

HOW TO MASTER THE FINE ART OF SOCIAL SCHMOOZING TO GROW YOUR PRACTICE

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People schmooze to make connections and persuade others. In the past, schmoozing meant physically going to gatherings like conventions, striking up conversations with people you were trying to impress, and passing out as many business cards as possible.

While this is still an effective technique, schmoozing can also be done virtually by taking full advantage of social media's outreach capabilities... and you don't have to wear your best suit to make a great impression. In fact, being socially active is critical to your practice's growth.

Using both unpaid and paid methods of social media engagement will increase your online visibility, help you develop a relationship with potential patients, build loyalty, and increase leads for your practice.

UNPAID OPTIONS

Many people view organic (unpaid) posts as more trustworthy than paid

ads. The first step is to set up social media accounts for your practice on as many platforms as possible. Then stay active on each one.

Think outside the book. Social media is not limited to Facebook. Although Facebook is, by far, the most popular social network worldwide with 2.07 billion monthly active users,¹ it is not the only game in town. Expand your marketing strategies to multiple social platforms to engage a wider net of potential patients: Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn, etc.

Post to social media every day. People interact with social media an average of 135 minutes per day.²

To encourage them to spend some of that time interacting with your practice, your posts should stand out from the chaotic social landscape. The content you write should be even more valuable than the flashy graphics you post.

Think outside your practice. Not all of your posts should be self-serving. While some should

directly promote the services you offer or current specials you are running, create a nice balance of fun posts and expert-sourced educational articles about eyecare. This will give your practice more credibility as a trusted resource for information. More lighthearted posts can include staff photos, fun stories, and testimonials. Be creative.

Incorporate videos. Social posts do not have to be static. The use of professional or amateur videos and Facebook Live video feeds will increase engagement. In 2017 46% of marketers said they planned to add Facebook video to their content strategy in the next year.³

PAID OPTIONS

The obvious choice for paid options in social media is online advertising such as pay-per-click (PPC). By 2019, social ad spending will top \$31 billion, making up 29.4% of digital ad spending.⁴

Use the profiling data you have gathered about your unique patient base when you are

developing your social marketing strategies. This is invaluable information for targeting your messages to the right people. Again, using videos or live video feeds in paid ads will garner more attention from those prospects who are more visual.

Facebook, for example, has marketing options that can positively impact return on investment (ROI):

Retargeting. This is a back-end process that is used to push your Facebook ads to people who have visited your website. This is accomplished by setting a tracking pixel on your website. It is also possible to upload your prospect database to Facebook; the site will look for email and phone number matches for those registered with Facebook and deliver your ads to them on the platform—even if they haven't visited your website.

Geofencing. A 20,000-square-foot geographical area can be set up with a virtual Facebook fence so anyone within that area will receive your ads when using this platform.

Geotargeting. This allows you to select a mileage radius or choose zip codes around your practice—or any location—to target your ads to people living in a specific geographical area.

Caveat: In light of recent privacy issues surrounding Facebook's sharing of personal data, it is still too early to know if the settlement will have any real impact on their amount of active social users. Facebook is now required to give consumers "clear and prominent notice" and gain consent before sharing personal data. This may be enough to keep Facebook a powerhouse in the social media realm.

CONSIDER CHATBOTS

This could be the future of online communication. Chatbots can actually engage in conversations with people online. There are a variety of software programs that allow people to ask your practice a question virtually and the chatbot will respond. This technology can sift through a huge amount of data to provide relevant information for your visitors.

IMPORTANCE OF LANDING PAGES

Your call-to-action on social media should always link to a unique landing page that directly complements the messaging in your post. Rather than sending people to your full website, a landing page with targeted information and lead capture forms will be far more effective. You can then follow-up with targeted emails and other marketing strategies.

Lead information gathered from a landing page is essential in calculating the effectiveness of your messaging and your ROI. Closely following the results of your efforts will allow you to learn what types of messaging work best for your patient base. Keep in mind that this can continue to change over time.

IF YOU DON'T SCHMOOZE, YOU'LL LOSE

It is not difficult to stay active on social media, but it does take some dedicated effort every day. The question is not IF you should have a social media plan but HOW you will make it happen (appoint someone in-house or outsource the task). If your competition is succeeding where your practice is failing, you will feel the negative results in your lead count. **AE**

NOTES

¹Facebook Company Info. Stats.

Retrieved from <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

²Statista. Daily time spent on social networking by internet users worldwide from 2012 to 2017 (in minutes). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>

³HubSpot. The ultimate list of marketing statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics>

⁴eMarketer. (2017, Nov. 27). Is organic social media marketing still relevant? Retrieved from: <https://www.emarketer.com/content/is-organic-social-media-marketing-still-relevant>



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IN A BLINK

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