



USING THE INTERNET IN YOUR PRACTICE

Part 2: Generating new patients using social media

⤵ While no one denies the usefulness of social media, very few medical practices know exactly how to harness its power. Here, we focus on the top three social media heavyweights: Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

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With this article, we intend to illustrate the value of having a social media presence and how you can use social media to attract new patients. One of us (NHB) has been using social media to promote his medical practice for 3 years and can be found on the first page of Google search results for several of the medical conditions he treats. As a result of these high search rankings, he is able to generate two to four new patient visits every day.

You can achieve the same results using the techniques described in this article. You certainly can buy banner ads and buy traffic

to your page, but we want to show you how to get on the first page of Google using the natural, organic method.

Push vs pull

Social media can be used in different ways to build your practice. What you employ depends on what you want to accomplish and the time and energy you want to devote to each of these social media opportunities.

By its very definition, social media is social engagement—and what is known as a “pull” technology. There are two ways to share your information with people on the Internet:

1. “Pull” Web site surfers to your information
2. “Push” your information to them.

Push occurs when you initiate the process by placing your information in front of the Web site surfer. They get it or see it because of the actions you have taken. Sending e-mails is one way to push information to your target audience, or potential patients, to your practice. Another way to push your Web site and its contents is to get listed on the first page of search engine results. You want to “push” your Web site in plain view of the person who has typed in keywords or keyword phrases that relate to your practice

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(ie, “OBGYN” plus “<your city>,” “tubal ligation” plus “<your city>,” or “loss of urine” plus “<your zip code>.” Push techniques are the best way to market your services and offer the best return on your marketing investment.

Using social media, you are able to “pull” your audience of potential patients to you and your practice. In other words, your target market of potential patients has to take the time and make the effort to type in your Web site address in order to come to you. The information or message you have on your social media sites has to be strong enough and of sufficient compelling interest that patients want to come to read what you have to say. Web surfers are looking for online relationships for information sharing. It is this interaction with your potential patients that makes social media unique. Using this pull technology, you have the opportunity to interact and develop a relationship with a patient before she picks up the phone to make an appointment, before she comes to the office to see you eyeball to eyeball.

Facebook and how it relates to your practice

Originally, Facebook was developed as a way for people to see what was going on in each other’s lives, a method to stay in contact with one another. In the beginning, it was friends, family members, or groups of like-minded individuals frequenting each other’s Facebook pages. Typically, they would keep tabs on who was having a party or post pictures of their kids for family members to see.

Facebook has evolved. Today, companies, businesses, and, yes, medical practices are trying to “pull” more Web site visitors to their Facebook pages. To do this, they hold contests with prizes; offer great content, coupons, and videos; and provide special offers to get Web surfers to their site. Large companies and large group practices like the Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, and MD Anderson Cancer Center, have whole social media departments that post regularly, respond to comments left on their pages, and answer



questions posted by those who “like” their page or site.

Individual practicing clinicians, and most smaller ObGyn practices, do not have the budget for a social media team. They also don’t have the time or the training to write effective copy that is so compelling that Web surfers are drawn or “pulled” to their Facebook page. The reality is, your patients expect you to have a Facebook page, and they expect you to have quality information that is helpful and relevant to their well-being. But, the question remains...

Can Facebook generate new patients?

You and your practice certainly can place a lot of information and pictures on Facebook, and potential patients can leave comments or ask questions easily. You can start a dialog with a patient without providing medical advice and motivate her to see that you are providing medical value before the doctor-patient relationship is established. Still, does a Facebook page generate new patients? It depends

**FAST
TRACK**

Patients expect your practice to have a Facebook page and to present quality information that is relevant to their well-being



on the information you post and how you use Facebook to acquire new patients.

For instance, your practice is probably restricted to a local area—a few zip codes surrounding your office and hospital—which means you really only want patients who are in your area to visit your practice's Facebook page because those are the only ones who are likely to call and make an appointment. Unless you are highly specialized in a particular field, such as fistula repair, robotic surgery, or the treatment of mesh complications, the Facebook surfer from New York isn't likely to hop on a plane to come to your practice on the West Coast for gynecologic or obstetric care.

On the surface, it appears that it is impossible to compete with larger practices and hospitals that have more dedicated staff to draw prospective patients to a practice through Facebook. However, the real, overarching challenge is to improve your Web site rankings on the major search engines, to be on the first page of Google, Bing, and Yahoo search results. And what we do know is that Google has placed a high value on Web site rankings through social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—that is, of course, as long as your Facebook page provides content that has keywords relevant to your target market and the content on your page links back to your Web site.

