

Healthcare EXECUTIVE

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CASE STUDY



Health Care Social Media: Getting Executives on Board

When it comes to pitching social media to the ‘c-suite,’ it can be challenging to clearly quantify impact and return on investment, says this case study by Michael Pauley of the Health Association of New York State

Among health care marketing and communications professionals, there is gut-level recognition that social media are an important part of a marketing mix. Yet, when it comes to pitching social media to the “c-suite,” it can be challenging to clearly quantify impact and return on investment (ROI). If you are still in the early stages of implementing your social media strategy, tracking the number of “likes” and followers may get you by. However, soon the time will come when your chief executive officer (CEO) or chief financial officer (CFO) will

ask how all of your efforts are impacting the bottom line.

Before you even consider discussions with your c-suite, you should be able to answer the following questions:

How Will Social Media Support Your Business Objectives?

Feeling the pressure to “get on social media,” many health care marketing professionals have decided to open up accounts and “wing it.” While this experimental approach can yield the occasional victory, it is much easier to obtain executive support if

you can show that your efforts will align with your facility’s core business objectives. You have to establish your objectives; they have to be measurable objectives that support a strategy that support a business goal, says social media expert Shel Holtz. “By starting off with the identification of the business goal, you’re able to produce the metrics that show you’ve supported that goal.”

Howard Luks, an orthopedic surgeon in Westchester County, New York, has used social media to grow business and create more efficient visits with patients.

“About 15-17 per cent of patients are there because they have ‘seen me online,’” says Dr. Luks. “They see my videos and they get comfortable with me. We can just sit down and start talking. Patients can be awkward and quite fearful in initial meetings, and that causes them to forget what they were going to ask or not focus on the reason they are there. Social media allows you to humanize your organization.” “Why would you spend money on anything unless you knew what outcome you wanted to get out of it?” says John Luginbill, CEO of The Heavyweights marketing



firm. “Why would you put the effort into any piece of marketing unless you knew what you wanted to have happen?”

What Channels Are the Best Fit?

There are a dizzying number of social networks available, and even within “the big four” of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, there are demographic hot spots you will want to understand and monitor, to make sure you are using resources efficiently. Looking to reach seniors? Twitter may not be the right place. Want to ease patient fears about certain procedures?

YouTube videos might do the trick. “Rather than shoot for the moon, and say ‘let us use any social media that we want at Albany Medical Center,’” says Nicole Pitaniello, Assistant Vice

President for Communications, “we did an analysis of what social media would be most advantageous and the one that we could manage. For us, that was Facebook.” Health care social media have evolved to the point where mistakes can be avoided by looking at the successes and failures of others. Many

facilities, systems, and national organizations are using creative strategies with limited resources to strengthen their ties with their key communities and/or produce positive business outcomes.

Are You Able to Commit to Making It Succeed?

“Before presenting to our executive staff, we did probably six to eight months of research,” says Ms. Pitaniello. “We took an inward look at whether or not we were willing to do what needed to be done to make it a success for all of our constituents.” How much time you will need to plan, execute, and measure the effectiveness of your social media strategy depends on what

but it can take significant staff time to get started—and there’s a cost associated with that, even if it’s the cost of having staff not working on other projects.” Ms. Pitaniello says part of Albany Medical Center’s commitment was making sure that when a public relations staff person is on call, he or she is automatically e-mailed updates from Facebook when comments are posted—providing around-the-clock service through their Facebook page.

How Are Social Media Being Used by Others?

There are certain business challenges that every hospital is trying to meet: increasing patient

Social media has matured into a powerful communications tool that is not going away anytime soon

business goals you have chosen.

“This idea of social media being free is a myth,” says William Van Slyke, Vice President, Communications, Public Relations, and Marketing for the Healthcare Association of New York State (HANYS). “The tools may be free,

volume, improving outcomes, providing excellent customer service, and maintaining their reputation. So it is certainly worth understanding how an organization with ample resources is using social media, and considering how you might adapt its tactics

to meet your own goals. However, keep in mind that duplicating outright what another or larger facility or system is doing could backfire because its strategy is unique to its particular business goals.

OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

C-suite objections to social media are as varied as the communication tools themselves. Below are some frequent objections:

It is a Waste of Time

If your CEO still thinks social networking is for college kids to post photos of themselves binge drinking, you may have a problem. It has matured into a powerful communications medium that is not going away anytime soon—and neither are the health care consumers who use it. “Folks can argue that MySpace came and went, and the same will happen with Facebook and Twitter, and there might even be some truth to that,” says Chris Bevollo, President of the health care marketing firm Interval. “The tools may come and go, but the idea of social networking is not going away—and people will start to become noticeable by their absence.” A recent report by the research organization YouGov suggests it is already happening.

Social Media in General

- Half of American adults use social media sites.
- The increase in the use of social networking has been most pronounced among those who are over the age of 35.
- For those 65 and older, usage has gone up 154 per cent since 2010.
- 52 per cent of Facebook users and 33 per cent of Twitter users engage with the platform daily.

Facebook

- Facebook is the most popular site on the Internet, with more than 800 million users.
- If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most popu-

- lous, behind China and India.
- The average user is 38 years old

Twitter

- Averages 460,000 new accounts every day
- More than 100 million users send more than 140 million tweets per day.
- The average user is 39 years old.

YouTube

- More video is posted on YouTube in one month than ABC, NBC, and CBS have produced in the past 60 years.

LinkedIn

- Growing by two new accounts every second.
- There are 900,000 interest groups on LinkedIn.
- The average user is 44 years old.

So half the country is using social networking to show photos of their kids' dance recital. Big deal, right? Not so fast. Empowered health care consumers are using these networks to educate themselves, make decisions about where they will receive care, and comment on the care they receive. Social media is increasingly where your customers are.

- 83 per cent of Americans have used the Internet to look for health /medical information.
- One in five uses social media to make health care decisions.
- 67 per cent of all prospective elective patients search the Internet before making a provider decision.
- Computer-based patient inquiries have a much higher probability of having a reliable payer than telephone-based inquiries.
- 90 per cent of consumers trust peer recommendations; only 14 per cent trust advertisements.

The combination of these data points dispels the myth that social media are just toys. If 20 per cent of Americans are using the largest and most popular networks in the country to inform their health care decisions, why wouldn't you maintain a presence there?

Signposts to using social media

- At the very least, social media should be used to support goals related to customer service and reputation with your key stakeholders. At best, it should be used to drive patient volume, increase revenue, or produce savings.
- Select the network where your audience is, and that will best support your goals. Start by visiting the more popular social networks and see what people are saying about your industry, your facility, and your employees. Search on each platform for keywords associated with your business to find interest groups and content related to your business goals.
- Presenting a manageable program using existing resources will make your pitch more palatable.
- Examples from organizations your c-suite holds in high regard, or even from your competition, may wind up being some of the most effective tools in making your case.
- If you can do nothing else, you should at the very least have a system for monitoring online comments about your facility, and a policy in place for how to respond.
- 47 per cent of journalists responding to a survey said they used Twitter to source new story angles.
- Almost 90 per cent Physicians who said they use at least one social media site for personal use. More than 65 per cent use them for professional purposes.

Negative Comments

It can be a difficult pill to swallow, but the bottom line is, negative comments about your facility are going to happen. In fact, they already are. "Your organization was opened up to negativity when it opened its doors," says Mr. Bevolo. "These things are out there, on Twitter, on Facebook, on the comments sections of news

sites, whether you're there or not. So the question becomes, do you want to try to engage in the conversation and try to help manage that in an appropriate way, or are you going to be completely absent from those conversations? There's a right way to do it, and certainly the wrong way to do it is to not do it at all."

