



BUILDING A SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE



These 10 tips can help you succeed with this new form of marketing.

BY CHIRAG J. PATEL, MD, FACS

Social media has affected almost every aspect of our lives—pop culture, sports, health, fitness, politics, you name it. Years ago, there was a definite disconnect between the practice of medicine and social media, perhaps because some may have thought of it as unprofessional, useless, or simply not effective; however, the same cannot be said of social media and medicine today.

Now, social media can be an important vehicle for connecting with patients and fellow providers—and retina practices must adjust and re-strategize or be left behind. In this article, I dispel myths and encourage you to build a cyber presence that represents your practice in a positive manner.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS IMPORTANT

The methods by which patients gather information about a particular topic have changed, especially when it relates to health. Social media is now at the crux of information, a resource throughout society.

In its simplest form, medicine is a relationship-based profession. The bond that physicians form with patients and their families drives treatment and care. So, what if I told you that there is an opportunity to start building relationships and trust *before* a patient walks into your office?

THE NEW STOREFRONT

Social media is a tool that every practice should use to showcase what makes your practice unique. Is it warm and welcoming? Is it based on expert care with extreme specialization? There is no right or wrong answer. The most important aspect of building a social media presence is that your posts must be genuine and sincere. Believe it or not, people want to see who you are, and the more your posts or stories portray these feelings, the more traction you will gather.

Social media is an opportunity for us to improve the health literacy of patients and combat misinformation. It

also provides a beautiful view into your practice before patients even step foot into an examination room. It serves as an icebreaker for new patients—they may feel as if they already know you. Ultimately, it increases your *cyberworth* (think networth in the internet world) and will pay dividends on website searches.

TIPS ON BUILDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Throughout my social media journey, the landscape has evolved considerably. Facebook was the primary social media platform when I started building my presence; now, Facebook has taken a backseat to platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Despite changes and trends in social media platforms, I have compiled some tips that are time-tested and will help you succeed no matter how the platforms evolve.

Post Organic Content

Original and organic content based on your practice will help you capture your audience quickly and effectively. Your viewers want to see *who you are*; they don't want to see a stock photo of random people.

Keep it Simple

You don't need a production studio; something as simple as an inexpensive ring light can be a big help. You don't need to block out a chunk of time to produce content either. Simple daily occurrences can serve as organic content; just remember to take a picture or a short video, whether that's a picture of you, your staff, equipment, a meeting, or a patient (make sure you get their written permission to post).

Involve Staff

Use the resources you have. You may find that some of your staff members are social media savvy. This is a great opportunity to engage those staff members in helping

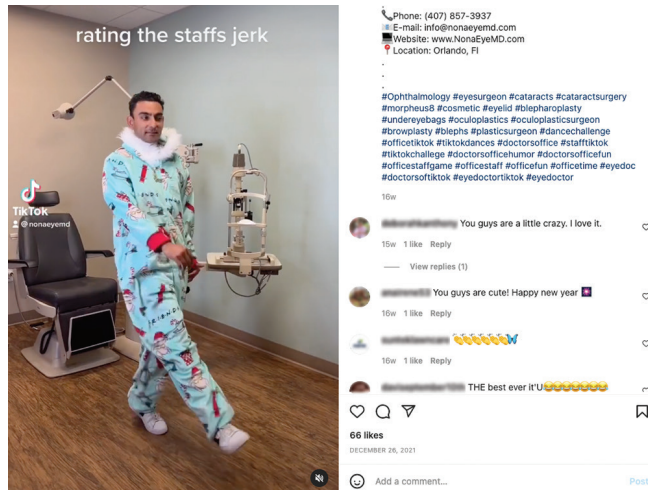


Figure 1. A great team-building exercise is to involve staff members with creating and posting content. It is also a great way to keep on up all of the social media trends.

