

The OWL Webinar: Marketing Your Business and Products with Social Media

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It's a brave new (marketing) world.

In addition to traditional marketing platforms such as radio, TV, print and word-of-mouth-referrals, we also have internet marketing platforms, including website marketing, PPC ads and, for ophthalmic practices, directories. And just as we've started to get a handle on those, social media marketing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram have started to gain visibility and credibility. What's a business to do?

First, one must recognize that it's not solely about the technology. Though social media platforms (or "channels") have certainly gained a foothold, the only thing that separates them from older mediums is their social nature. Yes, in some cases marketing information must be presented in a different manner than we're accustomed to (Twitter's maximum of 140 characters comes to mind), but traditional marketing objectives and goals are still in force; namely, branding, product promotion, word-of-mouth referral support, attracting and acquiring new clients, and client retention. All marketing platforms,

including social media, are utilized for one reason: to market your business. As with traditional marketing mediums, the key to effective social media is to ensure that you choose the ones that are right for your business and then leverage their marketing potential to the fullest, integrating them with your traditional marketing to promote your business brand. It's not as difficult as it may appear.

Here's how it's done.

Getting Started

What is social media good for?

For one, it allows a company or organization to engage its clients (and potential clients) with perceived value-added features, the purpose of which is ultimately to facilitate brand and/or product loyalty. For example, if you are attending an OWL event, it is likely you will be encouraged to "like" the organization's Facebook page for industry updates and news, as well as follow it on LinkedIn for additional professional news.

More recently, people have been using social media in lieu of traditional business cards (LinkedIn) and to connect (Facebook and Twitter). At the very least, people exchange Twitter handles at social gatherings to connect immediately and then follow up from that channel.

For professionals, a LinkedIn Group is a good way to hold discussions and be part of a larger whole. OWL's LinkedIn Group page, for example, provides followers with highlights on the latest 'Ophthalmic Woman Magazine' as well as referrals and process, industry gathering news and

more. In other words, social media is a great way for a company or organization to provide more than what is offered on its website.

To understand which social media channels will work best for your company's needs, let's look at the benefits and drawbacks of four of the most important channels — Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram — and discuss how you could (and should) use them.

Facebook (1.15b users)

Think of Facebook as: A place for the 3 Cs: content, copy and connections.

Benefits: Most popular social network; easily accessible; low-cost marketing strategy; ability to reach essentially everyone else who is on Facebook (as of June 2013, there were 1.1 billion users); analytics help determine important demographic information about your fans so you can develop a targeted strategy.

Drawbacks: Potential to get lost in the crowd; sharing of information must remain aligned with business plan and desired presence/target audience; legal may require pre-authorization of content, so planning is essential; planning is also important for optimal engagement and continuity, but planning too far in advance makes it difficult to remain new and relevant.

How to Use It: A Facebook page is not just something to create and then forget about. You need to be committed. Post regular updates to your fans and provide useful content. You need to participate in the conversation — share images and become immersed in Facebook

to provide an excellent social media service that represents your company as a reputable organization. Facebook is a great landing spot to begin the chain link of social media you want for your company, practice or organization. It is a great place to engage consumers – not with technical information, but rather with information that is entertaining while still containing information about your brand.

From Facebook, you can tie in LinkedIn posts, Instagram pictures, Tweets and company website traffic to boost your visibility and round out your social media presence for maximum exposure and engagement.

Twitter (500m users)

Think of Twitter as: A “micro-blog.”

Benefits: Access to celebrities, individuals, medical practices, institutions and industry experts; real-time sharing of information, advancements and updates; concise messaging; immediate ability to conduct damage control; hash-tagging quickly categorizes conversations and events. All of this is contingent on engagement, meaning a conversation you can participate in is always happening.

Drawbacks: Contingent on engagement (both a positive and a negative); closer monitoring required than FB; active presence requires expert and professional content creation and monitoring.

