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“Social media gives you powerful tools to define yourself online and establish your online reputation.”

Kevin Pho, MD, Founder
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Social media has leveled the playing field for small businesses in a way similar to the way that the Internet did two decades ago.

The problem, though, is that many small business owners don’t see the potential ROI for being active in social media, or companies simply don’t invest enough resources in order to be effective and truly maximize their social media presence.

On the other hand, for those small businesses that shifted more of their marketing budget from traditional marketing to social media and have had success, they have found social media marketing to be a natural way to develop leads, find marketing partners, establish thought leadership, and engage their customers.
LINKEDIN

31% of healthcare professionals use social media for professional networking.¹
For those who don’t know where to start building an online reputation, I recommend creating a LinkedIn profile.

Then as you become more comfortable online, incrementally adopt more social media platforms. Your next step could be going on Twitter and simply listening to what other thought leaders have to say. Then, you can share your own articles with reliable health information on Facebook or Twitter. Finally, you can take the ultimate step of creating your own content, such as an article on a blog or a video on YouTube. The more social media platforms you engage in, the bigger your online presence will be.
First, join groups on LinkedIn.

Start with three or four relevant groups and grow from there. There are groups you can join for your city, in your specialty, and in your functional area. Once you join a group, be sure to engage in conversations with the group members online and, where appropriate, look for opportunities to connect in person to discuss ways to work together. Also, make sure to set up a strong company page on LinkedIn where patients and other physicians can learn about your practice specialty and how they might work with you.
For most of us, setting up a LinkedIn profile took a long time. But without any networking activity, your perfectly constructed profile sits in the background like a treasure box in the back of the closet; there’s really good stuff in it, but nobody opens it to find out.

The LinkedIn search engine uses unique algorithms to factor in things like your profile, activity, and connections to come up with relevance scores that only apply to you.

Ensure that your profile is looked at by becoming part of the LinkedIn community and regularly updating your profile with links to relevant articles in your field.

LinkedIn Today, which lets you set up newsfeeds, is a good place to start. Update your profile when there is a change in your work experience, training, or education. Accept LinkedIn connections, respond to comments, and engage with people you’re connected to. Keep that treasure box in the living room, where people will look inside to find great things about you.
TWITTER

Today, 73% of U.S. adults use social networks\(^2\) and the average U.S. consumer spends 15 hours per week on social media channels.\(^3\)
Tweetchats are an exceptional way to broaden your circle of influence and connect with leaders and opinion makers, a fact I learned quite late.

Find a Tweetchat near you! Click here for a list of healthcare-related tweetchats.4
Hashtags are extremely effective, but somewhat misunderstood and misused.

Any word or phrase can be a hashtag, but it is important to have a purpose behind what you are saying. When posting about a particular topic, it is extremely valuable to see what words or phrases are already trending and then to add those to your post—but only when applicable. Don’t add hashtags that don’t make sense!

In most cases, after 18 minutes, a tweet has reached its peak engagement.⁵
When it comes to social media, I do what feels natural and what enables me to enjoy the time I am spending.

With that in mind, I limit my use of social media to professional purposes and focus on Twitter and LinkedIn. Both allow a purely professional approach.

My goal is to create a personal brand, namely that I am a healthcare attorney. I devote almost all of my content to that one goal.

In using Twitter, I have developed a couple of guidelines to structure my use. I almost always link to the source material that I am discussing and provide my own personal take on that content. Providing the link gives a more detailed resource for followers to read. My comment, just a brief snippet, shows my knowledge and unique view of the area. In measured ways, I also try to engage in conversations with other users, which is a learning opportunity for me and establishes a connection.
FACEBOOK

According to DC Interactive Group, 41% of people said social media would affect their choice of a specific doctor, hospital, or medical facility.\textsuperscript{6}
Five Reasons to Keep Your Business and Personal Pages Separate

1. Facebook’s user terms say so.
You may find yourself with a cancelled account if you violate Facebook’s Terms of Services by using a personal profile strictly for business promotion.

