

Starting a Conversation

In today's competitive environment, just having a web presence is not enough. Your healthcare organization also needs to have online visibility.

Social media are electronic tools that enhance communication, support collaboration, and enable users across the globe to generate and share content. The various forms of social media allow users to build social networks and start conversations with those who share their interests and experiences. The subjects of these conversations range from pure entertainment to harnessing the collective knowledge needed to answer life's most pressing questions. The result is unlike more traditional media vehicles—such as TV, radio, newspapers, and **websites**—which typically only push out information after it has been scripted, edited, produced, and staged.

Social media—Highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies and the online content created by people using these technologies. Fundamentally, social media represent a shift in how people discover, read, and share news, information, and content. They fuse sociology and technology, transforming monologues (a communication from one to many) into dialogues (two-way communication), and they democratize information, transforming content readers into publishers. Social media are popular because they allow people to form online relationships for personal, political, and business use.

Website—A set of related web pages containing content such as text, images, video, audio, and other digital assets. A website is hosted on at least one web server, accessible via a network such as the Internet or a private local area network through an Internet address known as a Uniform Resource Locator.

Social media and their networking capabilities originated in 2002 with the launch of Friendster, the first online social network. A privately owned website, Friendster helped people to make new friends and to

stay in contact with old ones through sharing online content and media. Since 2002, the reasons for forming and joining social networks have matured, and now they are limited only by our imaginations. Over the last several years, the growth of social networking options has been dramatic, and the various applications are quickly finding their way into business and healthcare organizations around the world.

This book provides an overview of various social media tools and examples of how they are used in healthcare and community health environments to engage and connect with the public, employees, physicians, consumers, and other stakeholders. It aims to stimulate readers to consider new uses for social media in the healthcare environment and in their organizations. I hope that by the time you reach the end of the book, you will be able to identify a tool that can improve outreach into a particular community, whether it is

- internal to the organization;
- geographically isolated, rural, suburban, or urban;
- disease- or condition-specific;
- demographically oriented; or
- widespread—*the masses*.

Each chapter of this book defines and describes a social media tool and reviews its costs, benefits, sample uses, and any limitations and risks specific to healthcare environments. We will explore the language of social media and its value proposition for the healthcare industry and encourage readers to explore the many sites and materials referenced.

OUR COMMUNITY AND PATIENTS

Healthcare is undergoing an unprecedented transformation. Cost, quality, safety, and staffing challenges are giving rise to a new, more proactive role for the average patient.

Social media provide people with additional opportunities to enhance their knowledge and their ability to care for themselves, and online communities are attracting older and broader audiences. For some, social networks are just new information and communication tools that are becoming as much a part of their daily lives as newspapers, radio, TV, and the telephone. In fact, producers of traditional media have already recognized this fundamental shift in where people go for information, and they too have applied social media

tools to broaden their outreach, audience, and attractiveness.

OUR WORKFORCE AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Healthcare leaders are expected to improve quality, safety, productivity, and the patient experience, often at the same time they are being asked to decrease costs. Successful leaders understand the importance of communication and collaboration during challenging times and seek tools that allow them to reach out more effectively and efficiently to physicians, employees, volunteers, and others.

Proactive leaders are exploring low-cost—but potentially high-touch—social media applications and incorporating those that fit into their strategic initiatives. Correctly applied, these tools can improve the quality of information and the efficiency with which it is gathered, shared, and used. These new tools help healthcare leaders listen, learn, and build on their organization's collective knowledge with new relationships and increased trust.

WEB 1.0

In the early 1990s, the Internet and websites were new, and each had

Web 1.0—An early stage of the conceptual evolution of the World Wide Web, centered around a top-down approach to the use of the web and its user interface. Socially, users could only view web pages but not contribute content. Information was not dynamic, being updated only by the webmaster.

recognizable and unknown potential. Traditional read-only websites (**Web 1.0**) provide access to the information a healthcare organization believes its stakeholders need; the information remains the same until the organization replaces it with something it believes to be more valuable. And, once a stakeholder locates needed information, he can only access it as long as the organization keeps it on the site. To many, these first-generation websites seem static or stale unless they are frequently updated with content that accurately reflects stakeholder needs and expectations.

For the purposes of this book, a healthcare organization's stakeholders and potential social media audiences include

- patients and their families and friends;
- medical staff and other physicians and allied providers;

- employees and potential employees;
- consumers;
- employers;
- volunteers and auxiliary members;
- grant makers and donors;
- vendors and other partners;
- health plans and payers;
- non-acute care and other support providers;
- media;
- the community at large; and
- licensing, regulatory, and accrediting organizations.

