

## Developing a Social Media Marketing Plan

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If you're thinking about taking your hospital into the world of social media marketing, there are a few things to consider. Too many organizations are pursuing social media without first developing the strategic rationale that supports and guides the program. The appropriate first step is the development of a social media marketing plan.

When developing a social media marketing plan, there are a lot of tools for you to consider employing, and the options grow more varied everyday:

- Blogs (Wordpress, Blogger, Typepad)
- Social Networks (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Ning)
- Microblogging (Twitter, Pownce, Tumblr, Jaiku)
- Social bookmarking/content sharing (Delicious, Digg, Diigo, Fark, Squidoo)
- Discussion boards and forums
- Online video (YouTube, ICYou video)
- Patient Communities (Patients Like Me, MedHelp, Daily Strength, Revolution Health)
- Podcasting
- Photosharing (Flickr)
- Presentation Sharing (SlideShare, myclick, SlideBoom)
- Virtual Worlds (Second Life)
- Wikis
- Widgets

But looking at social media tools is really putting the cart before the horse. Sure, get familiar with these tools. But before taking action, you need is a strategy for how you'll engage your stakeholders and target audiences using social media. It is best if you look before you leap and let strategy guide your movement into the world of social media. That means developing your organization's social media marketing plan. How do you get started? Generally, your social media marketing plan should follow the form of a typical marketing communications plan:

1. Identify Goals and Objectives
2. Market Analysis (trends, needs, competition, best practices, etc)
3. Social Media Program Components/Implementation (including integration with traditional campaign)
4. Assessment and Allocation of Resources
5. Monitoring and Measurement

That's the big picture view. What follows are some more specific steps you should consider taking when creating a social media marketing plan for your hospital. Although there are several steps to the process, this does not have to be an overwhelming endeavor. Given what you already know about your market and your target audiences, you should be able to draft a preliminary social media marketing plan in just a few days. Don't try to write a book. Keep it simple and direct.

1. **Participate** - If you're not involved in social media, get involved. Consider this remedial training! At a minimum, join Facebook, LinkedIn, and start following some industry blogs. You will find it very difficult to sell or even construct a social media marketing plan if you aren't familiar with the functionality, strengths and weaknesses of the various platforms.
2. **Culture/Preparedness** - Start by assessing your organization's appetite for social media? How risk averse are they? Fear in the C-suite is one of the major obstacles we face relative to implementing a social media marketing program. Determine the steps you need to take to bring your leadership along and prepare them for this venture into the world of social media. Start feeding them a steady diet of articles, white papers and books on the subject. Ideally, presenting them with a well reasoned, strategic social media marketing plan will help to make your leadership more comfortable with the idea.
3. **Target Audience** - Define your targeting audience(s) and key stakeholders. Do some research into how they use social media. This will provide insights that you can apply to your plan.
4. **Objectives and Goals** - Take each group (grateful patients, referring physicians, employees, reporters, influentials in the community, your board) and outline your marketing objectives related to that group (keep it simple). Compare these objectives to what you've learned about how each group currently uses social media. Also look at industry best practices and review the activities of your top competitors. As you move forward, you should be prepared to adjust your goals based on new learning about the potential that social media represents. You may well learn that possibilities exist that you had not anticipated, and this may impact your goal setting.
5. **Desired Outcomes** - Clearly define the outcomes your organization would like to see. They may include increases in brand awareness/stature, enhanced search rankings and web traffic, increased preference, engagement of brand ambassadors, and improved patient volumes. Be as specific as possible. The outcomes you desire should impact the ways in which you measure results.
6. **Toolbox/Channels** - Identify social media channels that will help you accomplish your marketing objectives for each audience. This will become your toolbox! The vehicles you select need to take into account a number of factors including: resources available, desired outcomes, and their ability to effectively deliver your message/content. This assumes that you know the strengths of various social media platforms. (Hopefully you've done the earlier analysis of each group's use of social media.) Identifying the

appropriate social media tools is the step that may require the most research. For example, you may not know which LinkedIn groups reach a specific target audience, so you'll need to get online and start digging around. Join those groups and start following the conversation. Find out what these people care about. Another example, you'll need to identify the top bloggers/thought leaders that you will want to influence? And you'll want to start following those blogs and monitoring those conversations.