2. You may reach the ceiling.
Your business page allows unlimited fans to “like” it and see your content. A personal page however is capped at 5,000 friends.

3. Analytics. Personal pages don’t offer the analytics that Facebook’s business pages do. If you are not measuring the effectiveness of your efforts, you’re doing yourself and your practice a disservice.

4. Advertising. The very problem most people have with Facebook is also what makes it so great: extremely targeted and cheap advertising. You won’t find any other advertising source (outside of social media) that allows you to go further into specifics about your ideal patient.

5. Respect of your IRL (in real life) friends. Friends and family want to support you so while they may put up with constant promotion, polls show that they just want to see things of a personal nature. It is okay to occasionally share something from your practice’s page, but try to keep them somewhat distinct.
The nice thing about Facebook is that you can share photos and updates that are longer than tweets—it’s perfect for both the professional and more personal posts about your practice.

Share staff accomplishments and successes, introduce new providers, and showcase photos of your new location. It can be warm and fuzzy, and provide great health-related content in a more visual way. Take advantage of that to connect your patients with your staff. While it is your business page, that doesn’t mean it can’t be used to create bonds and build lasting relationships. When people see pictures of the birthday party you had for your biller, it makes them smile and connects them with your practice that much more.

Photo posts receive 39% more interaction than text posts.

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YOUTUBE

YouTube has more than four billion video views per day.\(^7\)
We all know that YouTube has a lot of views each day, but it also has multiple content uploads each day, which makes it harder to get found.

What businesses need to do is utilize all of the places that their target audience visits in order to drive traffic to their videos.

Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest are all great places to start promoting your videos, outside of YouTube.

Another way to get your target audience to your video is to embed your YouTube content on your company’s website and in your company blog posts.
Don’t forget that YouTube is a social platform just like Facebook and Twitter.

Make sure you’re actively subscribing to other’s content, responding to comments on your videos, and liking content that is popular among your target audience.

Just like the other social platforms, you will help increase engagement, activity, and awareness with your own content if you don’t hesitate to put yourself out there!
YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

More than 2/3 of patients surveyed used an online search prior to booking an appointment, and more than 40% of consumers say that information found via social media affects the way they deal with their health.
You can use social media and stay out of trouble on HIPAA—just be careful not to reveal too much patient information. Just because a patient posts about her condition publicly, you do not have license to respond publicly. Even if you were to post a comment about a rough day in the clinic, or losing a patient in the emergency room, with no patient identifiers, patient identities can be triangulated thanks to the vast amount of information online—and the total volume of information seems to double daily. Healthcare professionals have been sanctioned for such posts.

Physician bloggers can steer clear of HIPAA issues by only writing posts about composite patients, or patients with numerous key details changed, where a story illustrates a point without putting patient privacy at risk.

State laws and federal laws other than HIPAA, enforced by an alphabet soup of agencies, create additional minefields. With all of these potential problems, remember that reaching out to patients, families, referral sources, and the general public through social media is an incredibly powerful act. As long as you bear in mind just how powerful it is, you can do so responsibly.
People frequently ask, “What are the top reviews and ratings sites I should focus on?” They’re hoping for a “do-these-and-you’re-set” type list. But there is no such list!

While a couple of directories tend to rank highly for searches for most practice types—Healthgrades.com and Vitals.com, and, above all, Google’s own business listings—there is quite a lot of local variation.

The only way to know what the top directories are for your practice is to search like a patient.

If you’re an OB/GYN in Bend, OR, search on phrases like these:

- **OB/GYN Bend OR**
- **obstetrician Bend OR**
- **gynecologist Bend OR**
- **well woman visit Bend OR**

Add anything else that your ideal prospective patient might search on to find you. See which sites pop up first for the searches that are most relevant for your practice, and use the results from the first few of pages to build an initial list.