Telling patient stories can be

a great way to show how your facility provided exceptional care. However, if you're just changing names and a few identifying details, Mr. Harlow says it may not be enough, and suggests that you obtain patients' consent, in writing, to use their stories. "There are 18 elements that have to be stripped out of a story to have it considered de-identified under HIPAA. Number 18 is the tricky one—'anything else that can be used to re-identify the de-identified information.'" Meaning that you can remove most of the details, but if those details can be found in seemingly unrelated reports or datasets, you can still be found in violation. "As more information is put online, it becomes harder and harder to say that this is something that couldn't be re-identified by someone else."

Get Consent

The bottom line is, if you want to discuss patients in any way, get consent. HIPAA doesn't prohibit the use of social media, but there are some rules of the road that you need to live by," Mr. Harlow says. "And the principal rule is that you cannot disclose protected health information without the consent of the patient. In these times of the empowered patient, it's not unheard



of to have someone share very publicly what we might usually think of as private information. There are plenty of patients who are willing to share their stories online—which is their business. If you want to share their stories, it's just like any other marketing, you get consent."

Mr. Luginbill concurs. "We've been using patients and doctors in ads since the late 1970's when we started advertising. There were over 700 hospitals as of the end of 2010 that had ongoing social media programs of some kind, and not one of those marketing departments have been cited for a HIPAA violation. The same way you never get cited for a violation when you use a patient on a billboard. Nobody in a marketing department posts anything about a patient without the patient's knowledge."

SHOWING RESULTS

A question being asked with increasing urgency: What is the ROI of social media? As health care reform takes hold and hospitals look for ways to trim the fat, marketers soon will be asked to justify what their efforts have done for the hospital. Whether your desired outcomes are financial (hard conversions) or less cut and dried (soft conversions), setting goals is only half the equation. "If you're a hospital communicator, it's time to start measuring what you're doing," says Ms. Levco. "If you don't, your successor will."

Hard Conversions

Unfortunately, many struggle with the idea of making the transition from measuring followers to measuring dollars. "It seems like people get really nervous about ROI as it relates to money," Ms. Levco says. "But a hospital is a business, and you have to figure out ways to bring in patients—and one of the ways to do it is by using social media as a soft sell approach." Even for those who have been running a social media program for several years, tying tweets and status



updates to the bottom line is perceived as difficult because of organizational silos, not having the right systems in place, or numerous other reasons. Mr. Luginbill, who specializes in using social media to drive patient volume, says social media should be treated like any other form of marketing, and success starts by identifying service lines with excess capacity and developing a strategy to fill them.

A question being asked with

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increasing urgency: What is the ROI of social media?

"You have to decide 'where are we going to play and how are we going to win?' That forces people to say 'who do we want to talk to and how do we define winning?' Say, for example, a facility has capacity to do 50 knee replacements a week, but they are only doing 15 a week. Now they know how they want to win—they want to go from 15 knee replacements a week to 50. So where are they going to play? What geographic area? What demograph-

ic? What type of payer? Who can we target to talk about the value that we have here that would get people into a seminar to explore getting their joint replacement? So it's very clear what they want to do." Easier said than done, right? What if you are a small shop with limited time/staff/support? The path to ROI nirvana is the same, says Mr. Luginbill, and bridging the gap between the traditionally siloed divisions of marketing and finance is the first

looking for information or to schedule an appointment? Do you have folks at the front desk that are there to help provide information or direct people? These are things that are no-brainers, and I have yet to meet a CEO who would say 'no, we shouldn't have someone answering the phones.' Those aren't specifically high ROI activities, but they're part of doing business." Among the initiatives where you might consider leveraging social media:

Reputation Monitoring

Listening is at the heart of patient satisfaction. If you can do nothing else, you should at the very least have a system for monitoring online comments about your facility, and a policy in place for how to respond. "If you really feel like you need buy in, get a monitoring program and start telling the c-suite what people are already saying about them," says Mr. Luginbill. "There's no executive, there's no hospital—there's no one—that isn't touched by social media."

