4 social media strategies to engage consumers
cover story

4 Social Media Strategies to Engage Consumers

In order to truly engage consumers through social media, healthcare organizations need to do more than simply push out information. By connecting social media posts to initiatives and events, using humor, and creating contests, healthcare organizations can make meaningful connections to members of its community.

MARKETING SPOTLIGHT

The True Value of Patient VIP Programs

At Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills, MI, the acronym “VIP” has taken on a whole new meaning: Very Important Patient. The 330-bed hospital runs a rewards card program, offering perks to build patient loyalty.

IN FOCUS STRATEGY

Creating Accountability for Patient Experience

Patient experience encompasses just about everything except, possibly, the clinical care itself. Philip Betbeze shares how two organizations are incorporating accountability and responsibility for a patient’s experience throughout the institution.

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3 MARKETING WEEKLY

Social spending websites such as Groupon and LivingSocial can work in healthcare and help hospitals attract new lifelong patients—as long as they are used cautiously.

19 ASK THE ADVISORS

Our experts discuss what steps marketers can take to improve their healthcare organization’s reputation in the community.
Social spending websites such as Groupon™ and LivingSocial are now a mainstay across the country, connecting businesses with deal-savvy consumers. For companies offering traditional goods and services, sites like Groupon can be an easy way to attract customers who may have never otherwise visited the establishment.

Social spending sites can also work for hospital marketers—if they are used cautiously and strategically. About 9% of all social spending site offerings in November 2011 were for dental work or medical treatment, up 4.5% in the beginning of 2011, according to MSNBC.

But offering a discount to attract new patients is beneficial only if the patient comes back to your hospital again and again. If an uninsured patient “deal surfs,” going from one discount-offering provider to another, it isn’t good for your hospital—or the patient’s continuity of care. Deal-surfing situations can be minimized by targeting a specific patient demographic. For example, offering a deal on a high-end elective procedure like Lasik eye surgery may prove to be more effective than offering a discount on flu shots.

If you determine that a daily deal to promote a procedure is a good strategic decision, it’s important to investigate the legality of offering medical services through a social spending site in your state. The Mayo Clinic social media blog lists these possible legal minefields:

- Groupon collects 50% of the price as its fee; is that illegal fee-splitting under applicable state law?
- Is the 50% fee an illegal kickback in exchange for a referral? Are you subject to federal laws in this area in addition to any state laws?
- Do provider agreements with third-party payers prohibit the offering of discounts to plan subscribers?

If you decide it’s best to steer clear of social spending sites, you can still use them to your advantage. Consider a daily deal to the hospital café or gift shop as a way to reach out to a different demographic of consumers.
In order to build relationships and truly connect with members of your community through social media sites, such as Facebook®, Twitter™, and YouTube, hospitals are learning that it takes more than simply pushing out a weekly bit of health advice.

Social media can be a great tool for patient education and brand messaging. But to really build loyalty—and possibly even grow market share—hospitals need to engage consumers in two-way conversations. Photographs, contests, and links to interesting stories can be a great way to get those conversations started.

St. Peter’s Hospital in Helena, MT, is a relative newcomer to social media, having just launched its Facebook page in April 2011. “At first, we were using the page mainly to promote community events. We added monthly health tips and usual hospital news, but struggled to obtain friends,” says Peggy Stebbins, director of public relations and marketing. After roughly nine months, the 123-bed hospital had only about 80 friends—many of whom were employees.

“The only increase in activity we saw was when we posted photos of a special women’s event we held featuring Patty Duke,” says Stebbins.

So St. Peter’s decided to join the growing number of hospitals conducting cute baby contests online. The nonprofit hospital launched its own contest with media coverage of the first baby of the new year. And just like that, St. Peter’s number of Facebook friends increased to 1,153—it gained more than 1,000...
friends from the contest.

“Because of the success of the baby contest, we decided to continue with contests to increase activity,” says Stebbins. “Our hospital holds numerous successful community events, and Go Red for Women was the next event scheduled. With our sponsorship partner, we devised the best red outfit photo contest.”

