



10 LESSONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



SMITHANDJONES.COM | 518.272.2400



10 Lessons in Social Media Marketing

Insights and best practices for healthcare marketers and providers

Over the last five years, we've explored social media as a marketing solution for hospitals and healthcare providers. Our experiences helped us develop best practices that we could put to use for our clients. Here are some of the insights we've gained on social media's strengths and weaknesses as a marketing tool.

Social media is social – not commercial

Social media allows people to stay in touch with friends and family, make connections with others who share similar interests, and to support social causes and grassroots movements. It can bring people together and involve them in events much bigger than themselves. But the key word here is 'social.' It is not a commercial or marketing channel. In most instances, selling is interruptive, even off-putting, so marketers must exercise restraint in driving the sales process.

Doing good is what social media does best

Many of the most popular and successful social media marketing campaigns are movements: campaigns designed to do good, and engage people's desire to help others. They're meant to drive traffic but not necessarily recruit customers.

Sound strategies and best practices still work

Social media is just one aspect of an integrated marketing strategy, requiring traditional media spending for support and awareness. It's another tool in the marketing toolbox – and just like you can't build a house with one screwdriver, you can't build a successful, multichannel marketing plan with a Twitter feed alone. Some of the greatest successes in social media channels have been achieved by marketers who rely on integrated mass media spending to drive traffic to their social initiatives.

Strong brands have an edge in social media

Hospitals, practices and provider networks that have a clear brand position, a well-defined patient experience, and something worthwhile to say, tend to outperform others in the social media realm. Brands that can connect with their networks, but keep the conversation on a social or entertainment level, are the leaders in collecting fans and followers.

Social networks begin with insiders

Social media is ideal for connecting with those closest to your brand and working outward. Hospitals have large populations of employees and physicians who together have huge social influence. A message they share may reach thousands, including colleagues, friends and families. Starting a social network with them makes a lot of sense (but raises issues about defining the organization's social media policy).

Social media is great for engaging existing customers

If a healthcare organization has a large base of highly satisfied patients and advocates, social media is an essential channel for customer engagement. Use it to create buzz for the brand through re-tweeting, sharing and linking from satisfied customers to their friends and followers in the social network. Post health information in Pinterest that people can access and share easily. Word of mouth marketing and the opinions of trusted, non-biased consumers carry considerable influence for today's Internet-savvy consumer.



Protect the privacy of your social networks

HIPAA compliance requires hospitals and physician groups to avoid mentioning individual patients, though writing about an illness or condition can be an appropriate subject for a post. Apply the “elevator test” by reading the post out loud; if you would not be comfortable saying any part of it in public, do not publish it online. Physicians should use account privacy settings and keep professional and personal social media accounts separate.

Social media is great for responding to feedback and criticism

It's inevitable that a small percentage of healthcare patients will be displeased with their experience, and some will express their feelings through social media and review sites such as Yelp, HealthGrades, Angie's List and ePinions. Brands that recognize this can embrace the opportunity to turn a negative into a positive. By monitoring social media conversations for mentions of their brand, they can identify negative comments and make good on patient complaints. This can have a positive rebound effect: demonstrating a commitment to service can turn dissatisfied patients into loyal, repeat customers.

Goals provide a measure for social media ROI

“Likes” are nice, but the real goal of social media is engagement; active involvement with the social network in the form of comments, sharing of content and advocacy for the brand. Setting realistic goals and objectives for social media campaigns provide a way to track results and demonstrate return on investment.

Social media isn't free

While the cost of posting content to social media channels is low, the expense of labor to strategize, monitor and engage social networks shouldn't be underestimated. Consider the costs of ad spending to promote the campaign, as well as the time staff spends on Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter, in project budgets or overhead.

In summary, social media is all about engagement. It is NOT a miracle cure for underperforming brands or a substitute for an integrated multichannel strategy. If your social strategy isn't attracting the attention it deserves, it may be time to follow a new course. Call us if we can help.

