

# Avoiding Common Social Media Follies

Despite offering a number of opportunities for promotion, social media also engender many potential pitfalls that physicians should take care to avoid.

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According to recent figures released by SocialMediaToday.com, 93 percent of marketers make use of social networks for business, and the fastest growing segment on social media is adults between the ages of 45 and 54. The opportunity to promote a practice on social media is significant, but not everyone is able to leverage the power of social media effectively to their advantage. Many online marketers make a few common mistakes in their social media engagement, which can nullify the desired results or even backfire in some cases. Ahead, we offer ways to avoid common pitfalls of social media.

## **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE MARKETING POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

An overwhelming majority of dermatologists do not employ a focused social media strategy to boost the prospects of their practice. Even though publicity through social media is practically free of cost, many doctors do not believe it can yield real benefits for their practice. Social media is certainly not a cash cow that can start giving a return on investment in terms of hard income. However, over a period of time, a cohesive and systematic social media strategy can build a positive online reputation, increase awareness about the practice, improve patient engagement and patient satisfaction levels, and allow a chance to reach out to new patients. All of this translates into tangible benefits for the practice in the long run.

## **PUT THE AUDIENCE AT THE CENTER OF ENGAGEMENT**

Many marketers who engage actively on social media forget the cardinal rule to put the client at the center of every conversation. Instead of speaking about the patients and their needs, marketers may get too busy talking about

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themselves. Social media is not the place for blowing your own trumpet unilaterally. It is a place for mutual discussion and constructive engagement.

The easiest way to drive away or disenchant the members of a social network is to speak in isolation and speak about your own concerns and needs instead of theirs. Social media marketers should not view themselves as advertisers, but more as information providers and participants in an interactive medium. Storytelling, actionable suggestions, wit, and emotion can be powerful elements of any successful social media conversation.

## **TARGET THE RIGHT DEMOGRAPHICS**

To achieve the best impact on social media, identify the target audience and focus maximum efforts to engage with that segment. However, many marketers ignore this goal and aim at achieving maximum coverage without worrying about the demographic profile of the audience. For instance, a local practice in Chicago will have little to gain by extending its engagement to people from other cities or even other countries. Strictly from a marketing point of view, the effort should remain localized. Similarly, a



practice specializing in women's treatments should target female audience as far as possible.

### YOU CAN'T BE PRESENT EVERYWHERE

Social media networks have proliferated in the last few years, with Pinterest, Instagram, Google+, Tumblr, and others joining the fray, apart from the older players such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. It can be a mistake to try to diversify presence to every network, without making a strong impact on any of them. It is important to discriminate and identify which social networks may be of more direct relevance to the practice. If the marketer has the time and the capability to handle all social media accounts with efficiency and dedication, only then it makes sense to reach out to target audiences from all possible channels.

### MAINTAIN CONSISTENCY ACROSS MULTIPLE SOCIAL PLATFORMS

It is essential to have a cohesive social media strategy and unified branding if a dermatology practice decides to have a strong presence across multiple social networks. The appearance and performance across different networks should reflect the same level of professionalism, ideology, and focus. This allows audiences to connect better with the brand and appreciate its identity. The use of background, colors, fonts, logo, images, and videos should be consistent, along with core text such as the mission, vision, and objectives of the practice. If any special offers or announcements are made, it should be done consistently across various networks.

### BUILDING ENGAGEMENT IS KEY

For a social media marketer, the first duty should be towards the people who are already a part of the network. The marketer should take out time to respond to relevant comments, feedback, enquiries, and suggestions. A high level of responsiveness will eventually grow the network and draw the interest of a larger number of people.

Messages on social networks should be personalized wherever required, so that it does not sound like a repeated or mechanical response. If the marketer remains focused on building engagement, the long-term results may be better than what may be achieved by trying to drive indiscriminate traffic to the network by all means.

### STAY CONNECTED WITH PREVAILING SENTIMENT

Just like other marketing tools, social media is highly sensitive to current sentiment. However, enthusiasm to push an agenda can cause us to forget how the people may be feel-

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ing about a particular situation. A natural disaster or another national tragedy or crisis is likely to seize the imagination of participants on social networks for some time. During such periods, it is critically important to remain sensitive to public sentiment, and stay involved with their concerns. Rather than trying to control the direction of the conversation and harp upon products and services, an experienced marketer sometimes chooses to go with the flow and allow the conversation to decide its own substance and pace.

### MAKE SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Another grave social media marketing folly is to kick-start a new conversation, and then leave it incomplete and move on to the next conversation. Speaking first and thinking later is a common mistake that should be avoided on social media. The risk with social media technology is that once a comment, viewpoint, or opinion has been disseminated publicly, it may reach far within a very short time, and it is impossible to retract it later on.

Therefore, fickle-mindedness on social networks is not affordable for social marketers. Engaging in sustainable, focused, and exhaustive conversations, discussions, and dialogues can help build a strong social network that will have long-term sustainability and will deliver real results. Using social communities for business interests requires a deep commitment for meaningful engagement, as well as serious attempts to be helpful to others rather than exclusively chasing self-interest. ■

*Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete Internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dermatologists. With a team of 130+ full time marketers, Ekwa.com helps one doctor in an area dominate his or her market and grow his or her business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call Naren direct at 877-249-9666.*