St. Peter’s wanted not only to attract more friends but also to give more women a reason to attend the event, says Stebbins. While the red outfit contest only generated about 10 new friends, St. Peter’s did receive 18 photo submissions, and 96 people voted for their favorite red outfit. The number of attendees remained in line with the “Go Red for Women” event held in the previous year.

Michelle Kustra, marketing coordinator at Sherman Health, a 255-bed hospital in Elgin, IL, admits that, like St. Peter’s, her organization started out simply posting information on social media sites as well. However, for the past few years, Sherman Health’s social media goal has been to start discussions with the community. Kustra says that the Illinois hospital uses all the tools at its disposal—including Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, and e-blasts. “We are no longer talking to the community, but talking with them and connecting to them and helping [the community] to connect with us on a personal level,” Kustra says. Sherman Health has focused on photo submissions to help promote this interaction. It is also looking into sharing patient stories.

Healthcare organizations whose strategy is to simply post healthcare

FACeBOOK CONTEST HELPS PROMoTE CARDIOLOGY SERVICES
St. Peter’s Hospital’s “Wear Red” photo contest not only helped promote its community event “Go Red for Women,” it also tied into the organization’s overall strategy: promoting its cardiologists, cardiology clinic, and services.
information are missing out on the true essence of what social media is all about—having “two-way communication and getting people to connect with you interactively,” says Kustra.

INCORPORATE HUMOR

Many healthcare issues are life-or-death topics that have a very serious tone or message. When it comes to social media, however, organizations should splice in some fun health-related topics that focus on the lighter side of healthcare. Otherwise, people may stop reading your posts.

When Sherman Health started using humor, its numbers began to climb, says Kustra. “We are up to 5,000 Twitter followers and a couple of thousand Facebook fans.”

It’s important to have your social media presence mimic the ups and downs of your patients’ lives—meaning you should cover both serious events and fun events, says Charles Falls, president and owner of DC Interactive Group, the agency Sherman Health has partnered with for social media. “We don’t want to cross lines, so we try to keep fun events that everyone would find fun and interesting. We are not looking for controversy,” he says.

One of Sherman Health’s successful forays in using humor to disseminate health information was its Movememt mustache contest that took place in November 2011. “It was men’s health month, so we were trying to think of creative ways to engage the community and remind them that there are a lot of men’s health issues out there, and the big one is prostate cancer,” says Kustra. Sherman Health’s marketing team meets with DC Interactive Group on a monthly basis to develop a social media plan for the next one to two months. During its brainstorming session, the idea of tying a men’s health campaign to Movember, a global initiative to raise awareness and funds for men’s health issues, was formed.

In addition to asking people to send in mustache photos, the hospital had blog posts on famous mustaches over the years, ranging from celebrities all the way to Ned Flanders from the television series The Simpsons. “We had to talk about what we were doing, but also had to talk about the things that were interesting to people to draw them in and connect them back to the contest,” explains Falls. The blog posts also included information on the importance of having prostate screenings and eating healthy.
The mustache contest far exceeded Sherman Health’s goals of 15 photo submissions and 1,500 unique page views. The hospital received more than 40 submissions and had more than 2,500 unique views for its Movember-related posts. In addition, the mustache contest also engaged employees at Sherman Health, many of whom were telling their family and friends about it, says Kustra. “It was a really fun experience all around.”

INTEGRATE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

For any contest or marketing campaign using social media, organizations should include as many channels as possible, says Falls. For Movember, Sherman Health used Facebook applications to run the contest, but its blog helped connect all of the social media channels. For example, its Twitter posts would drive people back to the blog where they could connect to Facebook and look at photos, he explains.

The blog allowed people to read about the contest without having to get onto Facebook and like the page. “While we like having ‘likes,’ we are trying to build up our e-lists by having people sign up for e-mail communication so we can directly communicate with people,” Falls says.

