

# The Digital Landscape: E-Marketing and Social Media

Randy Gerson

*Editor's note:* This is part 3 in an ongoing series on marketing and your practice. [Part 1](#) appeared in the June 17 issue; [part 2](#) ran in the July 29 issue.

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As a businessperson and health care professional, undoubtedly you have heard a lot about the new digital landscape as a driving force in marketing and business growth. To some, it's become a "must" to blog, tweet and have a Facebook page for your business if you want to be up to date and interacting with your clients and patients. While this brave new world of e-marketing certainly demands using a different medium to connect with others, the basic approach to marketing remains the same. That means your marketing strategy should suit your practice, your budget and the people you're trying to reach.

## It Starts With Your Web Site

[Your Web site](#) is home base in the new digital marketing playing field. Your site should include the greatest amount of information about you and your practice. It also should express your "brand" and set the tone for any other digital communication you may do, such as direct e-mails or social media content. Your Web site provides content to educate and engage people to build demand for your services. This is information that you control and present to the world about yourself and your business.

When people started talking about Web 2.0 (the next generation of the Web) and social media, they essentially were talking about creating interaction and a sense of community versus a static, one-way conversation. It's no longer simply you telling people about your practice; it's engaging people to interact with you and become authors of the content being created and disseminated online. While many of these vehicles offer the chance to speak to large numbers of people, you are engaging with people individually, but on the public stage.

[Blogs are a good example.](#) A blog can be incorporated into your Web site or linked to it if you use one of the many online services available, like Blogger or WordPress. I often think of bloggers as the digital equivalent of newspaper columnists. The key difference, though, is that a blog is not only a paragraph or two about your ideas, new things in your practice, thoughts about the chiropractic industry; it's also the comments that readers make about your post. With that comes some risk of negative feedback. The upside is that you always have the option of responding to provide additional information or explanation.

## Social Media Channels



When talking about social media, one of the keys to success is to understand clearly the properties of the different social media, who uses them and the purpose for which they are typically used. In all of the social media channels, the key is content creation - what engaging information you're putting out; distribution - what method you're choosing to use; and interaction - affording others the chance to weigh in with their thoughts, opinions, etc. The main categories include social media (e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn); blogs and micro-blogs (like Twitter); social bookmarks (e.g., Digg, Reddit, Delicious); and video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube).

*Facebook.* You've set up a Facebook page. Now what? Facebook is about managing relationships and connections. It's ideal for building loyalty and "cheerleaders" for your practice. Through your content - the posts, links and photos you put on your page - you indirectly promote your practice and your philosophies and can engage with people who are interested in you and your work. Of course, you need to promote your Facebook page on your Web site, in materials, e-mails and other communication you send to your patients.

According to Peter Corbett, CEO of iStrategyLabs, Facebook has more than 103 million U.S. users as of January 2010. It's well-documented now that, for a site that began for college students, the 35-54-year-olds comprise the most Facebook users today. What's more, Facebook users ages 55 and older make up the fastest-growing age category.

*LinkedIn.* This is typically seen as a professionals' relationship-building site and is mostly used for job hunting and networking. LinkedIn groups offer additional networking opportunities, as well as discussion and Q&A formats, which offer the possibility of showcasing your expertise on issues related

to your practice. LinkedIn may be a good place to go to build your network of professional referrals.

*Twitter.* Most marketing folks use Twitter as a tool to gauge attitudes, customer reactions and trends in real time. "Tweets" are short and fast by definition. Again, it helps to know who uses what social media tools, as Twitter users skew to a younger demographic (18-34-year-olds), and according to iStrategyLabs, more than 74 percent of Twitter users in 2009 had no children.

*YouTube.* This video-sharing site is not just for music and cute pet videos. Millions of people upload personal videos on YouTube every day. It is also the second-ranked search engine. People searching for content related to your practice and services have the chance to see you or your staff in action, giving a demonstration or showcasing new products sold in your practice.

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