

As Social Media Evolves, Is Your Marketing Strategy Keeping Up?



To click with savvy consumers, be authentic and use social media tools to create true connections.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

>> Social media, once a diversion dominated by youth talking to friends, has become the hub of online life. Today, more than 60 percent of social media users are over the age of 34, and they are not just chatting with friends. They are building professional networks, shopping, reading news, and sharing health information.

As the demographics of social networks evolve and new technologies emerge, user behaviors are changing. Furthermore, the networks themselves are changing. Try the following strategies to up your social media game.

MORE SOCIAL, LESS MARKETING

There was a time when you could post virtually anything, and your friends and followers would see it. Marketers used Facebook and other platforms like digital bulletin boards, a place to post advertisements. Viewers quickly got tired of the influx of spammy ads, and networks wanted to capitalize on potential income.

With increasing costs and decreasing results, simple advertisements on social media are losing value. The networks present a greater opportunity than ever, but only for those who adapt their social

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marketing to the changing landscape. Today's winning strategies are more social and less marketing.

Don't think of social media as a place to post ads. Think of it as a place to nurture patient relationships, establish yourself in the local community, and build your professional brand. An advertisement, by nature, is one-way communication. You are speaking to the audience, giving them a message and encouraging them to act on it. Social media is about interaction. You are speaking *with* your audience and encouraging engagement.

THE POWER OF SOCIAL STORIES

Just when you mastered posting, tweeting, pinning, and photo sharing, a new feature began taking over social media: stories. You could be

forgiven if you ignored them and kept on going. After all, social media features appear and fade away regularly. However, this one shows no signs of going anywhere. With an 842 percent increase in use since 2016, stories are taking center stage on social media. If you aren't using them to market your practice, now is the time to start.

What makes stories so popular? They are unlike other sharing features in a few ways. The most unique aspect of a story is its temporariness. Facebook, like most other platforms with this feature, only displays a story for 24 hours or until someone watches it, whichever comes first. This is a significant shift from most social media content, which is often said to live on the Internet forever.

The nature of stories makes them feel more authentic and encourages

spontaneous sharing. They aren't crafted and polished, meant to last. Like the most memorable moments in real life, they are fleeting. Furthermore, they bridge the gap between public posts and private conversations. When you publish a story, it is visible to all your friends or followers. Yet, there are no public comments. When someone replies to a story, it begins a Messenger chat. Although you can still reach a vast audience, the interaction feels more personal.

GETTING CREATIVE WITH VIDEO

It's no secret that video is a top-performing media format on social media. However, many dermatology practices fail to leverage its full potential. If you are limiting yourself to sharing the occasional pre-recorded educational or promotional video, you are missing out.

From "fake news" to secretly staged "candid" selfies, social media is rife with deliberate misrepresentation—and people who use these networks know it. They are suspicious, and they are craving authenticity. Live video isn't edited and polished. It isn't reviewed and refined before posting. It is real, it is happening now. Like Stories, it captures the authenticity of the moment. In fact, four out of five people would rather watch a live video from a brand than read a blog or view a social post.

Live video can be shared in stories or it can be posted on your page, where people can view it later if they wish. You can also tap into the energy of live broadcasting with pre-recorded video by hosting a Facebook watch party. It is easy to do. Start a new post from your personal page or a Facebook group, and click to host a watch party. Choose videos to screen and invite viewers. As people join and comment, a real-time discussion will ensue. Remember to respond to comments and encourage engagement.

INFLUENCER MARKETING

You've surely heard of social influencers, and perhaps you've even tried hiring them to represent your practice. For the past couple of years, this has been hyped as a sure-fire marketing technique, but many brands have seen lukewarm results. The reason? In most cases, it is a poor match between influencer and brand.

The traditional recipe for success in influencer marketing goes something like this. If the demographics of the influencer's followers are like those of your target market, it's a good match. The higher the number of followers your influencer has, the more effective he or she is. What is missing from this equation? Again, the answer is authenticity.

For ethical and legal reasons, paid advertisements should be marked as such. Most influencer posts include a dis-

claimer, often accompanied by the hashtag #ad. Viewers know it is an advertisement. Influencers who are promoting your practice solely because you are paying them lack enthusiasm. They are no more convincing than actors in a TV ad.

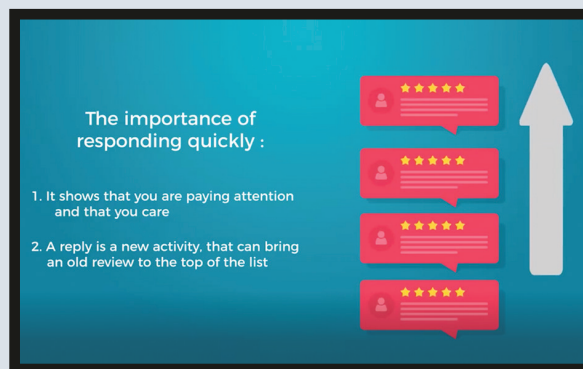
Influencer marketing isn't going to outperform any other advertisement unless it is more credible and convincing. To accomplish this, you need to find someone who is truly a fan of your brand. The best brand ambassador is someone who is already a happy patient. If you are working with someone new to your practice, you need to convert that person to a happy patient before he or she becomes a spokesperson.

THE RIGHT APPROACH FOR CONNECTION

With more middle aged and older adults than ever using social media, it is rich with potential dermatology and anti-aging patients. However, you need the right approach in order to connect with your audience. They are savvy to misrepresentation, soured on high-pressure advertisements, and hungry for authentic interaction. Give them what they want, and watch the leads pour in! ■

Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dermatologists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren.

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