much is vying for users' attention on social media. As with other marketing strategies, repetition is key to reaching your audience on social media. You must build trust and recognition through consistent messaging.

GETTING STARTED

To begin using social media as a marketing tool, develop and implement a strategy, or hire a social media marketing company. Make sure you are not missing any pieces of the puzzle; an effective social ad campaign can fall flat if it does not link into a powerful website with lead capture, and leads will fail if there is inefficient follow-through.

Connect all the dots. The people you want to reach are on social media. Join them! ■

1. Chang L. Americans spend an alarming amount of time checking social media on their phones. Digital Trends. <http://bit.ly/10HqXyk>. Published June 13, 2015. Accessed January 4, 2016.

2. Chaffey D. Global social media research summary 2015. Smart Insights website. <http://bit.ly/1ZKHUjs>. Published October 13, 2015. Accessed January 4, 2016.

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