Customer Service (negative)

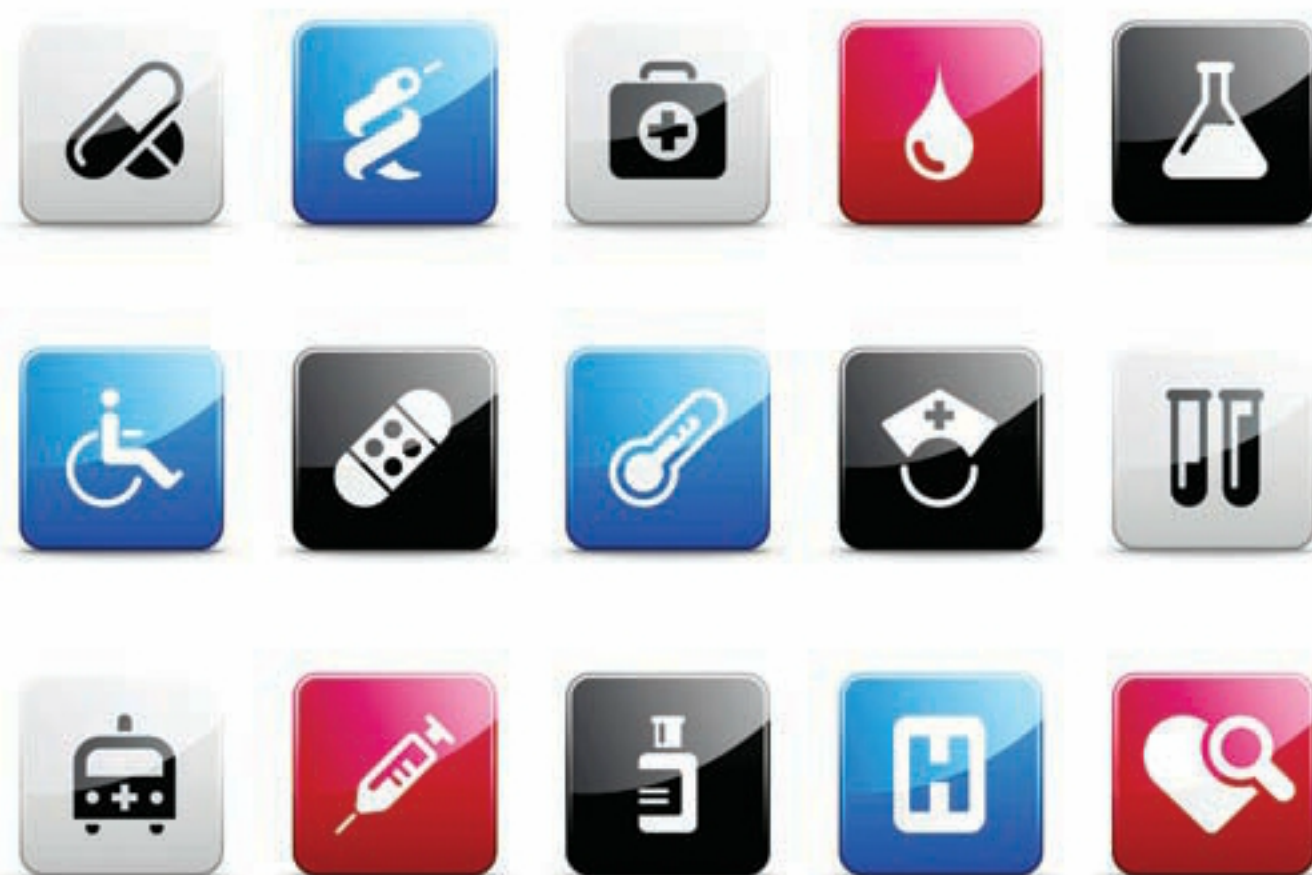
If you can get past the sting of negative comments, you may find them quite useful (assuming they are run of the mill complaints and not the rants of an angry

“troll”). They offer customers the opportunity to tell you where you can provide better service, and they offer you the opportunity to make improvements, clarify misconceptions, and convert complainers into brand loyalists. “We were able to overcome fear of negative comments by joining the conversation and being proactive,” says Ms. Pitaniello. “People are going to have those conversations anyway. It’s an opportunity to let people talk about the care they received and give us the opportunity to address it. It only helps build credibility for your institution.”

