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Getting Started with Social Media: More Than Tweets and Posts



by Sandra Fancher

While social media is a popular topic for webinars, health care marketing conferences, and breakfast speakers, many hospitals are not yet ready to commit to social media. Even though these organizations understand the importance of social media, internal resource constraints or leadership concerns have stalled efforts.

This article is for organizations that are not prepared to invest in day-to-day social media engagements but at the same time would like to take a few steps forward. Although it's ideal to create a full social media strategy, you can undertake some important moves so you won't get left behind in 2011. All the steps below focus on investing some time upfront and require limited day-to-day monitoring. The steps can be completed in less than four days, and some steps will only require 15 minutes to one hour to initiate.

Establishing a social media presence does not have to require dedicated staff and can lead to powerful results. Many hospitals are seeing immediate, measurable results with just a few hours of setup and ongoing monitoring.

Step 1: Reserve your names before someone else does

If you do not own your username on Twitter or YouTube, consider saving your name. Although Twitter has rules for recovering trademark names, save yourself the time spent in recourse. Consider your social media names as important as your Web site URL. The process is simple and free.

Twitter. The one catch is that you need to post to your account within six months to keep it active. One simple way is to hook up your RSS news feeds, although it's much better to create unique messages.

YouTube. Beyond protecting your name, you must be mindful that a video's creation date matters as far as search priority is concerned. Go to "Create Account" on the top of the home page (www.youtube.com) to get started.

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Facebook. Facebook requires that you have 25 likes before you can claim your username. If possible, try to fulfill that requirement quickly, possibly calling on internal staff, so you can reserve your address.

Step 2: Reap the SEO benefits of your existing videos

With last year’s launch of Google’s new indexing system, Google Caffeine, search results are now calculated in near-real-time. Twitter posts and YouTube videos now count toward your search ranking.

YouTube is more than just a video warehouse; it’s the third most popular Web site, an extremely popular video search engine, and a powerful marketing tool. If you already have videos on your site, make sure you upload them to your YouTube channel and apply appropriate SEO principles. Make sure to create a title and description and use relevant keywords. Doing so increases the chances of your videos showing up in the top search results. To see an example, type in “larynx cancer treatment Jackson” in Google. St. Dominic’s YouTube video is the first result. Below is a screenshot seen when you link to St. Dominic Hospital’s YouTube page.

With a nonprofit status, an organization can also add navigation to directly link back to its Web site’s key features such as Find a Doctor and Schedule an Appointment.



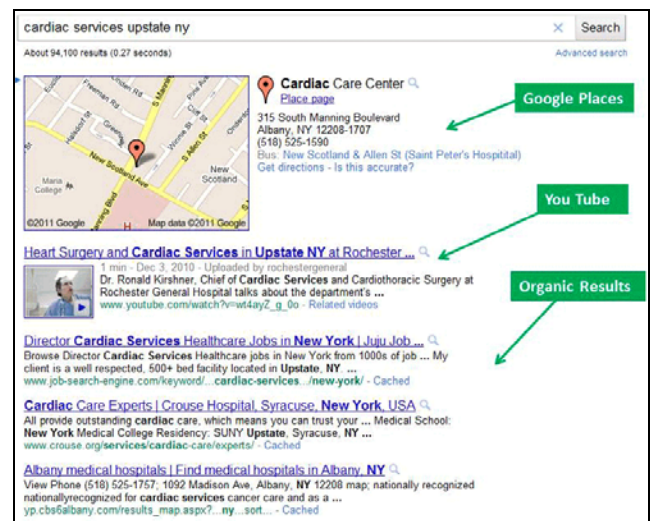
Step 3: Claim your Google Places page

Google Places is an online directory for businesses, much like the Yellow Pages, that provides contact information, map/directions, hours, photos, and reviews for individual businesses.

Most likely, your hospital or facility already has a Google Place page, whether you created it or not. Google pulls together address information and dynamically creates Place pages, and unfortunately, they do not always present the correct information.

Although it can be tricky and sometimes inconvenient to coordinate, claiming your Google Place page is well worth the effort. Claiming your account is an opportunity to assign valuable tags, photos, and videos, and gain access to analytics. For St. Dominic Hospital in Jackson, MS, optimizing its existing account increased its overall impressions (the number of times its local search result was viewed) by 2,200 percent and its actions (the number of times a user clicked a call-to-action) by 1,100 percent in two days.

Additionally, Google is increasing the importance of local search results, pushing your organic results below Google Places. You could actually begin to lose organic results and overall site traffic, as the results page below illustrates.



To get started, try typing your service plus location, such as “hospitals in Newton, MA,” into Google. In the results, you should see “Places for hospitals near Newton, MA,” and the Place page links. Click on “Place page” next to an individual hospital result. You’ll go to a page that asks at the top if the listing belongs to a business owner or is an owner-verified entry. If your “Place” is not owner-verified, you will need to select business owner and follow the instructions. A few tips for claiming your account:

1. Create a generic Gmail account, such as

yourhospitalanalytics@gmail.com, so that the account is not tied to an individual person.

