

# Using Social Media Effectively to Promote Your Eye Care Practice

Tailor online marketing campaigns to include mobile marketing and social media promotions.

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A recent advertising study "Digital Index" from Adobe Systems found that people's brand engagement with Facebook grew in the third quarter of 2012 by nearly 900% and is expected to continue increasing its fan base through 2013. Adobe's research attributed this huge surge in usage levels in part to the new "timeline" feature of Facebook.<sup>1</sup>

Several other studies on the impact of Facebook's timeline feature corroborate the findings of the Adobe study. A study which targeted 15 timeline early adopters from various industries compared rates before and after the feature was added to Facebook. Results showed that the timeline improved fans' engagement with the brand and content levels by 14% and 46% respectively.<sup>2</sup>

A major upswing in the number of individuals accessing Facebook using a mobile device has also contributed to this extraordinary gain in the site's levels of brand engagement. Nearly 25% of total usage on Facebook came from mobile users, and mobile visitors are predicted to continue steady growth. Based on these numbers, marketers should design campaigns specifically for mobile operating systems such as iOS (Apple, Inc.) and Android (Google) to drive more targeted mobile traffic to their websites.<sup>3</sup>

Eye care professionals should look at these new social media and mobile marketing trends and find ways to integrate them with their own online marketing strategies. They can engage the services of professional Internet marketing companies to develop a focused social media campaign in line with the trends.

## A COSTLY MISTAKE TO IGNORE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Search engine optimization (SEO) and social networking are increasingly intertwined, and leading search

engines such as Google tend to give higher page rankings to websites that have an active interaction with prominent social networks like Facebook.

Many SEO and Internet marketing companies continue to make the fatal error of ignoring social network promotion, while pressing on with traditional SEO strategies. Eye care professionals must have an equal balance of traditional SEO and interactive social media plans to identify and personalize their practice brand while moving up in search rankings. An increased presence on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Pinterest engages patients and visitors, establishes the practice's personality, and promotes its values and education, as well as impressing major search engines.

## MOBILE SEARCH MARKETING

Adobe's Digital Index report revealed that 20% of paid search clicks came from a smartphone or a tablet device. According to the report, this trend is expected to increase.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is important that eye care practices have websites that are compatible with smartphones and tablets.

Innovative Internet marketing companies are already finding new ways to take advantage of this trend by devising marketing strategies that take advantage of tablet and smartphone technology. At the same time, they are capitalizing on the new platform changes introduced by Facebook to reach out to their target audience in a more personalized manner.

The current trends as revealed in the Adobe report should encourage optometrists and ophthalmologists to tailor their online marketing campaigns to include mobile marketing and social media promotions. The emphasis on mobile and social media, however, must not come at

the expense of traditional Internet search marketing. The search spend of an average US company (amount spent per year on cost per click and other online or mobile search advertising across all devices and social media) grew by 11% from the third quarter of 2011 to the third quarter of 2012.<sup>5</sup>

## BUILDING THE BRAND VIA SOCIAL NETWORKS

To survive in a competitive environment, it is crucial for an eye care practice to be able to differentiate itself from its competitors and build a unique brand identity that potential patients can identify with. A lot depends on the professional marketing team that develops the marketing campaign for the eye care professional. Because the average eye care practice may have a limited marketing budget, it is vital to get maximum value from Internet marketing and SEO.

The lowest cost strategy that can have a great impact and garner wide-spread publicity for the eye care practice is the use of creative social media promotion. Keep in mind, though, that the social media arena is also highly crowded, and it is not easy to develop a large, targeted, and responsive audience on social networks. An experienced social media marketing company will first understand the inherent social needs of the target audience of the practice. The company will then analyze what potential patients wish to engage with and share with others on social networks.