WEB 2.0, HEALTH 2.0

The idea of **Web 2.0** involves the transformation of relationships by delivering what customers want—personalized information, convenience, and tools to help them plan and execute 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Social media complement and go beyond the traditional website by actively engaging individuals in their search for information and knowledge and offering an open venue for discussions and user contributions. They

- introduce at least bidirectional capability;
- provide an avenue for dialogue and collaboration in building the content;

- offer easier downloading of content into an individual's personal collection so that the content is available for as long as she wants it;
- allow interested individuals to admit others' content into their lives as they want to receive it;
- facilitate the widespread sharing of messages and calls to action; and
- provide access to information whether users are at home, at work or school, or mobile.

Unlike Web 1.0, Web 2.0 is created and shaped by the healthcare organization *and* its users, and it has the potential to evolve with every interaction. Users promote content each time they include a link on a **blog** or other social networking post, and this increases the potential for viral

Web 2.0—A term coined in 1999 to describe websites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier websites. Web 2.0 sites allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community. Examples include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications, mashups, and folksonomies.

Blog (a portmanteau of *web log*)—A discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web and consisting of discrete entries (“posts”) typically displayed in reverse-chronological order. Until 2009 blogs were usually the work of a single individual; more recently multiauthor blogs have developed, with posts written by large numbers of authors and professionally edited. *Blog* can also be used as a verb, meaning “to maintain or add content to a blog.”

or mass distribution and for mainstream media to pick up on even the most obscure post.

In today's competitive environment, just having a web presence is not enough. Your healthcare organization also needs to have *online visibility*, which is greatly aided by social media content that increases your search engine rating and places your site among the top search results.

Web 2.0 has led to **Health 2.0**, which, in addition to social media, includes telemedicine, electronic health records, personal health records, and remote monitoring. Health 2.0 centers on the idea that patients prefer to take a more active role in gathering and sharing their health information. Tom Ferguson, MD (2007, xi), shares this

Health 2.0—The convergence of healthcare with Web 2.0. Health 2.0 refers to a number of related concepts including telemedicine, electronic medical records, and the use of the Internet by patients through message boards, blogs, and other systems. A key concept is that patients themselves have greater insight into and control of information generated about them.

view of patients being more actively involved:

[B]ringing healthcare into the new century will not be merely a matter of automating or upgrading our existing clinical processes. We can't just automate earlier forms of medical practice. The underlying nature of healthcare itself must change.

One important agent of this change is “e-patients,” whom Ferguson (2007, xii) defines as

citizens with health concerns who use the Internet as a health resource, studying up on their own diseases (and those of friends and family members), finding better treatment centers and insisting on better care, providing other patients with invaluable medical assistance and

support, and increasingly serving as important collaborators and advisors for their clinicians.

These e-patients are becoming more engaged with providers and organizations that offer opportunities for active participation. They promote the sites and services that best fill their unique disease- or condition-specific needs, such as those that provide virtual support for chronic conditions and information on diagnoses or medications. Patients who are actively engaged spend more time on these sites, return often, and share their experiences with others, who in turn pass those stories along to their family and friends.

High-performing organizations offer interactive tools that empower patients through education and self-care (Bipartisan Policy Center 2012) and also recognize the value of social media and networking tools in the workplace for administrative and operational purposes. A blog might serve as a suggestion box, providing a forum for employees and patients to share feedback and giving you an opportunity to offer real-time but thoughtful responses. And a wiki may help a multidisciplinary workgroup pull together data and information needed for a report, proposal, application, or plan.

Collaboration is common in healthcare, especially when leaders believe in the collective knowledge of their management team and the value of multidisciplinary approaches to challenges. Social media facilitate this collaboration by bringing people together, providing a forum for questions, collecting answers and ideas, bringing information to the surface, and gathering feedback on interim deliverables.

Social media tools can enhance the gathering of knowledge by allowing wider participation in and contribution to discussions and decisions. Tremendous value can result when a project team uses social media to facilitate and document intelligence gathering or brainstorming sessions, protocol and procedure development, survey preparations, and strategic planning.

Your staff may already be using social media tools for collaboration and communication with partner or professional organizations. Their knowledge of the various tools and their ability to navigate social networking sites will prove valuable to your organization as it evaluates and plans for the application of these new technologies with your key stakeholder groups.

BOOK COMPANION

A book companion website is available at www.ache.org/books/SocialMedia2. The site includes examples of best practices from healthcare organizations that are using social media tools successfully and a list of links to resources for readers who would like additional information.