2. Select the phone option. But before clicking submit, find out who answers the number listed on the Place page and coordinate with that person a specific time when you will click submit. If possible, have a marketing staff member in the call center to make sure that you correctly capture the PIN. Google will call your number within 10 minutes and sometimes immediately upon submission. You only have three tries to get the PIN; after that, you will need to use the postcard method.
3. If Google created multiple Place pages for you – for example, to cover specific departments – claim those as well so that you can correct and consolidate accounts.

Step 4: Create a dynamic Facebook page

Facebook now allows you to build mini-sites in page tabs using Facebook Markup Language, also known as FBML. Facebook is the king of Web traffic, but if you are not ready to actively engage users through Facebook comments, you can still establish your hospital's presence by letting FBML pages serve as a brand ambassador for your hospital. One of the nice features of these tabs is that you can configure your account to default to the custom tab instead of the Wall, which is the typical default tab that lists your posts and allows others to post to you. If you are not ready to actively post on a Wall, defaulting to your custom tab provides information about your organization and its services. Consider these tab subjects:

- “About Us” page highlighting your key services
- “Careers” page with a dynamic feed of your job postings and featured testimonials
- “Foundations” to promote fund-raising events and ways to donate
- “Special Events” or “Marketing Campaigns,” enlisting the help of social networks to promote and communicate certain occasions and services

If FBML is something your staff does not have time to master, then contracting with a vendor can be a solution. Facebook packages are typically low in cost, and high in ROI. Here are some examples of FBML pages:

- Alaska Physician Jobs (www.facebook.com/AlaskaPhysicianJobs)

- Exeter Hospital (www.facebook.com/pages/Exeter-Hospital/127789863950878)
- Sterling Health Plans (www.facebook.com/pages/Sterling-Health-Plans/169390526433004)
- St. Dominic Hospital (www.facebook.com/pages/St-Dominic-Hospital/216233519152)
- Rochester General Hospital (www.facebook.com/pages/Rochester-General-Health-System/130032530035)
- MedTouch (www.facebook.com/MedTouch)

Step 5: Monitor your reputation by setting up alerts

Make sure you know what is being said about you and your competitors by using Google Alerts. Google Alerts does the monitoring, based on your settings, and sends you e-mail updates. Not being actively involved in social media does not mean that you are not being talked about, both positively and negatively, online. Making sure you are aware of these conversations will allow you to respond.

You can also monitor what's being said about your organization in blogs, YouTube, and forums through a Web site called Social Mention. Twitter supports e-mail notifications as well, if you're not a power user plugged in all day through one of the third-party apps such as HootSuite or TweetDeck. A new free tool called Hyper Alerts monitors posts and comments to your Facebook page. Let these tools do the work for you.

Step 6: Let your support groups or programs connect online

One of the easiest ways to build a dynamic social group online is to host discussions for existing support groups, such as bariatric or cancer patients. Begin by creating a Facebook page specifically for your individual health program or group. Add photos of the staff and supporting events and then promote the online group in your regular offline group meetings.

Be sure to assign a mentor to the group, someone who monitors the posts and adds supporting information. Typically, this person already mentors the offline support group or program.

Step 7: Blog your story

Although blogs can seem a bit overwhelming to maintain, consider one that starts with a simplified, focused

strategy. You can still produce great content and conversations with a constrained time budget. A few ideas to get you started are:

- **Q&A series.** If you have a channel for questions or a list of commonly asked questions already, consider having your experts answer these questions in blog posts. Make sure you feature your experts with profiles and that they have the time to answer follow-up questions.
- **Day-in-the-life series.** Assign your junior writer to follow specialists, nurses, or administrators to describe a day in their life. Highlight their personal preferences, such as their favorite cafeteria food and their cellphone ring tone, along with what makes them passionate about their job, such as patient interaction or using new technology. If a Flip cam is available, consider a video blog or supplement your story with short video clips.
- **Community investment focus.** Communicate how your organization affects the health of the community in a positive way and serves as an advocate for the overall health of the public. Feature wellness and educational opportunities, along with other community benefits you provide. Explain how health care regulation affects health care in the community and what you are doing to support the public.
- **Featured services.** Consider the treatments or procedures that set you apart from your competitors. You can create a great blog series on how an innovative treatment is improving patient care.

Step 8: Report your results to the C-suite

As you extend your reach, make sure you update your reports to include the impact you are having in all channels. For example, if you neglect to include your Google Places traffic, you could be reporting a decrease in traffic when in fact there is an overall rise.

Spend a few hours and attack the list so that when executives ask you about social media, you'll be ready with some great results of how you are already successful.

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