

# SOCIAL MEDIA FOR Healthcare Professionals



## New strategies for online practice success help you attract more qualified patients and referrers by being less intrusive and less costly to you.

After years of being exposed to over 5,000 advertising/marketing messages every single day of our lives, we have become far less receptive to traditional media and marketing messages. That's because traditional media such as newspaper ads, TV and radio commercials, direct mail and outbound telemarketing all intrude upon our lives. Today's consumer is looking for creative ways to stop the intrusions and lower the noise level.

We use caller ID to block telemarketers. We use spam filters to reduce or eliminate unsolicited email messages. We use TIVO to eliminate TV commercials. We subscribe to commercial-free radio and cable TV. We don't read as many newspapers and magazines. And our fingers are no longer doing the walking through the Yellow Pages in most markets. The recent financial crisis has accelerated these trends by forcing many health practices to seek more efficient, more valuable ways to reach out to their patients, colleagues and professional referrers.

The latest low-cost, long-term practice-building strategies – search engine optimization (SEO), social media networking and online content such as blogs – have helped many small businesses, including healthcare practices, to compete more effectively with large, established concerns. By allowing you to appear higher in organic search results, you can attract more interested prospects to your website... and your practice.

Social networks such as Facebook®, YouTube®, Twitter® and LinkedIn® are part of the hottest trend in online communications today. Social media, which is the umbrella term for these networks, blogs and other means of sharing information with an audience, has become much more than simply a platform for social interaction. It has evolved at light speed into a communication medium for business and professional interaction, as well.



## Social Media Has Created a Seismic Shift in Online Communication

Whereas traditional marketing communication is designed to help you find patients and referral sources, online communication is designed to help patients and referral sources find you. Instead of pushing your content to prospects, whether they want it or not, you attract interested prospects to your content. With the right content and a well-conceived social media strategy, your practice can become a magnet for interested, highly qualified patients and referral sources. Social media strategies, when combined with SEO and credible content, have three distinct advantages over traditional methods of communicating with your patients, referrers and prospects:

**Qualified Prospects** – TV, radio, print and direct mail are designed to reach large numbers of people, without addressing their individual needs and wants. Typically, only a small percentage of the target audience needs or wants your services, but you pay to reach them all. Social media, on the other hand, attracts only those prospects interested in your services or content. Prospects qualify themselves through the processes of search engines and social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn. Prospects also tend to be of higher quality.

**Lower Costs** – Content creation, SEO and social media incur little cost except human labor. Someone has to write your blog articles, optimize your website for search engines and provide content for your social media outreach efforts. Once your content is created, there is little cost to maintain it. Results cost less, too. One recent study claimed that it costs 60% less to obtain a qualified lead online than with traditional methods.

**Long-Term Benefits** – Once your content is created, promoted and optimized, the impact of the initial effort grows over time. Your return on investment – referrals – increases through the trust, credibility and relationships you build online, even though your actual dollar investment dramatically decreases.



# Social Media Helps You Shape Your Online Reputation

Today, with the meteoric rise of social media and consumer review sites such as Yelp, it is increasingly important for healthcare practitioners to build and manage their online reputations. That's because more and more patients are reviewing their own personal experiences with health practices online, and more patient prospects are reading those reviews before they make appointments.

Too many negative reviews can seriously impact your patient acquisition and retention efforts. Your goal is to build a positive reputation for yourself and your practice. **The big question is how. What steps should you follow?**

---

## Set Goals

Keep them simple in the beginning. What are the health issues and topics you care most about? How do you want to represent yourself and your practice online? What is your professional brand? Do you want to be an influencer in your community? Do you want to enhance your reputation with colleagues, speak at more conferences or contribute to more journals? Do you want more of certain types of patients or cases?