How to Use It: A company Twitter account is recommended to link to industry information, speaking events and trends, while incorporating the use of #hashtags to organize and filter Tweets. This allows you to carve out

niche followers, provide them with updates and lead them to Facebook, LinkedIn as well as your company website. Twitter can also be used to connect to sports teams, companies and Twitter accounts focusing on technology and innovation.

Twitter should be used to talk about company happenings to position your business as an interesting, “living” entity. This can range from product release announcements to industry recognition you receive. Twitter posts are a good way to lead people to your website or other social media channels where additional information is available. Twitter can also be used to link to other industry happenings in order to make it clear to your target Twitter audience that following you keeps them in the loop on industry happenings, not just your company. By appearing to be in the know, you enhance your brand.

LinkedIn (225m users)

Think of LinkedIn as: Professional social media for companies and individuals.

Benefits: Making professional connections; developing advantageous partnerships; following companies and industry best practices; ability to create practice or company pages to improve SEO and visibility online; networking opportunities; speaking engagements (participation or attendance); SEO improvement.

Drawbacks: Individual/personal LinkedIn accounts are not always kept up to date by busy professionals, so you may be connecting with people who have outdated information (current titles, employment

information); unless you’re a social media professional, it may be confusing to decipher between Group and Company pages; works best for B2B.

How to Use It: LinkedIn establishes you on a professional level. Unlike most social media channels, it exists solely for professional purposes. To this end, there are two important types of professional LinkedIn pages: Group pages and Company pages.

Company page: A basic Company page on LinkedIn often includes information gleaned from the company website. Establishing presence on LinkedIn lends credibility and improves SEO, and lends visibility to a company, practice, brand or organization. From here companies or practices post news, company and industry updates, photos, speaking opportunities and more.

Group page: After a Company page has been set up, some (if not most) organizations wish to hold discussions. A Group page on LinkedIn is a secondary account where discussions are held between Group members and managers of the Group. The benefit of a Group is to have a constantly evolving and updated space for conversations without having to inundate the Company page with information.

Instagram (130m users)

Think of Instagram as: A visual channel to tell your story.

Benefits: Visual platform for reaching your target audience; for those in the healthcare industry,

presence can potentially benefit from a refreshing visual makeover (highlight services, practice, procedures unique to your practice; personalize doctors; etc.); linking to community will help build a following and a network; lets followers see behind the “curtain” of your business; great for contests and participation.

Drawbacks: Instagram easily becomes stale; overly-used hashtags cause content to become lost in the sea of photos; inappropriate channel for some businesses and practices; visual and copy must reflect company/practice culture and message.

How to Use It: Instagram is a visual tool that employs #hashtags and themes to propel an organization into the visible sphere of social media. We can use Instagram to tell a story in pictures. What would a picture book of your practice or message look like? Creating an Instagram account around this idea is challenging, but for certain companies and practices it allows for a unique perspective. A visual representation of a company or an organization is not a fit for everyone, and Instagram is not the platform of choice for delivering a company message. However, it can be a good supplement to your social media campaign, highlighting the behind-the-scenes perspective and lending character and personality to your company. Also, it is important to note that Instagram is currently even more popular than Twitter. How long this trend lasts remains to be seen.

Tying it All Together

Launching a social media campaign is fairly straightforward; Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram link to your company or practice website

via buttons (speak with your website developer – it’s an easy process to implement.) Ideally, all of your social media channels will feed into a constantly churning cycle of information that helps maintain top-of-mind presence for anyone searching for additional information about your company or practice, expanding your footprint and ultimately improving your search engine rankings. However, this does not mean that every business should invest time and money into every social media channel. Boil down your goals and ask yourself: which channels will work best for my business?

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SOURCES:

User stats: <http://goo.gl/G5IWC>
Facebook: <http://goo.gl/F22zm>
Twitter: <http://goo.gl/1XdrO>
LinkedIn: <http://goo.gl/k218n>
Instagram: <http://goo.gl/HmWOU>
Stats: <http://goo.gl/RwYuu>, <http://www.shareholder.com>
Ophthalmic Women Leaders: <http://www.owlsite.org/>