If someone complains, do you leave it out there for the world to see, or do you delete it? Leaving the complaint, with your response included in the thread, shows that you are listening and take such complaints seriously. “Let it be,” advises Mr. Harlow. “Unless there is something clearly over the line in terms of identifying someone else or if it violates the terms and conditions you have set out.”

Customer Service (positive)

Lifespan, a large hospital system in Rhode Island, uses Twitter searches to find mentions of their “@names” by people visiting their hospitals. While steering clear of discussing clinical issues or personal health information, they leverage social media to provide another touch point for care and further their mission of improving the



health of their community. “I’ve seen mentions by people visiting someone in the hospital, and I simply send ‘best wishes’ to them, only to get a very personal response, with an update on their condition,” says Lifespan’s Senior Media Relations Officer, Nancy Cawley Jean. “Often that is followed by a thanks for the wonderful care we’ve provided. It’s even led to continuing conver-

sations with former patients! element of this process with 30 per cent saying they used blogs they were familiar with, while 42 per cent also drew from blogs they had not visited before.

Just like in the real world, it is about relationships.

Identify the key journalists in your geographic, demographic, or topical area and interact with them on a regular basis. Follow them on Twitter, comment on

Blogs were also highlighted as a key element of developing story angles with 30 per cent saying they used blogs they were familiar with

sations with former patients!

Crisis Communications/ Public Health Alerts

During Hurricane Irene, the Red Cross mobilized volunteers to respond to the individuals and online communities that were reaching out for information. Aside from providing preparedness tips and shelter locations, they searched out communities that had set up Facebook pages to make sure the information being presented was accurate.

Media Relations

A study on journalists’ usage of social media published in early 2011 by the Oriella PR Network showed that nearly half of respondents (47 per cent) said they used Twitter to source new story angles. Over a third said they used Facebook (35 per cent). Blogs were also highlighted as a key

their stories or “mention” them and, as time goes by, provide them information about your facility that is as easy as possible for them to repurpose. Consistently provide useful, accurate information to foster a relationship that benefits you both.

Recruiting

Social media offer a three-pronged opportunity to attract highly qualified talent. First, its social nature enables you to amplify your message. Second, having a robust presence allows you to add greater context to available opportunities by illustrating requirements in more detail than the space allotted by traditional channels. Third, it allows you to set expectations up front, potentially decreasing first year turnover rates. Nearly 90 per cent of physicians use at least one social media site for personal

use, and more than 65per cent for professional purposes.

Education

With more than 80 per cent of Americans using the Internet to guide their health care decisions, patients are more involved in their care than ever before. Social media give you multiple platforms, as a trusted authority, to educate your community about symptoms and potential treatments; your facility, service lines, staff, and commitment to quality—as well as clear up any misinformation they might have gotten from less accurate sources. Shore Medical Center, for example, has a series of “Inside the OR” videos which feature a thorough, graphic explanation of a variety of procedures, as well as follow-up interviews with both the physician and patient. Dr. Philip L. Glick, Vice Chairman and Professor in the University at Buffalo’s Department of Surgery and Professor of Pediatrics and Obstetrics and Gynecology, encourages his surgeons to use social media as a means to educate future surgeons.

CONCLUSION

With the explosion of information available on the Internet, health care is no longer a “black box” to patients and their families. Customers expect to be heard—and what’s more, they expect you to respond using the same channels they are using. A hospital without an engaging social media presence soon may be viewed with the same suspicion as a business that has no Web site. Perhaps the best illustration of the power of social media is letting the tools do the talking. “I used my own personal Facebook account to show how quickly we could reach our alumni base, our donor base, and our patient base. Our executive was fascinated by it,” says Ms. Pitaniello. **HE**

Michael Pauley, Senior Director, Online Strategy and E-Communications, Healthcare Association of New York State

