

Using Social Media to Market Your Practice

MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS AND KEY INITIAL STRATEGIES.

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What are you doing about social media marketing? More often than not, chiropractors are slow to respond to this question. Ignoring the reality and potential of social media marketing can leave you left behind quickly; embracing it can enhance your current marketing efforts and even expand your marketing into areas you never thought possible. Let's review the major myths and misconceptions some of us may have about utilizing social media marketing, as well as provide a simple roadmap on how you can get started with social media marketing today.

Clearing Up Misconceptions

1. *Social media takes too much time.* Believe it or not, social media is something that can be done in as little as 15 minutes a day, and can easily be delegated to office staff. In the beginning, I was also convinced that social media took too long. I had to log into my Facebook account to post an update. Then I had to log into my Twitter account and do the same. Does this sound familiar? Fortunately, things have come a long way since those early days. There are various free tools out there now, such as Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com), which allows you to post to the majority of your social networks at once.
2. *Social media is expensive. I'll need to hire companies to do this for me.* Companies can save you a lot of time when it comes to Internet-related tasks, such as setting up Web sites and helping produce fan pages. However, communicating with your audience is something you or your staff should be actively doing on your own, and the cost is nothing more than your time. And by communicating yourself, rather than through a company, you can be 100 percent confident in the message that is being sent on behalf of your practice.



Is social media expensive? If you are a large or medium-sized business, then the answer is yes. You'll need marketing, PR and various other members of an advertising group. But if you are running a stand-alone practice, as the majority of DCs are, social media marketing is something that can take a few minutes a day to do, and at minimal cost.

3. *I don't know where to start.* This is one of the biggest issues chiropractors seem to have when it comes to social media marketing. With so many different social media sites out there, it's no wonder we get overwhelmed with information overload. The point is to keep it simple. Break each day down into simple tasks. You don't need to become an Internet marketing expert. Sign up for free with a few sites. I always recommend signing up for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Foursquare and Google + are two others you can explore.

Assign one site to each staff member. Set small goals for what you want to achieve. The first week could just be about registering for an account. Week two could be about posting your first message. Meet every week for a few minutes to discuss what you've learned and how you should apply what you've learned to your future efforts.

4. *Social media is for teens, not for business.* Although Facebook started out as a social site with a large teenage population, this isn't the case anymore. New research shows that over

50 percent of Facebook users are over the age of 25. Facebook fans are also more trusting than others.² Taking these numbers into consideration, it's no wonder that social media is a prime opportunity to build trust and credibility in your practice. LinkedIn is a professional social media site that deals with business-to-business relationships. It's not hard to build up a large network of connections with other businesses in your practice area.

Initial Social Media Strategies for Chiropractors

While an in-depth action plan for incorporating social media marketing into your practice is beyond the scope of this article, I recommend following these key strategies to get started today. The key is to take action.

1. *Set up a business page with Facebook, a Twitter account, a YouTube channel, and a LinkedIn page.* These are the major social media channels with which you want to engage patients and potential patients. With Facebook, it's very important to set up a business fan page for your clinic, rather than using your personal Facebook page. All these social media channels can be integrated with your blog or business Web site.
2. *Provide value, build relationships and create conversations.* Social media marketing is about engaging the audience, not about actively promoting yourself or your business. I know how eager we are to promote our business, since that's one of the major reasons to be on the social media sites. However, think long term. Provide great value. Every time you find a valuable article that your audience may be interested in, post it. Is there a new story about low back pain? Post questions to your audience about the article and engage them. Questions and polls generally increase fan engagement.
3. *Be clear about your goals.* Although we want to stress engagement, what is your real goal? Is it to get more patients? Then work on increasing your credibility in your town. Find other groups nearby that you can engage with. Is there a fibromyalgia society group in your area? Begin posting on the organization's Facebook pages. Provide value. Become an expert in the eyes of the group. If you are using Twitter, you can monitor Twitter for any keyword or hashtag. For example, someone in your town may "tweet" that they just suffered a sports injury. You can tweet back to that person with some valuable advice. That recommendation can turn into an office visit and a [new patient](#).
4. *Create a seamless marketing campaign.* Always remember that social media marketing is only one part of your total marketing plan. If you are doing events in the area, post the dates and a brief description on your social media accounts. If you are handing out marketing material around town, put your social media addresses on every bit of marketing material. This allows current and potential patients to reach you through multiple channels.
5. *Always provide a call to action.* Once you develop the habit of posting and regularly engaging your audience, you can begin to produce call to actions. Are you running a charity drive? Set up a Facebook contest around the charity drive. Give away prizes to the best post or image. The goal is to always have the audience engage in your content. Look at your current marketing campaigns and decide what type of polls, questions, prizes and contests you can set up on your social media channels. Have your fans share the content to others. This increases the "viral" impact of your campaign; more people in your town will see the content.
6. *Advertise to get more focused leads.* By now, you should be regularly posting great content, providing valuable information and increasing the number of fans on your Facebook fan page. You should also be good at monitoring your Twitter channel for related content, and added many businesses in your area to your LinkedIn account. You can now begin to set up advertising campaigns on Facebook.

Did you know you can target users by age, sex, location and interests? When someone clicks your ad, you can send them to your Web site or a specific landing page that has a specific call to action relating to the ad. Make sure your staff continuously monitors where customers are coming from. That way, you should be able to figure out [your ROI](#) from the campaign. If you have a positive ROI, continue with the ad campaign. If not, tweak your ads. Use different keywords.

Facebook allows you to monitor what your conversion on the ad is - the number of people who saw your ad and the number who clicked on the ad. That way, you can see which ads are working and which are not.

Start Communicating

In today's competitive marketplace, every chiropractic practice needs to be aware of the various marketing opportunities available. Social media marketing is gaining power exponentially, and it's not going away. It's a low-cost way to make you the expert in your area and reach patients and potential patients in ways you never would have imagined.

Don't think of social media marketing as something different and unique. It's really just an extension of your current marketing plan. The more you integrate it with your current strategies, the more effective you'll become. By providing value and increasing communication with your community, increased referrals will follow.

Reference

1. Pew Internet: Social Networking (full detail). Pew Internet Research Center, data for March 2012.

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