Make a note to check again at least once a year.
To maximize opportunities for engagement, our social media manager shapes our daily content around the rule of thirds: one-third culture-related posts or interactions with users, one-third posts related directly to business/products/services, and one-third shared content from other sources.

This strategy helps you avoid being too promotional and self-serving, instead helping you establish yourself as someone who engages with others and shares quality content that drives conversation in your areas of interest. This also builds trust with potential customers and grows your online community.
Like anywhere else you work, you have to fiercely protect patient privacy. That said, the opportunity afforded by any social tool is the opportunity to connect one to many.

I use social tools to listen more than I use them to share what I know.

I create lists that facilitate the funneling of information all in one spot from diverse experts all over the world. In addition, when I’m creating content about a particular topic, I use a search tool (particularly in Twitter) and find out in real time what people are saying about a disease or condition. That way I find where a myth is being propagated and connect the public with scientific research. Facebook is a good place to share, but what’s often forgotten is how much listening you can do there too.
Three Strategies for Success in Social Media

1. Be authentic. People connect with authenticity and run away when people are fake or try to sell them something. This means you need to have the real people doing the work at your practice producing your social media content. Keep the sales stuff out of it.

2. Give before you get. Think about how many ways you can freely give value to those who follow you. This give-first approach will attract a large following, which will eventually provide a valuable return for your practice. Once you have a following, don’t be afraid to thoughtfully ask them for their support.

3. Pace yourself. Set realistic goals for how you’ll use social media and what the right pace is for your practice. It’s really easy to sprint out of the social media blocks. This early sprint will undoubtedly lead to burnout and kill your social media efforts. Relationship building on social media takes time—it’s more of a marathon than a sprint.

John Lynn, Founder
HealthcareScene.com
@techguy
I do not believe in blindly linking to all humans with a pulse in your industry (or beyond) on Facebook and LinkedIn—the information stream is already crowded enough.

For these two online communities I only link to those I have met and with whom I have had a real conversation. Usually these chats happen face-to-face over a cup of coffee, a meal, or a beer. I call this “The Coffee, Meal, or Beer Rule” for linking on Facebook and LinkedIn. There are exceptions, as sometimes we can have remote chats by phone, Skype, Google Plus, extended email exchanges, etc... Or, there is a person that it makes sense to connect with because of other reasons. Social media by its name must be social to be effective, thus linking for the sake of linking (with no ongoing purpose) is a waste of time. Strangers do not wake up and look for ways to assist you in your goals, but friends might!
Proofread your content.

As a writer, I am particularly sensitive to grammatical and spelling errors. If you maintain a website or social media presence, you absolutely must proofread your content and posts for errors. These errors can affect public perception of your knowledge, expertise, and attention to detail.
Approach social media as a continuation of your practice’s transition to e-health.

As we transition from the traditional care model involving face-to-face visits between providers and patients in an office setting, social media will be only one of the many e-health activities of your practice. As you develop your social media plan, expand your thinking and start to plan for expanded patient engagement, video visits, home monitoring tools, and other similar e-health solutions, thereby integrating health and wellness in the daily lives of your patients.
Three Crucial Factors to Ensure Social Media Success

1. Choose a message and a voice that fits your organization and target audience. Consider what kind of information your patients are interested in, need, and will consider your opinion on. Your voice is how information is shared: is it casual, witty, a bit cheeky or formal, straightforward, and more clinical?

2. Choose a person who will be the final “yes” on all posts. This could be the medical director, a marketing professional, or staff member who is trusted and has guidelines to work within. The key is that the person creating content understands the medium, the voice, and the content to be shared.

3. Choose a time and frequency. Often a practice will start off strong with a social media campaign but lose stamina either because the two above decisions were not clarified or because there is no set frequency. It’s better to put off social media until you are sure you can post regularly with quality content.

Once these decisions are made and you start your social media campaign, hang in there. Keep it up regardless of a slow start or lack of enthusiasm from patients.
Don’t be afraid to have an active voice in the conversation.

