

Everyone talks about social media, but what can it really do?

By Risa Goldman Luksa



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It is true: Social media is generally *not* going to help bring new patients in the door. Most people do not use Facebook or Twitter to find a doctor. However, there is still a lot of value in utilizing social media marketing for a practice.

Patient retention

Because getting new patients into an office is often associated with high costs, retaining patients is vital for the long-term success of a practice. If patients have a good experience, there is no reason they should not stay with their dermatologist for the rest of their life!

To retain patients, the name of the physician and practice needs to stay active in their minds. The days of expensive mailers are mostly gone, and a golden rule is to not email the entire patient database more than once per month. So how else to keep in touch? Social media!

Patients are already logging into social media every single day, so why not have a post come up in their newsfeed?

Cross marketing

Cross marketing is important aspect in an overall marketing strategy. Even if a patient is just coming in for a soft-filler treatment, the practice's full menu of services – everything from sclerotherapy to body sculpting – should be displayed in waiting room signage. Use social media as another method to communicate the wide range of services offered at a practice.

SEO

Everyone knows the importance of search engine optimization. Google says that over the next few years, it will start to incorporate social media metrics in its SEO algorithm.

Online reputation

Although people tend to think of Yelp and Google when it comes to online

reputation, social media platforms such as Facebook and RealSelf also have their own rating system. Ideally, happy patients will share their experiences so doctors get a five-star rating across the board. The simplest way to improve ratings that may be less than perfect is to *ask* happy patients to write reviews about their experience.

RealSelf

RealSelf is a social media platform where patients can post questions and receive answers from physicians all around the country. They also can share stories, see before-and-after photos, find physicians and see average pricing.

Unlike other social media, RealSelf absolutely is a platform that can bring new patients to a practice. To be effective, answer one question per day, upload at least 20 before-and-after photos and have at least five patient reviews on the site.

The site offers an account upgrade for a monthly fee that features a backlink to a practice website. It also offers advertisements called "spotlights." If done correctly, the return-on-investment makes these upgrades worth it.

Ultimately, social media is a free marketing tool that should be utilized. The goal is to provide educational and useful information to followers to help stay an authority in the field as well as increase patient retention, cross-marketing and SEO. ■

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Tips and tricks

Use this list as a guide to begin a practice's social media strategy:

- Make sure social media channels are branded and have as much information as possible filled out.
- Post on average three times per week.
- Do not use a mass distribution platform such as Hootsuite. Instead, write Facebook posts for Facebook, Twitter posts for Twitter and so forth. The language and idiosyncrasies are different so take the extra minute to make each post unique.
- Posts should be 80 percent educational and 20 percent promotional so they are not perceived as spam.
- Specials and incentives can be used to help engage users.
- Typos and grammar do matter.
- Don't just write posts; interact with people!
- Answer patient questions on RealSelf.
- Encourage patients to connect on social media.