Am I doing social media right? This is a question I hear a lot these days. The reality of social media in any industry is that it continues to evolve. New strategies are being implemented on platforms such as Facebook everyday. Unfortunately, there are some practices who’ve got social media all wrong. In fact, I’m often tempted to stop calling social media marketing “marketing” at all.

Why stop calling these platforms “marketing” tools? Consider the fact that social media like Facebook and Twitter have become fundamental forms of communication for millions of people. Unfortunately some practices still see platforms like Twitter and Facebook as marketing tools (where they’ll run short term campaigns), rather than considering the long term value these communication mediums can deliver. Social media platforms are now primary places people choose to spend their time not on television, not on email, and increasingly not on Google.

The problem with the mindset of social media being a short term marketing campaign is that people then see the use of Facebook or Twitter as expendable, of little value, while at the same time expecting fast results from their campaign efforts. In some cases practices will do just about anything to get those fast results.

Examples of trying too hard or too fast on Facebook are:

• Resorting to posting things that don’t reflect your brand or core values. Example: a high end aesthetic practice posting silly photos which the doctor is unaware of.

• Posting too often with the belief that more posts will mean greater returns. Example: a practice posting every day, or multiple times per day, when a few times per week would suffice.

• Sacrificing quality for quantity. Example: a practice buying likes which are fake likes bought with the sole purpose of inflating their numbers.

So who’s succeeding in social media today? It is the practices, people, and businesses who expect that social communities will be around for the long term. For example, Harvard Business Review (HBR) recently published an article titled Marketing is Dead. In the article, one of the few suggested ways to survive in our new world of marketing is to use social media properly. The HBR author, Bill Lee said, “when you contemplate a major purchase, such as a new roof, a flat screen TV, or a good surgeon, you’re not likely to go looking for a salesperson to talk to, or to read through a bunch of corporate website content. Instead, you’ll probably ask neighbours or friends — your peer network — what or whom they’re using.” Mr Lee goes on to say how smart businesses should already be positioning their social communities to replicate these buying experiences.

A specific example of what this looks like is having a Facebook page which reflects your values and displays robust positive patient comments or testimonials. This also means that you must put
more thought into your social media communication tools altogether. If you are paying a service to “handle everything for you” and you don’t even understand what any of this means, stop doing that. Take some time to become informed. As a business owner, you would never consider buying a new piece of equipment or investing hundreds or thousands of dollars on something you knew nothing about, so why do that with your social media budget?

In order to succeed in social media, the first thing you must adopt is a mindset that social media communication will be around for the long term—not short term marketing campaigns.

Here are a few guidelines you can follow to help make the most of your social media communities:

- Am I aware how my brand and our practice values are being represented on our Facebook or Twitter accounts?
- Do I understand, and can I appreciate, the difference between short term marketing campaigns vs. fostering relationships to grow quality social communities?
- Is my practice being mindful about the amount of posting that we do? Are we honouring the newsfeed space of valued patients who’ve liked our page, or are we throwing caution to the wind and posting as much as possible in order to force our name and face in front of people.
- Have we used a service to buy likes so our number of fans looks inflated? Or have we acknowledged it’s okay to grow slowly, with the intention of engaging patients or people in the community who genuinely have interest in our practice?

The good news is that social media communities can morph into different personalities. If you don’t like the community you’ve built to date, you can change your strategy and make over your page. Remove the contest you were never comfortable with, adjust the amount of posts you are making, or consist-ently invite patients to share their thoughts on your page. Practices can be largely disappointed with the results of their social media efforts when they don’t understand the purpose, goals, or objectives in the first place. Begin with the end in mind. More and more so, the end is farther away than you think.

Adopt a mindset that your social communities will be around for the long term. When done right, social media can help you shine in what’s often called a grim marketing landscape. In addition it can enhance your online reputation, and represent the high quality of patient experiences in your practice. The ultimate key to success in social media is to find a happy medium in sharing your personality, the human side of your practice, to make meaningful connections with other people, while never losing sight of your core values.

About the author

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