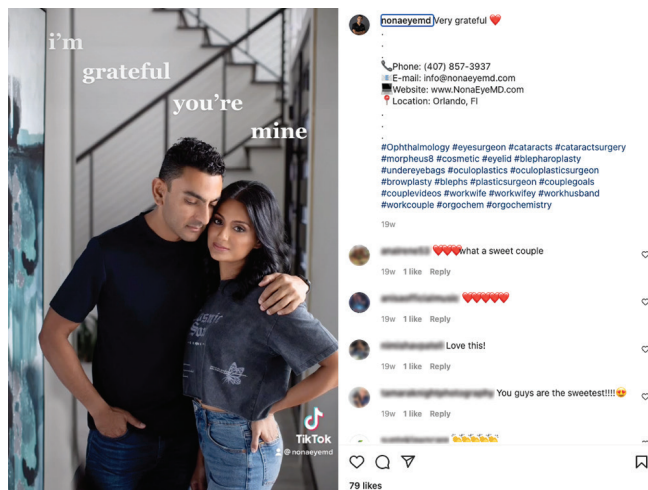


Figure 3. Remember that it is OK to let the social world see you with your guard down a bit. Don't be afraid to share your personal life because it gives patients an opportunity to know who you are outside of being a doctor.

you create and post content and advise you on any trends (Figure 1). Additionally, staff involvement is a great team-building and team-empowering exercise—win-win!

Caption Carefully

Keep your captions simple, informative, and fun. Use emojis, ask questions for audience engagement, and use hashtags to attract viewers (Figure 2). Remember, the longer the caption, the less likely a viewer will read through it.

Respond

Ultimately, the goal is to have substantive engagement with your audience, which could lead to new patients or referral sources. If your content results in comments, likes, or shares, it is an absolute *must* that you engage with that user, whether that's by answering a question, responding to a comment, or simply liking (or loving) the response.

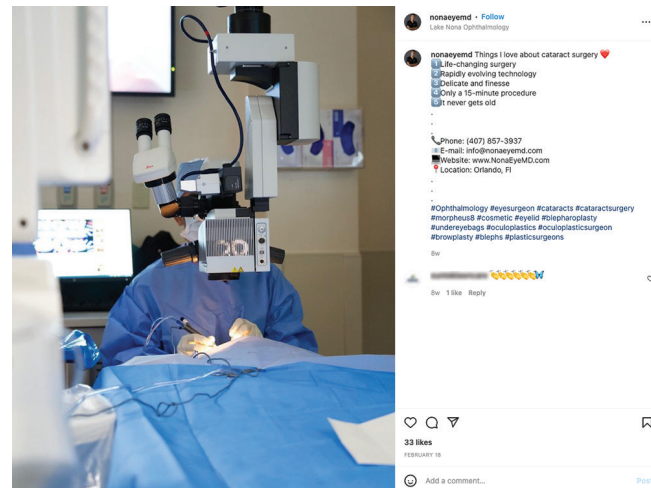


Figure 2. Keep your captions simple, informative, and fun by using emojis, asking questions, and adding hashtags.



Figure 4. A single post can consist of photos and videos. Be sure to take advantage of the different types of media that's available on all platforms.

Be Consistent and Patient

Plan your posts so that you share content on a consistent basis. If you decide to post three times per week initially and then more frequently as you become more comfortable, sticking with the plan is of utmost importance. Place value on showing the world who you are.

The results may take a few weeks, months, or even an entire year, but consistency will help you reap the rewards.

Find Some Levity

Taking care of a patient's health, our ultimate calling, should never be taken lightly; however, it's OK to let the social world see you with your guard down a bit (Figure 3). It doesn't make you any less of a doctor or less professional. It simply shows the world that you are still a human with interests, responsibilities, and emotions. It makes you genuine to your followers, and that's what patients want.



Figure 5. Posting about local restaurants or attractions that you enjoy gives venues an opportunity to connect with you and expand your patient reach.

Keep Your Audience on Its Toes

Photos, videos, selfies, reels, and stories are all different ways to engage your viewers (Figure 4). The idea is to keep your audience wondering what will come next. It will also increase the engagement.

Know Your Demographic

Understanding your patient population will help in determining which platform may be best suited to your needs. As a rule of thumb, I believe that Instagram is a great way to build your audience; additionally, your Instagram stories and posts can be automatically shared to your practice's Facebook account. TikTok is a great platform for a general audience that may not be locally based and tends to have a younger demographic.

Be Personal and Local

Although most of your posts will focus on your practice and staff, don't be shy to post about your hobbies, family, local restaurants, or attractions that you enjoy (Figure 5). It also gives local venues an opportunity to connect with you (especially when you tag them in a post or story).

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRY

Social media is integral to today's society. Using it will undoubtedly boost your practice's visibility and hopefully help you to grow and further establish yourself as a fixture in the community. ■

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- Financial disclosure: None