KEEP THE BUDGET LOW

Sherman Health had a $500 budget for its Movember contest, and it plans to stick to that same budget for future contests, says Kustra. “Since we already have a lot of [blog] pages built and e-blasts in place, we spent that money mostly on prizes.” For Movember, the grand prize was Blackhawks hockey tickets that were donated, the second-place prize was a Kindle Fire, and the third-place prize was a Norelco™ razor system.

Stebbins agrees these types of contests don’t need large marketing budgets. The most St. Peter’s has paid for a social media campaign

HUMOR CAN DRAW PEOPLE IN

Sherman Health used humor and interesting blog posts, such as a look at the most famous mustaches over the years, to draw people in and connect them to the contest.

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is $350 for a Facebook ad for its women’s health event featuring Patty Duke. The prize for St. Peter’s baby photo contest was an overnight hotel stay, lunch, and dinner, a total value of about $200.

Based on her experience with that contest, Stebbins cautions hospitals about offering too big a prize. “People were amazingly competitive,” she says. “One of the mothers had a relative who specialized in social media and sent the contest to one million friends. Obviously, this baby won with over 3,000 votes, the next nearest being about 200 votes.”

Unfortunately, this activity resulted in people writing negative comments accusing the contest of being rigged—and some people wrote mean comments about the other babies, Stebbins explains. “We never anticipated this activity, and our webmaster spent nearly two days monitoring and deleting the nasty comments. We met our goal of increasing friends, but I’m not sure we’ll keep them.”

Still, Stebbins would do another baby photo contest, but with a more modest prize, she says, adding that she would probably use third-party software to administer the contest and offer a prize tailored to a more mature audience, such as a dinner with wine (which would require entrants to be at least 21 years old).

TIE SOCIAL MEDIA TO SERVICE LINES

Ideally you want to connect social media campaigns to something that you are trying to promote, says Falls. “That ties [the campaign] into the business purpose for doing it and makes it easier for the C-suite to understand that there is a goal here, that you can identify it and see if you are meeting it.”

Kustra says that based on the success of Movember, the hospital is

**SIMPLE HEART IMAGE TIES CARDIOLOGY SERVICE LINE PROMOTIONS TOGETHER**

Sherman Health’s cardiology promotions for February are easy to find on its Web page—just look for the red heart, which was used to promote its “What Do You Heart?” Facebook contest and healthy heart CT scan.
trying to come up with an event each month that relates to a healthcare topic. For example, for February, it is doing a “What Do You Heart?” contest—where people can submit a photo of what they love, such as spending time with family, reading a book, or a favorite activity. At presstime, it had a good mix of community members and employees submitting photos, Kustra says, adding that within five minutes of posting the contest, it had three submissions.

Stebbins says the “Go Red for Women” event and Facebook contest were part of St. Peter’s overall strategy to promote its cardiologists, cardiology clinic, and services. “We also created a Helena HeartBeat publication with health and wellness education featuring our providers and a personal health tracker,” she says.

St. Peter’s will probably do about six contests during the year, all of which will align with its community events, Stebbins says. “Most of our future endeavors will be targeted at women ages 25 plus, those who make the healthcare decisions for their families,” she adds.

Falls advises healthcare organizations that are new to social media or looking to improve their consumer engagement to pay attention to what other people are doing. “Don’t be afraid of putting together a contest and not having it be all you’d hope it would be,” he says. “The important thing is to be out there.”

FUN OR INTERESTING BLOG POSTS CAN HELP ENGAGE CONSUMERS
Sherman Health uses its blogs to connect all of its social media campaigns, disseminate health information, promote contests and services, and start conversations with the community.
At Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills, MI, the acronym “VIP” has taken on a whole new meaning: Very Important Patient. The 330-bed hospital runs a rewards card program, offering perks to build patient loyalty. Botsford is one of many hospitals around the country that are instituting loyalty programs in an effort to outpace their competitors. But do these programs work, and are they worth it?

Botsford launched its VIP program in fall 2010 as a way to improve patient satisfaction and increase physician referrals by linking potential patients with doctors, says Lynn C. Anderson, marketing and public relations manager. “There is so much competition, especially in the Detroit market,” she explains. “We have five to six hospitals within just a few miles, and we are all looking for ways to improve service excellence.”

