



# A Skeptic's Guide to Social Media

BY KIM LONGETEIG

The trending YouTube video, *Social Media Revolution 2012* by Socialnomics, states, "Social media isn't a fad, it's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate." Indeed, social media has transformed how we socialize, make purchasing decisions, learn about news and current events, choose who to vote for, and even how we market our businesses. The days when the popularity of MySpace drew in the mostly younger-generation to its frenzy of pop-culture have passed. Today, not only are people of all ages in every country using social media for personal and business use, one of the fastest growing demographics using social media is adults 55+. No matter the age or ethnicity, the use of social media comes with a bit of a learning curve. When you are used to traditional mediums and marketing methods, the new social media jargon can take some getting used to. Rest assured, if posting, pinning, liking, following, tweeting, blogging, checking-in, and analyzing click-throughs leaves you scratching your head, you're not alone. Social media trend cycles are very



short. Existing platforms are constantly updating and changing functionality, and new platforms are being introduced regularly.

As a whole, businesses from all types of industries have been early adopters of social media for business use—quickly recognizing how it can leverage business growth. The radiology industry, on the other hand, has been a bit slower to respond to the social media movement—primarily because many are struggling to understand how to balance the investment of time and resources versus the return on that investment. There are also a number of misconceptions and erroneous assumptions about social media and its use—making skeptics out of even the best of us. Some of these misconceptions include the belief that social media is only for young people who want to socialize and grandmothers to look at photos of grandkids—but not for business, that it doesn't fit within our unique business model, and that it's not possible to generate a positive return from the time spent on your social media activities.

While social media marketing may not appear to be a typical marketing method because of how and to whom we typically market, it absolutely does offer new ways to connect with more people—patients and referring physicians—and to drive traffic to your website where the greatest opportunity to attract and retain patients exists. Radiology marketing has been going through a transformation for some time. We've all made the jokes about the old days when pens, post-its, and donuts were the best way to bring about loyal referral sources. Now, we focus on new ways to build our brand and connect with patients who are armed with information about their options, and are just as much a part of healthcare decisions as their physician. We give our practices a face, tell our patients' stories, ask better questions, and actually listen to the answers!

If you're tempted to make the argument that you or your group just don't have the time or resources to engage in social media, stop right there. None of us do. But with a good, old-fashioned plan and the right people asking the right questions, you can find a way. Skeptics, are you listening? Social media has become important to the marketing landscape. It increases exposure and helps your facility stand out in a noisy marketplace. Plus, there are metrics that can be assigned to your social media efforts that will prove its effectiveness and will help drive the necessary buy-in from practice executives.

Often overlooked is the necessity of a social media strategy and a policy that aligns with the corporate culture of your group. While this may seem like a daunting task, there are a number of online resources that will help guide you through developing a social media policy. One of my favorites is the *Social Media Toolkit*<sup>1</sup> written by Vanderbilt University

Medical Center (VUMC). The fundamentals of your social media policy will, at minimum, answer who will be responsible for managing your social media pages, what platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) will be used, if staff will be given access to social networks during business hours and be encouraged to interact on the company pages, will "fans" of your pages be allowed to make original posts, and how you will manage a negative comment should one occur. Taking your policy one step further, you might consider best practices that members of your group will adhere to. Borrowing guidelines from VUMC, consideration should be given to:

- Using good judgment—status updates are immediate and readily available to your online audience. If you're unsure, it's best to discuss the subject with decision makers before posting content online.
- Two-way conversations—social media is not a place for just talking, selling, or pushing ideas, it's about listening and engaging with others by commenting and responding to conversations around you.
- Keeping it real—transparency is key to being social and personable. Be yourself, add value to discussions, and deliver relevant, accurate, and timely information.
- Adhere to the necessity of patient privacy and abide by the law—it's best to not even open Pandora's Box by sharing content that can potentially be used against you or to allow visitors of your page to post the same.

Your social media strategy will identify your objectives for social media, specifically your goals, frequency of online activity, types of content you will utilize, from where and how that content will be generated, whether you will engage in online advertising, and what metrics will be used to measure progress. Above all, your primary goal is to add social media to your existing marketing mix. Determine how your practice will achieve the greatest benefit from social media and then integrate it fully across all of your marketing and operations touch points. Social media does not stand alone and should not be isolated or pushed to the side in lieu of other responsibilities. Simply launching a Facebook page is also not permission to dabble. Social should be seen as a serious business strategy, and like all marketing initiatives will require time, resources, and the understanding that results are not immediate.

