

BLENDING ONLINE AND OFFLINE TACTICS

FOR YOUR PRACTICE

BY KRISTIE NATION

Finding the perfect balance between efficiency and the personal touch can be difficult in this day and age. You want patients to have the best possible experience. This means figuring out when to use social media and when to fall back on old-fashioned one-on-one interaction.



WHY SHOULD YOUR PRACTICE USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media is one of the cheapest, most effective forms of making contact with patients.

Five good reasons to use social media as part of patient outreach include:

1. **LOW COST** — Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ (the most popular social media platforms) are free. A social media campaign costs only the time needed for design, planning, and implementation.
2. **MEASURABLE RESULTS** — It's easy to see when social media works since you can track the number of followers, shares, likes, comments, and additional traffic to your practice's website from social networks, and ultimately, more appointments booked.
3. **EXPANDED REACH** — When you use social media, everything you present to 100 people in your network can reach hundreds or even thousands more via sharing and commenting.
4. **YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE IS ON SOCIAL NETWORKS** — Studies show that 86% of online U.S. adults use social media. Meanwhile, 73% actively read blogs, online forums, and customer ratings and reviews on a regular basis. One-third of these people say they use information found on social media to help them make health-related purchasing decisions.
5. **EVERYONE ELSE IS USING SOCIAL MEDIA** — Those competing for your patients' dollars are using social media to attract customers, and you should be, too. Your campaign may not be as big as Gatorade's or the Red Cross's, but being present and active online is imperative to long-lasting success.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO IMPROVE PATIENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH YOUR PRACTICE

You can use social media platforms and supporting technology to make patients' experiences with your practice easier and more enjoyable. Here are three key examples:

- **REDUCE WAITING ROOM TIME** — Use Facebook and Twitter to remind patients that they can cut down on time spent in your office by printing and filling out necessary forms ahead of time on your website. Remember, the female consumer loves time saved more than money saved!
- **GET FEEDBACK** — You can do this easily by using email surveys regularly and paper reminders with a QR code that take the user directly to your Facebook Page or Google+ local page. This can result in incredible testimonials for your practice.
- **LISTEN** — Monitor social networks to hear what is being said about your industry, and your practice in particular. Knowing what people are talking about gives you a chance to respond.

WHEN THE PERSONAL TOUCH IS NEEDED

Although social media and technology can be powerful tools, there are still times when a one-on-one approach is needed.

- **CUSTOMER SERVICE** — Being active online gives you an edge when it comes to unhappy patients. You can find out about them quickly and move to help resolve their issues. Respond quickly and with genuine concern to any complaints posted online, and then take the conversation offline to resolve it. (Post an update on the successful resolution so viewers know you took action.)
- **FOLLOW UP** — A successful Atlanta, Ga., based pediatric practice makes a point of having a staff member check in with patients by phone later in the day after a procedure. This personal touch has parents bringing their kids back to the practice, where they know their child is a priority.

The bottom line is that social media and other forms of online interaction can help make your practice run more smoothly. When combined with a personal touch, your practice cannot help but prosper. **DE**

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