Often practices will shy away from commenting or responding to online reviews because they fear it will draw more attention to unwanted publicity, but responding is crucial—especially with reviews that come across as negative or offer constructive feedback. It is important to the individual patient who wrote the review, but it also has an equally important impact on prospective patients searching for your practice online who can see that you make an active effort to listen, engage, and act on patient feedback.

If you resolve a complaint quickly and with little fuss on the part of the customer, studies show 9 out of 10 customers will buy your product or use your service again.10
Engage in social listening to find out what people are talking about that relates to your specialty, and how you may be able to capitalize on it.

Tools like Hootsuite and Radian6 help monitor posts for certain keywords and phrases, and offer opportunities to join current conversations and offer advice or feedback. This is especially helpful if someone is complaining about another local practice, opening the door for you to learn about their pain points and offer an alternative option. These tools, and others, like Klout, are also helpful for identifying key thought leaders in specific industries. Developing a relationship with social influencers can help extend your reach when they help to share your content, and vice versa.
While online social media is similar to offline social interaction, there is one huge difference: it is public. Anything you say can be seen and spread around the world to anyone. So some ‘rules of the social road’ apply. Be courteous, even in heated discussions. Respond promptly to inquiries. Introduce yourself, say hello and goodbye, and engage when involved in a discussion like a chat. Do not engage in personal, nosy, or prying questions. Always be sincere and honest.
Negative reviews aren’t all bad.

A ZocDoc study found that patients are happy to book appointments with doctors who have received some negative reviews—so long as their reviews aren’t overwhelmingly negative. It is not until a physician’s overall rating falls to 2.5 stars out of five that patient preference for that provider begins to decline significantly. In fact, of the 10% of doctors who receive the most appointments through ZocDoc, about 3/4 have at least one negative review.

One in five Internet users has consulted online reviews and rankings of healthcare service providers and treatments.¹¹
Understand your audience: where they spend their time, the types of content they want and need, and how you can be helpful and not overly promotional.

Brands are like personalities; people will come to identify you with certain descriptions. They expect that brand promise every single time they encounter you—whether it’s online or offline. So spend the time to define your audiences and your brand. Document consistent language and style approaches and don’t deviate from that strategy. You will win if you keep it consistent, cohesive, and controlled. Doesn’t mean you can’t have fun, but always make sure you’re being true to your audience’s needs and your own brand’s personality.
When joining in social media conversations it’s important to listen to the pulse and feel the rhythm of the conversation before just diving in, just as you would in person.

Whether you are responding to an area of expertise, an industry or personal interest, or just someone’s Tweet that catches your eye—spend some time getting familiar with the conversation before jumping right in. Listen and then join in! Participate in a way that inspires additional participation.

To make any kind of meaningful connection on a social media platform requires that you recognize that it is an open and ongoing conversation between a few or many people, not an impersonal data feed. Interrupting a conversation with an ill-timed advertisement or a comment that is not relevant reduces both interest and credibility.
It is reported that 65% of physicians use social media. Although accurate, it is important to distinguish between the use of social media outlets such as Facebook, with a professional-only site such as Sermo.

Professional social media allows physicians to connect in safe and trusted environment and crowd source with peers to help aid in patient diagnosis and treatment.

Online medical sharing is an important step in helping improve healthcare on a local, national, and global scale.
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Kareo is the only cloud-based medical office software and services platform dedicated to small practices. At Kareo, we believe that, with the right tools and support, small practices can do big things. We offer an integrated suite of products and services designed to help physicians get paid faster, run their business smarter, and provide better care.

Our Practice Management software, Billing Services, and free, full-featured award-winning EHR help more than 20,000 medical providers more efficiently manage the business and clinical sides of their practice. Headquartered in Irvine, California, Kareo’s mission is to help providers spend their time focused on patients, not paperwork.

For more information, visit www.kareo.com