Time... fleeting, precious time. With so many demands in any given day, managing your social media activities will be just one of a dozen hats you wear. For the many who are unsure how to make the time they spend with social media pay off, it may seem easier to just ignore social media altogether and continue to market in the same ways you always



have. By now, I'm sure most of you know how Albert Einstein defined insanity: "Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." With this in mind, it's time to try something new.

When deciding how much time to dedicate to social media, it's important to note that the benefits of adding social to your marketing mix will not be immediately realized. According to Social Media Examiner, endurance is key. In one study, they determined that those with three or more years of experience in social media marketing are seeing the greatest results. Furthermore, 75 percent of marketers spending as little as six hours per week on social media saw increased traffic.<sup>2</sup> That's less than one hour per day. So plan to pace your efforts and fear not: social media doesn't have to be all-consuming.

One choice that is clear when it comes to engaging in social media is to not bite off more than you can chew. It's wise to limit the number of networks that you utilize until you feel that you've mastered the ability to manage your initial selection. Personally, I suggest getting involved with Facebook and linking your company page to Twitter, which can be done effortlessly, so that you can target two audiences simultaneously with Twitter being automatically populated by what you post on Facebook. Bear in mind that some of your audience will overlap and you don't want to bore them with duplicate status updates, so make it a point to post some unique content on each platform from time to time. LinkedIn is a powerful networking tool and can be easily maintained for starters. There are a number of ways to leverage LinkedIn once you become more proficient with social media marketing, but it takes more creativity and time than I would suggest out of the gate.

There are numerous third party online tools to help you manage, schedule, and measure your social media activities. Two of these tools, Tweetdeck and Hootsuite, are known as dashboards and can offer you a quick solution for updating multiple social media platforms simultaneously as well as to monitor channels of interest. Facebook recently integrated additional scheduling tools into their company pages allowing you to choose the day and time when your status update will be released and also to specifically target the audience who you most want to see your post. If you're feeling particularly content-savvy on a certain day of the week, schedule your week of posts in advance and let the tools do the work for you. TweetReach is a great tool for measuring the effectiveness of your tweets and retweets and Google Alerts will keep you apprised of searches and conversations that are happening online about you and your company.

To get the most out of your social media efforts, take advantage of promoting your online presence in every other aspect of your marketing and communications. Include

social media icons and links to your social media profiles from your email signature, your website, and from all of your printed materials. Provide backlinks to your website from your social status updates, and consider adding social media widgets to your website that show a real-time feed of your social activity as well as a snapshot of the fans of your company Facebook page. Like any marketing effort, social media will require the same level of cross-promotion to draw attention to your online presence. As social media becomes more refined as a business tool, users are becoming choosier about which pages they support through 'liking'—the equivalent of casting their vote in your favor. So too must you up the ante with the types of content you provide to effectively engage your audience.

If it all seems like just too much to manage, consider outsourcing your social media maintenance. There are companies readily available to help you create social content, manage your online advertising, refresh your graphics, and monitor online activity. If you go this route, be sure the person or company you choose is willing to learn about your practice so that they are developing content that is tailored to fit your overall marketing objectives.

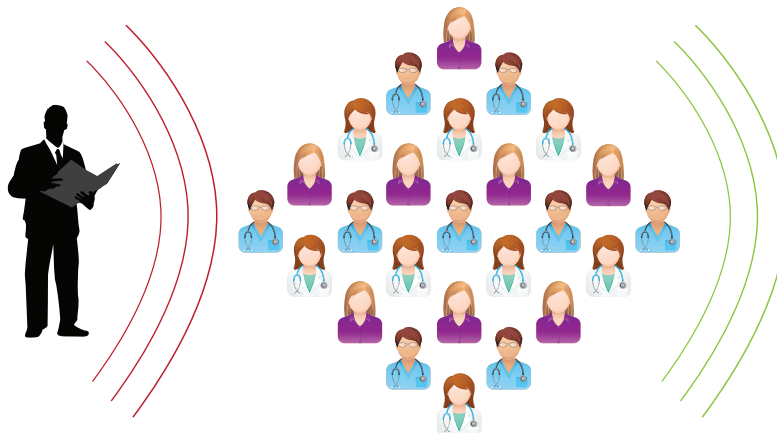
Getting to the nitty gritty of why many radiology groups haven't yet made the social media leap, we'll switch gears to how to realize a benefit from all your hard work; or, as Jerry Maguire said, "Show me the money!"