---

## Start a Blog

Think of a blog as a personal website. Unlike a website, a blog is easy to set up and maintain yourself. You can create original content or you can simply post information you find elsewhere that may be useful for your target audience. Your content may be patient-oriented or peer-oriented around your areas of expertise. Posterous and Tumblr are two blog sites that are extremely easy to set up and manage. As of 2010, 70% of Internet users were reading blogs and more than 120,000 of those blogs were healthcare-related. Done correctly, blogs can provide your practice with an opportunity to share your expertise and knowledge with a much larger audience. Other blogging tips:

- If you have a niche, focus on it. It will help differentiate your practice and attract your target audience.
- Post entries that provide perspective and insight about your practice. Intersperse these with current news or events related to healthcare and your specialty. Blog about general health information, patient health tips, new procedures or anything related to your practice and specialty.
- Post content that mixes professional and personal entries.
- The AMA's Social Media Policy recommends using privacy settings to safeguard personal information and content to the fullest extent possible. Remember that any harmful or inappropriate actions or messages online can negatively affect your reputation among patients and colleagues.
- Stay HIPAA-compliant by not posting any patient-identifiable information on your practice blog. Maintain appropriate boundaries for your patient-provider relationship. When interacting with patients online, be sure that patient privacy and confidentiality are always respected and enforced.

Although these tips are very important to remember when blogging, also note that these are also important rules to follow with all social media efforts.



---

## Befriend Facebook

With over 500 million members, Facebook is the 800-pound gorilla of social media sites. Though it is used primarily for personal interactions and connections, Facebook can also benefit professional users. Hospitals and physicians can use it to reach patients and create user groups based around health-oriented issues and topics. Facebook helps you engage with your patient base, promote your practice and build your presence on the Internet. Readers can navigate your page to learn more about your subspecialty and access basic contact information for your practice. Your “likes” can read your educational posts, view pictures or videos of your practice or visit your blog or website. Facebook is viral marketing at its best. When someone “likes” your page, all of their connections will see it, too. This can direct even more traffic to your practice. Facebook offers incredible flexibility and many ways to connect with your target audience.



---

## Get LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a great platform for keeping in touch with patients and colleagues, connecting with industry insiders and generating new leads and referrals for your practice. LinkedIn emphasizes knowledge and leadership, which allows you to separate yourself from your competition. LinkedIn lets you create a profile, engage with a targeted network of people and showcase your knowledge within your field. You can also start a group with a group page, or participate in LinkedIn Answers.

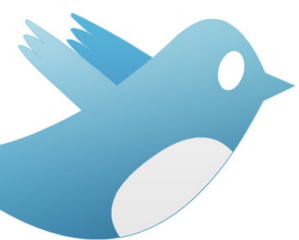
---

## Watch YouTube

Showcase your expertise, share your knowledge and market your practice to existing and future patients with video. YouTube lets viewers watch videos about your practice. Your YouTube channel can help extend your brand by letting you customize your colors, look and feel to complement the look and feel of your practice’s website or marketing materials. You can add links to your practice website and relevant information to your channel. Your videos can serve many purposes but should generally give viewers a look at your practice with a level of personalization that cannot be matched by plain text or other forms of messaging. Web videos let you demonstrate your expertise and establish you as a credible source to your viewers.

---

## Twitter Away



Twitter is unique from other forms of social media in that it’s designed for brief, to-the-point communication. Also known as “micro-blogging,” Twitter limits posts to 140 characters or less. This allows users to send and receive very quick, concise, messages to a limitless number of “followers.” Since Twitter pages also provide similar brief descriptions in your profile and allow only a snapshot of what you do, your updates become the reason for people to follow your stream. Twitter allows you to post announcements or special offers, highlight your specialty or share your professional knowledge and insights. It’s also perfect for sharing links to other content you may have created that doesn’t fit Twitter’s 140-character limit – blogs, podcasts or webinars.

**These four networks and your blog will give you a great start in social media networking and the greatest return for your time investment. To learn more about the many ways we can help you strategize and dramatically boost your exposure to patients and professional referral sources online, call Practice Builders at 800.679.1262.**

## OUR MISSION

*Help healthcare practices and businesses achieve maximum success  
by being devoted to their goals, informed about their specialties,  
fast and flexible in the face of change  
and completely focused on client service.*

**PRACTICEBUILDERS**  
*The nation's leader in healthcare-practice success since 1979.*

ONE TECHNOLOGY DRIVE, BUILDING 1, SUITE 829, IRVINE, CA 92618 | 800.679.1262 | WWW.PRACTICEBUILDERS.COM



*Click on any of the icons above to visit our social media networks!*