Socialize Your Practice to Success: Facebook

By Kayce Bramble and Thomas J. Tedeschi

Who’s Afraid of Social Media? It’s kind of funny, but social media scares a lot of people, not just us audiologists. It seems that everyone is using social media today, and if you wish to be progressive and stay on the forefront of marketing, you need to be actively involved with using it. Social media, as a marketing tool, is unfamiliar for many of us and that can be very intimidating. Fortunately, audiologists are in the habit of learning new things, ideas, and strategies on a daily basis, and social media should be no different. With a clear understanding of the definition, value, basic components, and best use of social media, audiologists can be very successful at socializing their practices successfully.

Socializing your practice doesn’t have to be difficult or overly time consuming. It’s really not necessary to reinvent the wheel. Today, there are numerous resources readily available that can provide assistance. You can do a Web search of even the most basic questions and get help. Your colleagues and other local clinics may have some applications already in place that can serve as a guide for how you would or would not want to use social media. If you feel that this venue will involve too much work, you could hire a business consultant to plan and implement your social media marketing plan.

What Is Social Media?
Social media differs from traditional marketing approaches because it has the potential for instant two-way communication. We cannot immediately express our opinions on the content of a billboard or newspaper; however, we can comment or communicate instantly with others via a blog or a posting on Facebook. Social media is not restricted to blogging or Facebook posts, it also includes Web and mobile technologies that are supported with interactive dialogue. Other forms of social media you may be familiar with are YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest. But there are plenty of others you may not be familiar with. Social media is now considered the new “word of mouth.”

Why Is This Important to Audiologists?
Today we use the Internet to assist us in a number of ways:
Learning more about products and services that we use in our offices

Understanding more about competitors’ products

Observing and viewing our competition’s Web presence

We also need to be cognizant of the fact that our prospective patients, as well as their family members, are using the Internet for the same information. We cannot ignore the Internet if we hope to stay competitive. An understanding of how to use the Web and the optimization of your Web presence is crucial if you want to be the audiologist individuals are directed to, and whose site they choose first. Your name and the name of your practice easily can be found in a Google search. You need to be smart and control the information that people will find about you and your business as much as possible.

There is a misperception that seniors do not use social media. In reality, many seniors find social networking exciting and they enjoy being part of the online community. Seniors today are creating their own blogs, and connecting with family and friends by joining Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. We are seeing many retirement communities launching their own Facebook pages (Care Networks, 2012).

Social media has gained wide acceptance at a faster rate than any other medium in history. It took radio 38 years to reach 50 million listeners, while it took television 13 years to get 50 million viewers. Facebook, however, added 100 million users in nine months. Social media is only going to grow and get a stronger foothold in the way we communicate, and receive information and news (United Nations Cyberschoolbus, 2012).

Social media is an inexpensive form of marketing. Facebook is free, Twitter is free, and blogging is free, assuming you’ve got the time and the knowledge to use it. How to use it is the key! If you do not know how to effectively use this form of marketing, consider hiring a consultant to work with you. It is no different from hiring in-house or outsourced professionals to manage your marketing or your Web sites. It is extremely important to remember that social media marketing can be measured. There are a number of tools that are available that will measure the effectiveness of your social media marketing. A couple of free services that are available that track social media marketing are Google Analytics and SocialMention.com.

Key Elements for Using Social Media

The following are just a few key elements to remember when using social media. First, you must interact with people—don’t post and run. You must be vigilant in monitoring your site and responding in a very timely manner to comments and questions. Your site will not be very effective if you do not respond to inquiries and you will not know that there are inquiries unless you review your site often.

Second, go beyond just promoting your practice. Give your readers something interesting or relevant about your practice that they can comment on or talk about. Even better, give the readers content that they will want to share with others.

Third, the use of social media applications must clearly display expert content to truly be effective. The 2010 Trust Study (www.edelman.com/trust/2010/docs/2010_trust_barometer_executive_summary.pdf) found that marketing efforts “must honestly convince people of their genuine intentions, knowledge, and expertise in a specific

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area or industry through providing valuable and accurate information on an ongoing basis.”

**Facebook Made Easy**

A Facebook business page is easy to set up and maintain. All that is necessary is that you have a personal page on Facebook. Facebook has simple steps for creating the business page. You will want to customize at least a little bit. You’ll want a cover photo, profile photo, and some custom tabs. If you don’t feel comfortable with photo editing and design, maybe a friend, co-worker, or even a graphic designer can take over this task.

There are numerous resources to help fill an audiology Facebook page with valuable information. There are online services that will actually help do the work for you. Sites such as www.audiology.org, Audiology Online, Healthy Hearing, and hearing aid manufacturer sites can provide a wealth of information that you can simply repost by clicking on the share button. Most importantly, when you share a post, also add your comments. Open up discussions, ask people if they agree or disagree, ask what their opinions are and share your own opinion. Remember it’s about being social.

Having great content is useless without Facebook followers. You need people to read and share your information. Some easy steps you can take to grow your page followers include: adding a “Like” box to both your blog and Web site, include links to all of your media sites and on the sites themselves, include links on your business cards and in your email signature block. Another great idea is to place a sign in your waiting room that says “If you like us, Like us on Facebook” and include your link.

**Social Media Cautions**

Facebook content comes with a word of caution. The AMA has a policy statement on social media that seems equally applicable to audiologists (American Medical Association Policy, 2012). Be aware of patient privacy and refrain from posting identifiable patient information online. Maintain privacy settings as much as possible when posting online. Also, check often to ensure that personal and professional content posted by others is both accurate and appropriate. When interacting with patients online, maintain the same boundaries you would keep in a clinical setting. It’s best to separate personal from professional content online. Be aware that actions online can result in negative consequences that can affect your reputation with your patients and colleagues. Be smart and be careful.

**Conclusion**

A social media presence is an essential part of a healthy audiology practice. Reaching out to prospective patients, building a knowledge base with them, and providing an educational and professional forum is an effective social media marketing strategy that can go a long way in forging lasting customer relations (The Healthcare Marketing Group, 2012).

If you think about it, this is what we do already in our daily practice. We meet new people, we get to know them, we listen to their communication problems, and then we offer solutions.

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

**References**


