

The Growing Importance of Social Media for Dermatologists

Dermatology practitioners must realize that social media is not just a tool for building relationships; it is also good for their businesses.

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Social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and LinkedIn present an extraordinary marketing opportunity for dermatologists who are looking to promote their independent practices. Potential patients are increasingly embracing social networks as an integral part of their everyday lives. Interestingly, the phenomenon is no longer restricted only to youth; statistics show that the over-50 population is joining social networks in staggering numbers.

COMPELLING NUMBERS

Dermatology practitioners cannot afford to ignore the fact that Facebook alone has more than 800 million active users worldwide, with more than 200 million added in 2011. A.C. Nielsen reports that more than 80 percent of all American adults use an online social network. Facebook gets the lion's share, with Americans spending more time on Facebook than on any other website.

Almost 23 percent of the entire time an average user spends online is spent on social networking. These numbers are compelling a growing number of small businesses and professionals, including dermatologists, to consider leveraging the immense power of social media to their marketing advantage.

ADVANTAGE FOR DERMATOLOGISTS

Independent dermatology practitioners have a clear advantage, like most other small businesses, in shifting their marketing strategies toward social media. Zoomerang, a leading online survey firm, conducted a study of 1,180 small and medium businesses (SMBs) and 500 customers to understand what is driving SMBs and independently practicing professionals to leverage the marketing power of social media. It revealed three key reasons:

- High visibility to a large number of people
- Personalized connectivity with potential clients
- Personal image enhancement and self-promotion.

Dermatology practitioners who have not yet woken up to the power of social media must realize that it is not just a tool for building relationships, but it is also good for their businesses. Crowdspring, a leading crowd sourcing marketplace, reveals these findings:

- More than half of all SMBs and professionals report gaining new clients through social networks—most notably through Facebook.
- Sixty-four percent of Twitter users and 51 percent of Facebook users are more likely to purchase the products or services from the businesses they follow on social media.
- Results can be achieved without spending much on social media: about 60 percent of small businesses spend less than \$100, and 74 percent do not have an employee to run social media marketing campaigns.

SEO AND SOCIAL MEDIA

A great dermatology website deserves to have a high targeted visibility in an organic search. Leading search engines such as Google are increasingly attaching importance to websites that are integrated with active social networking. Search engines are using social media activities as one of the most reliable forms of evidence to determine the worthiness of a website from the point of view of online readers.

For instance, when someone shares useful content from a dermatology website on Facebook or Twitter, it is a clue to help a search engine determine the value and relevance of that website. Every link or mention of the website on social networks is viewed by search engines as a vote or an endorse-

ment of the content by the general readers on the Internet. So page rankings improve as more and more people “vote” for the website on social networks.

Dermatologists can enhance their social media networking by providing unique, relevant, and highly useful nuggets of information to readers regularly. Interesting blog posts, compelling news items, patient testimonials, and even case studies, ebooks, and useful weblinks, apart from educational images and videos, can be posted on a dermatologist’s social media account to achieve higher “votes” from readers.

ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Active social media networking can help a dermatology practice dominate search engine page results. Paying attention to accounts can help the dermatologist maintain a good online reputation. The Internet is essentially a free medium that makes it extremely difficult to control or manage an individual’s online image or reputation.

For instance, third-party reviewers on the Internet can make or break a professional’s reputation, and there is not much that the professional can do about it. However, with a greater degree of personalized control over social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google Plus, LinkedIn, and Flickr, it becomes possible for a professional to manage his or her online reputation in a far better way.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Perhaps the best endorsement for a dermatologist comes from an existing or past patient. No amount of paid advertising and marketing can match the impact that a positive testimonial can have on a new patient; from a dermatologist’s perspective, user-generated content is the heart of social networking. eMarketer, a premier Internet research and analysis firm, says that 65 percent of all Internet users between the ages of 18 and 24 consult the information, comments, and opinions available over social networks while making a buying decision for any products or services. If a dermatologist invests enough time and effort to build a great social media presence, the results can be astounding over a period of time.

WIDER REACH TO TARGET AUDIENCE

Social networks offer a dermatologist the potential to reach out to the widest possible number of new patients at the lowest marketing cost per patient. Compared to any other form of advertising and marketing, social networking turns out to be the one medium that requires the least amount of time, effort, and money—and has the potential to achieve the highest results.

The incredible power of social networks stems from the fact that each follower and fan has his or her line of followers and fans. In other words, if just one follower on Twitter shares

one interesting tweet on dermatology, it will automatically reach a hundred followers, assuming an average active Twitter user has a hundred followers. Out of those one hundred followers, if one other follower retweets the same tweet, the reach will grow exponentially.

GAINING PROFESSIONAL CLOUT

Perhaps one of the most understated benefits of social media networking for dermatology practitioners is the enhancement of their professional clout. Apart from reaching out to potential patients in the local areas where the dermatology practice is located, the dermatologist can also improve connectivity with other professionals in the industry. These could include other leading dermatologists from any part of the world, potential business partners, media professionals, marketing and PR experts, thought leaders in the field of dermatology, dermatology conference and event organizers, and other influencers in the industry.

Active social media networking can help a dermatologist make new connections that could promote his or her practice. It could lead to speaking opportunities, conference invitations, community event sponsorships, and above all, learning about the latest developments and happenings in dermatology around the world.

PARTNERING WITH EXPERTS

To boost the business prospects of their dermatology practices through social media marketing, dermatologists can partner with professional social networking experts or companies that are experienced in social media promotions. Internet marketing firms with an exclusive focus on promoting medical practices may be the best partners for a dermatologist to create and manage a highly successful social networking campaign. ■

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