Any community member can register for a card. VIP members get access to free valet parking, a concierge to help connect them with a physician or specialist, access to a physician within 24 hours, and a 10% discount at the gift shop and
on nonprescription drugs at the outpatient pharmacy. “The best referral will come from the physician referral department, because they are going to look at your insurance, at all of the doctors, at where you work and live, at what time the office closes, and tailor it to you,” says Anderson.

MARKETING PERKS TO SENIORS
The VIP program targets the senior population, featuring images of happy elderly patients on its microsite. The program also offers regular health education seminars aimed at older people and a free one-year membership to the hospital’s Generations Senior Program, which organizes events and outings for those over 50 years old. For just $15 a year, members of the Generations program can go on hospital-sponsored trips to the symphony, the theater, and even a casino.

The VIP program was marketed through direct mail, an internal campaign, as well as the hospital’s Web page...
and a microsite. More than 900 community members signed up for VIP access.

Staff members all received a VIP pin to wear on their clothes that said, “Ask me about the VIP program,” says Anderson. In addition, employees were given incentives for referrals, such as being entered to win a $10–$15 gift card each month. “We also did life-size posters of people like the president, the cook in the kitchen, and a security guard with messages about the VIP program, and we rotated them around just to keep the chatter up,” she adds.

Anderson says the most effective marketing technique was the employees. “The direct mail got us out into the community,” she says. “But employees giving cards away and saying, ‘We want you to be a VIP’ was very effective.”

**RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES**

Programs like Botsford’s VIP card create a channel for open dialogue between the hospital and its patients, which holds the promise of improved patient outcomes. Now that hospitals can be fined for having higher-than-usual 30-day readmission rates for certain conditions, the pressure is on for hospitals to improve preventive strategies and increase patient communication.

By luring senior patients into the hospital for free health screenings and seminars, Botsford is able to bring high-risk patients in the door before they need to see a physician. The VIP card’s guarantee of physician access within 24 hours makes it easy for patients...
to get in touch with their doctors—and it may also cut down on some unnecessary ED visits.

Patient reward programs can also change a hospital's image from a place to go only in a time of crisis to a community center. If a local resident becomes used to dropping by your organization for health fairs and special events, he or she will be more comfortable receiving care there when the time comes.

**BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR MESSAGING**

If your organization decides to offer a perks program, be wary of focusing solely on amenities. While patients are apt to choose services that are immediately useful, such as valet parking and gift store discounts, they also need to be assured of your organization's quality of care.

To accomplish this, Botsford follows a dual-messaging strategy on its Web page. While its homepage features the VIP program front and center, the site also stresses quality by promoting its new imaging center, its trauma center, and its results-oriented approach to care.

Perks programs can create more loyal and better-informed patients, and may even help pave the way to improved outcomes. And who knows—if a patient wins big at a hospital-sponsored casino outing, you may just have found a new benefactor.
Any story that attempts to discuss ways to improve the patient experience should attempt to define it, because there is ample confusion in healthcare, even among otherwise highly competent leaders, about what patient experience actually is.

It isn’t providing excellent-quality healthcare—at least not totally. A basic assumption by patients is that when they receive a medical intervention, the actual medical care will be excellent. Rather, patient experience is much more comprehensive, even encompassing patients’ feelings about the hospital brand and their “stickiness”—that is, their loyalty.

HealthLeaders Media’s survey on patient experience in 2009 showed how difficult it was for hospital and health system senior leaders to define the patient experience: 34% chose “patient-centered care,” 29% selected “an orchestrated set of activities that is meaningfully customized for each patient,” and 23% said it involved “providing excellent customer service.”

The rest agreed that the patient experience meant “creating a healing environment,” was “consistent with what’s measured by HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems),” or was something “other” than the aforementioned options.

Sounds like patient experience encompasses just about everything except, possibly, the clinical care itself.

That’s just about right, says James Merlino, MD, Cleveland Clinic’s chief experience officer. The wide-ranging view of what constitutes patient experience used to be perplexing, he says, but the correct answer for him and...
for many others who are looking to improve is that it’s “all of the above.”

