



Branding/ Reputation

- EDITORIAL, *L. DONOSO BACH*
- THE ART OF INFLUENCING
- CLICK, LIKE, RETWEET: HEALTHCARE REPUTATION ONLINE, *M. ENNIS-O'CONNOR*
- SOCIAL MEDIA IN HEALTHCARE, *S. SYED-ABDUL*
- SOCIAL MEDIA: GETTING IT RIGHT IN THE MARKETING PLAN, *R. SMITH*
- THE RIPPLE EFFECT: SUSTAINABILITY IN HEALTHCARE, *W. CLARK*

AI AND RADIOLOGY, *P. CHANG*
HAPPY STAFF, SAFE PATIENTS,
U. PRABHU

QUALITY AND SAFETY: ROLE OF
THE BOARD, *L. ROBSON*

QUALITY AND SAFETY IN
RADIOLOGY, *L. DONOSO BACH,*
G. BOLAND

SPORTS MEDICINE IMAGING,
G. RODAS/ K. NASIF

THE PAYER DETERMINES, BUT IT IS
NOT THE PATIENT, *P. KAPITEIN*

EXCHANGING 'MAMMOGRAPHY'
SCREENING WITH 'BREAST
CANCER' SCREENING, *N. CAPPELLO*

POINT-OF-CARE ULTRASOUND
SCANNERS, *ECRI*

CONNECTING IMAGING AND
INFORMATION IN THE ERA OF AI,
D. KOFF

ELECTRONIC CLINICAL HANDOVER,
J.J. COUGHLAN

DECONSTRUCTION OF BUSINESS
PROCESSES TO DISRUPTION OF

BUSINESS MODELS, *P-M. MEIER*

ENHANCING THE PATIENT
EXPERIENCE, *D.G. RELIGIOSO,*
E.S. DECIUS

ROBOTIC COMPANION ON WARD,
M. KEEN

BRINGING LIVE MUSIC TO
ADULTS AND CHILDREN ACROSS
HEALTHCARE, *S. ROWLAND-
JONES*

HEALTH SPENDING IN GREECE
UNDER RESTRAINT MEASURES,
D. LAPPOU



Social media: getting it right in the marketing plan

Leveraging digital resources is the key to successful marketing

Reed Smith of the Social Health Institute weighs in on what healthcare can do to leverage their reputation through a sound social media and digital marketing strategy.

You have a great deal of experience through the Social Health Institute (SHI) and other organisations you cooperate with. Do you think social media marketing and healthcare are a natural fit? In your experience, what have some of the challenges been for healthcare organisations when implementing a social media strategy?

Social media and healthcare are absolutely a natural fit. Social media by definition is about community. In healthcare community can drive healing. The idea of connecting with others who might be going through the same situation you are is why many spend hours each day looking at those little screens.

If I had to boil it down to the biggest implementation issue for organisations it would have to be holding out social media as a separate strategy. Is it a separate tactic? Sure, but we need to think about marketing as marketing. Traditional, digital, and social are all part of the larger plan and can only be maximised when used together.

Digital is becoming part of the organisation as a whole. We are seeing a real focus in information, technology and systems marketing, quality, operations, and even clinical environments. Gone are the days where an intern was running your Twitter account.

What are the top things that healthcare gets wrong when it comes to using social media channels?

I don't know that healthcare necessarily gets anything wrong, but maybe it is more about maximising the usefulness of social. I very seldom see a marketing

department within hospitals that, I feel, is appropriately staffed to maximise digital. There should be a larger emphasis on reputation management, community management and leveraging advocates. We have to understand that consumerism has fully made its way into healthcare delivery.

“ TRADITIONAL, DIGITAL, AND SOCIAL ARE ALL PART OF THE LARGER PLAN AND CAN ONLY BE MAXIMISED WHEN USED TOGETHER ”

On the other hand, have you seen some ingenious use of social media for healthcare marketing?

Live video and chatbots come to mind when you start thinking about who is on the cutting edge.

Chatbots within platforms like Facebook and live video in Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms allow for consumers to better engage with the provider and consume content that is relevant and timely. With that said we have to be careful not to always be jumping to the new shiny object. Be sure you understand who your audience is and where they participate online. This can change by service offering or even location.



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Do you think anything needs to change in a typical healthcare marketing department to keep up to speed with the opportunities presented by social media?

I think we are still a little overstaffed with older skill sets. It is important to understand what is coming and what the consumer is expecting. So, when you look social and how artificial intelligence and augmented reality/virtual reality are coming on the scene for example it would be important to have skill sets that complement where the industry is headed.

I would encourage every marketing department to invest in skills that maximise data and technology.

What key characteristics of traditional marketing should healthcare bring into its social media initiatives?

All of it. I don't think we should shy away from traditional marketing efforts, strategies, and tactics. As a matter of fact, the best thing you can do is couple all your digital and traditional efforts together to have a larger and longer lasting impact.

Specifically, one thing that comes to mind is audience segmentation. These skills work well with persona development in the digital space and you look to target and re-target consumers on social.

What can a hospital do to upgrade its social media presence? What mix of factors make a good strategy?

At the risk of sounding like a broken record I would not have a social strategy. I would have a marketing strategy that includes social and other things. With that said when looking at social it is important to have a strong content plan coupled with the right frequency. Video is hard to overlook. Be sure to explore all types of video. The traditional videos we have done are great but also look at animation, and even animated gifs.

Simply put, invest in a social presence that shows your community that you really want to connect with them online.

Do you have any mini case studies on how an aspect of a hospital or healthcare organisation's marketing was enhanced by social media?

One that comes to mind is a campaign that one of my partners, Bobby Rettew, created and led for the South Carolina Hospital Association. It is called "Be Something Amazing." It is an Instagram-focused campaign to engage teens and millennials around choosing a

career in healthcare. It is filled with amazing content and engaging animations. You can check it out at besomethingamazing.com.

It is a smart effort that takes into account the audience and where they participate.

“INVEST IN A SOCIAL PRESENCE THAT SHOWS YOUR COMMUNITY YOU WANT TO CONNECT WITH THEM”

What role does social media marketing have to play in the overall reputation and image of a healthcare organisation?

I don't think it is a surprise that the clinical leaders of our industry are also the ones leading in the digital and social space. Your brand is not just a logo, it is the experiences consumers have with coming in touch with your organisation. The experience of healthcare now moves far past the brick and mortar of our institutions and plays out everyday on social media.

Word of mouth is still the number one influencer of consumer choice but past that consumers pull from experiences of others "like" them. Social media is where they find the others. ■

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Social media and healthcare go hand in hand
- ✓ Social media should be included in a marketing plan rather than approached separately
- ✓ Hospitals need to staff modern marketing departments with more digital expertise
- ✓ Traditional marketing works well in a digital mix
- ✓ Word of mouth is prime consumer choice driver; social media plays key role in reputation building

