Guide to Social Media Marketing for Healthcare & Pharmaceutical Businesses

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Introduction

Healthcare and pharmaceutical companies are finding themselves in an era of significant and rapid change. The power of the relationship is shifting from the advertiser’s voice (pushing products and services at us) to the voice of the empowered patient and healthcare professional (HCP), who can decide who and when to communicate with and what information they are prepared to absorb. Websites and social networks have given them easy access to information and conversations on a range of healthcare topics, services and medical products which they can get to at anytime and anywhere, thanks to the high levels of Internet access and the growth of the Smartphone.

As a marketer trying to reach patients and HCPs, being aware of this shift and evolving your marketing strategy is crucial. The time has come to think about a more collaborative and less intrusive way of engaging with these individuals.

Compared to other sectors such as travel, retail and finance the medical, pharma and healthcare industries have been slow to embrace this method of communication and they may be losing out on a chance to connect with their target audiences.

Social Media Usage By Patients

Individuals are often very focused on health and well-being. As a result, they regularly rely on search engines to research symptoms and diseases and try to connect with people in similar situations using social media. According to Brandwatch, the social media monitoring software firm, one third of patients seek health advice on Facebook.

Have you done any of the following health related activities using social media?

- Post about your health experiences or updates: 24%
- Comment about your health experiences or updates: 27%
- Post reviews of medications or treatments or doctors or health insurers: 16%
- Share health-related videos or images: 16%
- Trace and share your health symptoms or behavior: 18%
- Join a health-related cause: 20%
- Support a health-related cause: 28%

Source: FwC HRI Social Media Consumer Survey, 2012

* HRI surveyed 1060 consumers; selected demographics may result in smaller sample sizes
Social Media Usage By Healthcare Professionals

Many doctors, hospitals and other healthcare brands tend towards caution when it comes to entering the world of social media, and the majority of HCPs avoid social media altogether.

Among the biggest concerns that medical practitioners and institutions have with the use of social media is the need to protect patient privacy and fears that entry into social media may compromise security.

Another concern is that it would be necessary for HCPs, hospitals and other healthcare providers to create a monitoring system to prevent employees from abusing the social media connection, and to ensure that information that is shared is factually correct, adheres to specific industry regulations (i.e. the ABPI) and has a positive impact on the image and reputation of the institution.

Finally, there is undoubtedly concern about charges of malpractice, in the event someone sought medical advice. While most HCPs know they should avoid offering medical advice outside of their offices, many may worry that social media would blur the line between doctor and patient and ultimately lead to decisions that are less than professional.

There are many social media networks available to the medical industry. Some are very broad, while others are more concentrated; still others are more specialised and niche-oriented.

- The broader platforms include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. These allow medical professionals and healthcare companies to post content that can be as informative as they want it to be as long as it complies with any regulations.

- CancerDoc, Healthline and Revolution Health are aimed at people who want to share similar experiences, communicate information, or for medical institutions and practices to share ideas and disseminate information.

- WebMD and AskDrWiki are regarded as expert sites that are designed to allow patients to ask questions and get answers from medical professionals.

- Sites like Patient Opinion, offers a digital platform enabling conversations between patients and health services

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