“When I took over this role, we suffered from the same problem as everyone else. In order to fix it, you have to define it,” he says. Rather than defining patient experience success as performing well on standardized measures such as HCAHPS or other metrics, Merlino and the Cleveland Clinic leadership team went the other way.

“We made it more abstract. The idea being, let’s just tell our people that anything that affects the patient outside the delivery of medical care is patient experience.”

That’s not to say that the clinic doesn’t strive to do well on metrics like HCAHPS and other patient experience measures. However, Merlino says he wants to avoid a “teaching to the test” mentality that may result from an exclusive focus on how the hospital system performs on measures that might affect reimbursement.

Rather, a more holistic approach is needed to fully incorporate the core idea of patient experience—that one bad experience can ruin the whole effort. By focusing exclusively on measures that are on the HCAHPS survey, essentially, you’re missing both the ethical obligation to do best for the patient at all times, as well as the potential long-term benefits of patient loyalty.

“One bad interaction can define the impression,” Merlino says. “This is well documented in retail and other service businesses.”

So how does one begin to incorporate accountability and responsibility for a patient’s experience throughout the institution?

In stages, he says.

**HCAHPS’ FOCUSING ROLE**

At the beginning, despite his misgivings, Merlino did focus on HCAHPS scores. He explains: “We chose HCAHPS initially not because we’re chasing numbers, but because it was the only thing that had leverage. If you don’t do it well, you will be penalized financially. We had started on this journey for the right reason before HCAHPS, but needed something to focus on.”

But more important was to get the message to everyone who works in the hospital that each of them is responsible for patient experience.

“You can talk to anyone at our main campus and ask them about patient experience. They will say it’s important and they are part of it,” Merlino says.

He says Cleveland Clinic faced an interesting challenge culturally, because it had always been thought of as an organization founded by doctors, for doctors. Instead, it’s for patients, Merlino says, and the rest of the employees, whether they regularly encounter patients or not, have at least as important a role to play in patient experience.

Cleveland Clinic took a big risk to deliver that message to the entire staff of 42,000 employees by taking them offline over a period of months in small group sessions that lasted a half day. Everyone, from neurosurgeons to housekeeping staff, spent valuable time discussing why...
patient experience was important, how everyone is in this together, and service excellence standards and how to improve. In tables of eight to 10 people, including a facilitator, Merlino and his staff talked to the randomly assigned groups about patient experience using theoretical situations and a visual learning map, encouraging them to develop a collegial atmosphere.

It cost $11 million to do the project, says Merlino, but it was well worth it. "It was a leveling experience that got everyone to realize that patient experience isn’t the responsibility of one group," he says. Rather, it is a team effort, and the organization succeeds or fails on patient experience as a team.

"A highly engaged workforce is a big driver of satisfaction," he says.

“We needed a culture of engaged and satisfied caregivers. If we don’t get that, we don’t get to any other level. Any Fortune 100 company understands that.”

And patient experience is a journey that never ends, he says.

Although Merlino says Cleveland Clinic is “nowhere near where we want to be,” after its intensive training was initiated in 2009, its patient satisfaction scores jumped 15% from 2010 to 2011.

“We attribute it to our work on this program,” Merlino says.

**DRIVING ACCOUNTABILITY**

But a one-day retreat for employees wasn’t going to get the job done in and of itself, Merlino realized. Sustainability was critical, so patient experience measurement and metrics needed to be implemented by the management staff, a group 2,200 strong, and they needed to know it was one of the most critical factors by which their performance would be judged going forward. And it had to have full support from Toby Cosgrove, MD, Cleveland Clinic’s CEO.

“The top person has to say it’s critical,” Merlino says. “If you don’t have that, you’re not successful.”

Those 2,200 managers underwent two sessions to discuss measurement protocols, accountability, engagement, and developing unity of purpose.