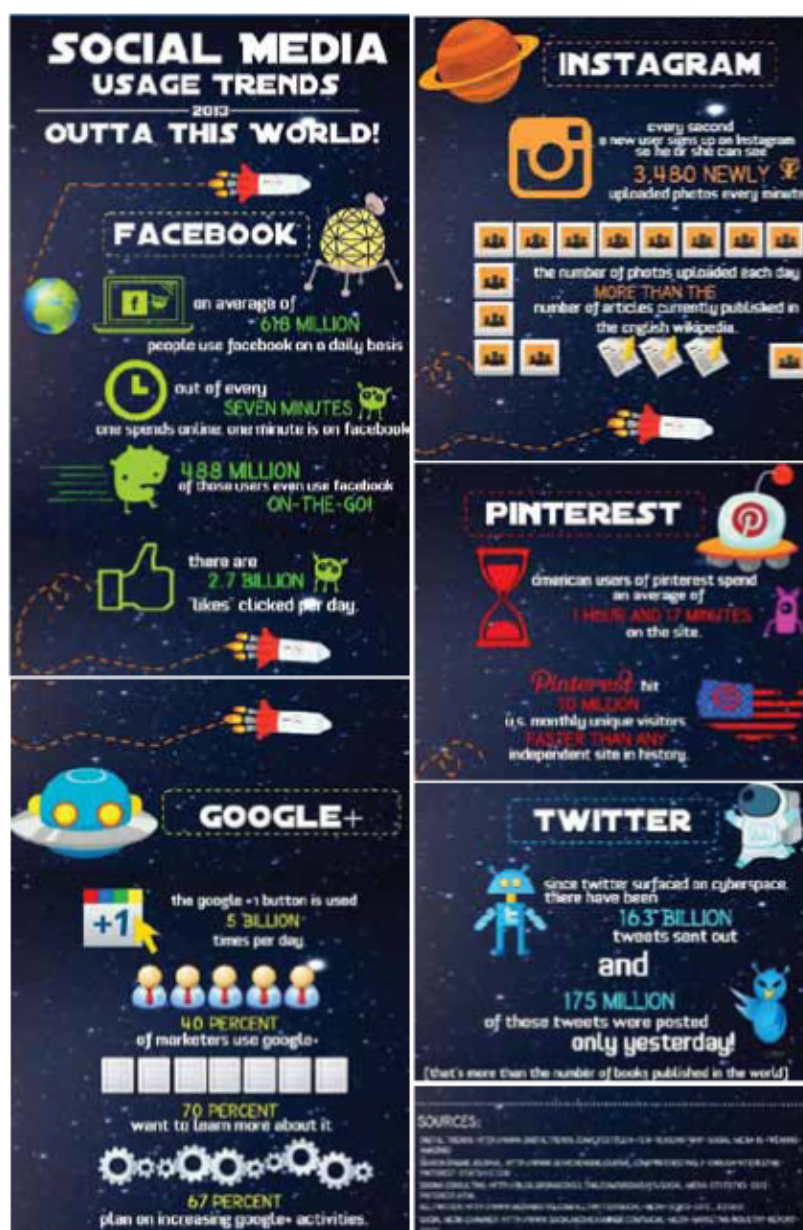
This information and analysis will help the marketers come up with innovative ideas to capture the imagination of this audience using social networks. They will create exclusive content for the audience, which will engage them and prompt sharing. Facebook, for example, provides page insight data, which helps marketers understand what kind of content is most appealing for the target audience.

## EFFECTIVE SOCIAL NETWORKING TIPS

An eye care provider who is planning to launch a focused social media campaign to promote his or her practice

should keep some basic tips in mind.

- "Brevity is the soul of wit" when it comes to social networking. Brief posts with fewer than three lines of text achieve better reader engagement and response compared with lengthier posts.
- Post frequently and maintain consistency. Readers have a short memory in the world of social media. Out of sight is out of mind in this game, so practitioners should stay in touch with their fans and followers and post fresh messages about three to five times a week, if not more.
- Page insights should be used to help the eye care



Usage trends for social media engagement.



provider determine what may be the optimal time to post messages to their preferred social network. Maximize the impact of posts and reach the most potential patients by updating during the optimal time range.

- Become familiar with the audience as much as possible. When the opportunity arises, engage with patients individually and personalize the relationships.
- When engaging others on social media, be sure to post items that target current trends, holidays, and "hot" issues of the day. Fans and followers will feel more connected on a personal level, increasing the likelihood that they will repost or share your information.
- Be reader-friendly in terms of language and content, and ensure that messages are appropriate for the profile of the target audience.
- Make use of images and videos wherever possible. A growing number of online readers and social media enthusiasts prefer to view rather than read a lot of text. Readers prefer to interact with content that includes pictures and videos.
- Try to construct brand-specific content when using social media. Help readers identify with the eye care practice by speaking in the voice of the brand. Practitioners can differentiate themselves from other

providers using social networks and offer something unique to their fans and followers in their content.

## CONCLUSION

The most important aspect of the practice's Internet search and social media marketing campaign is that it constantly strives to be useful. Rather than focusing on aggressive self-promotion, disseminate useful eye care information and educate and guide potential patients about new products, procedures, and treatments that suit their needs. A sincere, helpful, and pro-patient approach will go a long way in building the eye care practice's brand online. ■

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