**7. Integration** - Define the process you will use to make sure the program is integrated with the traditional marketing and branding efforts of your organization. And don't forget about PR and media relations. There are lots of great social media tools that can make your PR program more effective; pitch engine, LinkedIn, filtrbox and Meltwater News are few examples. Be sure to integrate those into the plan. You'll also want to consider the role of social media in internal communications.

**8. Plan Your Resource Allocation** - If you allow it to happen, your social media program may end up dominating your life. That fear keeps a lot of people from taking the plunge. It is vital that you make your program sustainable, avoid over-taxing your internal resources and fend-off social media fatigue! You'll need to get tactical by identifying how you'll use each platform in your plan given the resources you have available (internal or external). A great deal of information can be re-purposed and shared within various social media platforms. A simple press release can be distributed through LinkedIn groups, become a blog post, a tweet on Twitter, and fodder for the wall of your Facebook group. So, think this through carefully. You also need to define workflow and who will actually do the work. Identify who will develop content for these various outreach mechanisms? How will information travel within your organization to the content generators? It is important that you recognize that you don't have to do everything at once. You will be more likely to experience success if you avoid biting off more than you can chew. Start small and you can always grow the program over time.

**9. Measurement** - Determine how you will measure results, knowing that not everything important can be measured. You will want to build these measurement tools into your plan. Whether it's Google Analytics for your blogger site, Wordpress' built in analytics (page views, referrers, comments), Technorati's blog rankings, friend counts, or member volume on your facebook group, it is not difficult to find meaningful ways to measure the appeal and relevance of your social media efforts. The tools will vary by social media channel. It is also important to measure productivity on your part, not just the activity of your target audience. This means you should measure your posting frequency and your level of engagement.

**10. Monitor** - Develop a plan for actively monitoring social media conversations. It is essential that you know what's being said about your brand online. You can use Technorati's daily custom RSS feeds to get quick updates on blogs that mention your hospital's name. **Technorati** is the biggest blog search engine, indexing over 60 millions blogs. **BackType** notifies you when people comment about your hospital on blogs. Receive updates as they happen, or at a the frequency of your choice. **BlogPulse** is a blog search engine that reports on daily activity relative to your brand. To monitor

conversations on Twitter, try **TweetBeep**. It keeps track of conversations that mention your hospital, with hourly updates. Another option is to use Twitter Search (search.twitter.com), and establish an RSS feed on your query. For monitoring conversations on message boards, try **BoardTracker**. It lets you monitor forum posts and topics. **SocialMention.com** provides quick snapshots of conversations surrounding your hospital's brand. You can set up daily email alerts. **Facebook Lexicon** lets you search your hospital's name and immediately see how often it is discussed on Facebook users' walls. **MonitorThis** allows you to subscribe to more than 20 search engine feeds at the same time. Meanwhile, **Digg** and **Reddit** let you search for submitted stories that match your hospital's name. The most obvious tools are Google Alerts and Yahoo Alerts. If you don't have these set up for your hospital, you should do so immediately. Each service will send you email alerts when your keywords come up in blogs or traditional news reports. Finally, **Filtrbox** works much like a Google Alert. It searches millions of sources and emails you ranked results for your search terms every day. Take some time and get to know these various tools. Choose the ones that are the least labor intensive and that can most easily be integrated into your team's daily routine. You can also use these monitoring tools to track conversations about your cross-town rivals.

11. **Policy** - Develop an 'employee social media policy.' You need one of these anyway, but with an increase in social media engagement by your organization, having an employee social media policy becomes more important. Start by reviewing social media policies of other organizations. The Mayo Clinic, for example, has their employee social media published online.

### Conclusion

The reason for integrating social media into your marketing communications program is not because everyone else is doing it. If that's your rationale, you will fail – if you ever get started. The best reason for actively engaging your stakeholders via social media is because it will help your organization achieve its marketing objectives. Just like any other marketing initiative, your entry into the world of social media should be strategically driven, and defined by a well-crafted marketing plan. It is essential that you understand the various social media platforms, allocate the necessary resources, and secure buy-in within your organization, before getting started.

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