“These managers sustain it,” says Merlino. “Managers must be razor-focused on the goals; you have to give

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**TRACKING SUCCESS**

While HCAHPS is the dominant tool used by healthcare organizations, majorities do employ other means of measuring.

_How do you track and measure the success or failure of your patient experience strategy?_

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them mechanisms to track them and you have to hold them accountable. They will then hold their employees accountable. Toby drives it to the executive leadership team, we drive it to our management, and management drives it to the employees. In a way, what we’re doing is enforcing basic management techniques. It’s not rocket science.”

**UCLA’S REASON FOR BEING**

If Merlino sees patient experience as a critical part of the care process, David Feinberg, MD, sees it simply as the reason for being for Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, for which he is the CEO.

Put simply, Feinberg is a believer that if patient experience is excellent, most everything else that’s a priority for the hospital or health system will fall into place. Which is why he is self-deprecating about UCLA’s achievement of 99th percentile in HCAHPS scores.

“Our HCAHPS scores are good, but we’re not doing well in patient satisfaction,” he says. “We’ve had a meteoric rise from 38% to 99th percentile. We perform at the very top regarding HCAHPS questions. That being said, we’re terrible because to get to 99th percentile, you have to get 85 out of 100 people to give you that answer on their survey. That means we’ve failed even though we’re the best, because we’ve failed with 15 people out of the last 100.”

He says, with no hint of guile, that the scores need to be 100 out of 100 before he can boast that they’ve gotten anywhere. Yet Feinberg’s hospital represents the top 1%, in a manner of speaking, meaning it must be doing something right.

His biggest challenge, he says, was instilling a team spirit about patient care throughout the organization. One of the guiding philosophies is that it’s not just about the people who touch patients. “Whether you’re in IT, or billing and collections, or frontline nurses, docs—wherever you fit—you’re part of a healing team.”

That’s fine for a major academic medical center in one of the nation’s largest cities that has far more resources than the average community hospital, but Feinberg takes care to mention that much of the work is commonsensical and that being attentive to the customer’s needs doesn’t cost much, if anything, and often leads to better, more coordinated care—and thus a lower ultimate cost of care.

Anyone in a leadership position should be able to start with culture, anyway, says Steve Whitehurst, chief customer and strategy officer with BerylHealth, which consults with hospitals on patient experience.

“Of course, it all starts with the culture and leadership engagement,” Whitehurst says. “CEOs may talk about the patient experience, but if they don’t drive this message down into the organization, it doesn’t work.”

Source: Adapted from HealthLeaders magazine, February 2012.

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Aloysius Butler & Clark
A fresh perspective in marketing communications
What steps can marketers take to improve their organization’s reputation in the community?

Know your leadership team and your plans and can speak knowledgeably to their circle of influence. You can also establish an employee ambassador program. People put more trust in a recommendation from someone they know rather than an ad.

The tactics are endless, inexpensive (compared to paid time and space), and they show—not just say—that your hospital is committed to the community. There’s also a secondary benefit: When (not if) your hospital has a major crisis, you’ll have an already-existing “circle of friends” you can communicate with directly.

Robert Rosenberg, President, Springboard Brand & Creative Strategy

More and more studies are suggesting that corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies are very effective in improving an organization’s reputation in the community. Beyond brand advertising, these initiatives serve to improve the lives and well-being of residents.

For example, Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) is in its third phase of a distracted driving campaign. The first phase was dedicated to launching the initiative and distributing items such as car magnets and yard signs. Thousands of these items were requested to help raise awareness of the perils of texting while driving.

Phase two involved a tie-in with Diana Ross’ song “Stop in the Name of Love,” using TV and radio ads to promote the message. This time, tens of thousands of car magnets were requested, and the talk value in the community was over the top. The third and current phase is creating partnerships with media and community-based organizations to help spread the word about the dangers of distracted driving.

CSR studies suggest that people and employees want to be associated with brands that care. Market share, employee retention, and recruitment all benefit from these types of programs. In LVHN’s case, preference remains high—and trauma business is down. That’s a good thing for this organization that takes great pride in improving the lives of people in their community in favor of increased business in the emergency room. #ma
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