Since its inception as a business tool, social media has largely been regarded as a "free" tool. Technically, it still is in the sense that you don't have to pay to play, but it does require resources such as time, technology, and people to manage. Proving the return on these investments has often been debated as measurable vs. immeasurable. Just as with any advertising dollar you spend, however, you should have an idea what to expect from the time you invest in social media. Applying specific metrics to social media will, in fact, allow you to measure the return on your investment. It should be noted that social media metrics may not fall in line with traditional ROI metrics and some of the best things you can do for your practice with social media may not create a measurable impact. It is my personal opinion that while metrics are important, not every social media activity needs to have a firm number attached to it to make it beneficial for your practice.

The Social ROI™<sup>3</sup> graphic on the next page, which has been modified slightly from its original to best fit the radiology industry, illustrates some of the things social media can do for your practice to help give your investment more clarity. Specifically, social media increases the exposure of your practice, which will help you add definition to your brand ultimately creating differentiation in your marketplace. It also allows you to connect with your target audience on a



# SOCIAL MEDIA ROI



- Efficiency
- Reputation
- Differentiation
- Patient Retention
- Brand Association
- Opportunity Creation
- Perception Shifting
- PR and Exposure
- Patient Education
- Network Growth
- Builds Trust
- Innovation

Source: Social ROI™, Shane Gibson ©Mark Smicklas: Intersection Consulting/Blog

social/emotional level, which will build trust and help to create a positive reputation and patient retention. Social media will also increase operational efficiency by creating an opportunity to be proactive with customer service and cost effectiveness by adding more depth to your marketing and advertising campaigns through cross-promotion. Additionally, engaging in social media marketing will position your group as a resource by introducing information about technology and providing patient education, and as an innovative company that is aware and engaged.

Engagement is a key success metric in social media marketing. In fact, some refer to ROE, the Return On Engagement, as being more significant than ROI. Truly, many businesses struggle with identifying what to measure, how to measure, and how to interpret the data when they are able to gather results. Social Media Examiner indicates that only slightly more than 50 percent of all social media users are effectively measuring social marketing ROI. Among those businesses that are measuring social media activity, they are primarily focusing on total numbers of fans/followers, traffic to their website, and social engagement. Significantly lower on the list of tracked metrics are lead generation and sales.<sup>4</sup>

Once you identify the metrics that are important to your practice, apply those metrics to the social media goals you identified when you set up your online strategy. You will need to establish a baseline to track your progress and keep a timeline of your social media activities. The analytics interface embedded in Facebook, called Insights, will be especially helpful for this. Ensure that Google Analytics or the analytics program of your choice is installed on your website so that you can easily track social media referral traffic. With these measurement tools in place, you will be able to overlay your timeline onto your baseline and identify trends, pinpointing the social media activities that are generating the greatest return on your investment.

Putting it all into perspective, save yourself from sleepless nights by setting realistic expectations for the return on your social media investment. Building revenue from social media activities takes time, and not having a traditional set of metrics or a firm number to prove its worth is not reason enough to sit out. Focus on developing trust with your audience, join the conversation, be engaging, entertain, provide value, inform, and drive traffic to your website by integrating your social presence into all of your marketing touch-points. Most of all, be there consistently.

Eric Qualman, creator of Socialnomics, states, “We don’t have a choice on whether we DO social media, the question is how well we DO it.”

## REFERENCE

1. Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Social Media Toolkit: <http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/root/vumc.php?site=socialmediatoolkit>
2. Social Media Examiner: Small Businesses Benefit Most From Social Media, Study Reveals, April 18, 2011.
3. Social ROI™, Shane Gibson ©Mark Smicklas, Intersection Consulting/Blog
4. Social Media Examiner, 5 Social Media Marketing Trends: New Research, February 29, 2012



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