Free Social Media Tools Can Mean Powerful Results for Your Practice

By C. Noel Henley, MD | March 23, 2012

When most physicians I talk to hear the term "social media," they envision pimply-faced teenagers discussing offensive YouTube videos on Facebook or sending out five Tweets per minute describing the taste of their latest burp.

This doesn’t exactly engender confidence in using social media for their practice, much less even start the learning process required to get up to speed.

Like it or not, your patients are using social media, and have been doing so for several years now (forever in Internet time). It’s as much a part of being online as websites or e-mail.

Following the money — an online social shift

The largest Internet companies are spending billions on social media; Google’s focus is shifting to Google+, its social media platform.

You can hardly visit any website without seeing icons and buttons allowing you to share the article on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn.

Once you have an online presence for your practice, social media should be the next territory you conquer.

A warning

If you set out to figure out social media for yourself, you’ll be quickly overwhelmed.

A Google search for "how to use social media" shows 210 million results — 35 million of those are videos alone.

If you investigate social media on your own, be sure to search for "social media for business"; this will greatly simplify your search and eliminate confusion.
One of the best places to start is with Joel Comm’s book, *Twitter Power* - you can get it on Amazon or just about anywhere.

**The basics**

There are some basics you have to learn, but they mostly involve how to sign up for the different social media services. It’s no more complex than signing up for a new e-mail account.

You’ll need to be familiar with the basic techniques of composing Tweets and setting up a Facebook Fan Page for Business.

**The lazy physician’s social media system**

I’ve used a version of this system for two years or so to stay involved in social media.

It takes me less time each month I do it.

*Step 1*

Sign up for three services:
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube

*Step 2*

Once you’ve created your profiles, create a Facebook Fan Page for Business, and link your Twitter account to your Facebook Fan Page using a program called RSS Graffiti. This will let you post any Tweet automatically and directly to your Facebook Page.

Any YouTube videos you flag as “favorites” can be posted to your Facebook Fan Page by using Twitter as well.

*Step 3*

Sign up for a free Tweet scheduling program like TweetDeck or Gremln.

*Step 4*

Pick out four online articles you think your readers will care about. These can be articles or blog posts you find online or ones you’ve written on your website.

Using the Tweet scheduling program, set up each tweet to go out on a specific day of the week at a regular time, like every Wednesday at 8 a.m.

Type up a short introduction to the article like, "New pixie dust treatment eliminates the need for elbow surgery http://www.yourlinkhere.com.”

Set the scheduled delivery time, then move on to the next article/Tweet.
This process should take about an hour each month if you have a group of five or six websites in your area of expertise you check regularly.

You can also find interesting videos on YouTube and share them on Twitter using buttons on the YouTube site, or just include the website links to the videos in your scheduled tweets.

**The biggest secret for finding great articles to share**

Twitter is enormous — current data shows 250 million tweets are sent per day right now. Thousands of those tweets (at least) are sent by physicians and their representatives.

Start searching Twitter for physicians in your specialty. One place to start is wefollow.com — just type in your specialty or area of interest and start following people on Twitter.

Their Tweets will show up on your Twitter account when you log in, and you can bookmark websites they link to or cut and paste the text of the Tweet to save for later.

You can re-Tweet the original person’s message or make up your own Twitter update to go along with the article.

**The end result**

As you find interesting articles and send out regular Tweets linking to those articles, this populates your Facebook Fan Page with new content.

This keeps the page looking fresh and updated.

I spend about one hour per month doing this; you can easily train a staff person to do all this for you or your whole practice.

Let me know if you have more questions about the details of this strategy.

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