Therefore, it is not necessary to devote an inordinate amount of time to your social media presence to obtain results. You will, on the other hand, get more visitors to your Web site if it is found on the first page of search engine results because of your Facebook posts. Of course, if your Web site is not set up properly for easy visitor navigation and visitor conversion, you may not be able to obtain the desired result of gaining new patients even if they do find your site. You need to have a Web site with marketing and patient conversion systems built into it; don't overlook the layout of your Web site. For more on this issue, see Part 1 of this series, which appeared in the February 2014 issue of OBG MANAGEMENT.

YouTube videos and your practice

YouTube has become a significant search engine for virtually every product and service you offer your patients. There are millions of videos on YouTube, and you can search topics simply by typing in any topic that your patients might be interested in, from birth control to cancer.

There are five ways your practice can benefit from a video posted on YouTube:

- 1. Web site traffic driver.** To achieve this “pull,” you must label your posted video correctly, with keyword phrases that are relevant to the type of patient or conditions you are looking for, and offer a description that would make a viewer want to see the video. You also must provide a link back to your Web site, which increases your chances of gaining a new patient from YouTube.
- 2. Boost your search engine optimization.** Google places a high-ranking factor on videos posted to YouTube that are keyword-relevant.
- 3. A video library can position you as an expert in the field.** You can create your own YouTube channel and keep adding videos. One of us (NHB) has more than 70 medical videos on his YouTube channel. If someone views one of these videos, they will have immediate access to the rest of the video collection even though they may be labelled with other keywords. This further positions you as the knowledgeable expert in your field.
- 4. Video embedding capability.** Any video you have posted to YouTube can be placed on your Web site, in a format that keeps the viewer on your site. This means the viewer has less of a chance of getting distracted with other video offerings and landing on someone else's Web site.
- 5. Free video storage.** Because you have stored the video on YouTube, you are not using the resources on your Web site when someone, or several people, view the video at the same time.

Getting started with YouTube

Making a video can be easier than you think.



YouTube has become an important search engine for virtually every product and service you offer your patients

First, a video can simply be a PowerPoint presentation. Studies have demonstrated that it is more about the content of the video than a physician being in front of a camera. There are lots of Web sites you can use to record a presentation; one of the most popular and easy to use is <http://www.GoToWebinar.com>. There are computer programs that make it easy to record and then simply upload the recording to YouTube. Cam Studio (<http://camstudio.org>) is a free open-source program available that has a lot of flexibility for editing audio and video files, and it is easy to use. Camtasia (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html>) is a popular program that costs about \$300 and has a lot of features for advanced editing. Camtasia also has a simple navigation system for the nontechnical person.

Content is key. You can select a few frequently asked questions (FAQs) that your patients regularly ask and simply record yourself giving the answers. Take a look at what is new, relevant, or controversial in regard to the procedures you perform. Or just look at all the pages on your Web site that have the procedures and services you provide and make a video on those topics. The ideal video is 3 to 5 minutes in length.

Attracting patients via Twitter

The most amazing example of social media and building a fan base is Twitter. Here's a question: Who are the people that have the biggest following on Twitter? The answer: Celebrities, rock stars, and athletes. As a society, we are obsessed with these groups and want to know their every thought, what they like, what they had for lunch, what they think, and who they think about.

Now how, as a practicing ObGyn, do you expect to build a base of Web site surfers who want to know your every thought on urinary incontinence? The harsh reality is, if you think you are going to get new patients by making posts on Twitter of 140 characters or less every day, you will be disappointed.

However, the return from using Twitter is, similar to Facebook and YouTube, related to the fact that Twitter is one of the top accessed Web sites in the world. Linking your own content

from such a Web site increases the search placement of your content when a potential patient performs a general Google search.

Are social media effective?

The effective use of social media can result in attracting new patients every day to your practice—if you post quality information on a regular basis that is helpful to your existing patients and especially to potential new patients. Overall, social media can help you get new patients through search engine rankings. Even if you don't want to do any work on your social media sites, you can hire companies that will do it for you.

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The bottom line

There will be many ObGyns who will read this article, throw up their hands and say, "Makes sense, but this is over my head." Because it sounds so technical, many clinicians will just ignore social media and hope it goes away. If your plans for the next 5 years include practicing medicine, we don't recommend that you take that approach. The Internet and social media are the "places" in which patients of today are searching for their doctors. Trust us—potential new patients are no longer using the *Yellow Pages*.

The patients of tomorrow will be increasingly technologically sophisticated, and these social media techniques will continue to evolve. Don't get left behind. And don't let your competitors dominate one of the most important sources of new patients you have, along with patient referrals and physician referrals. Jump into this world yourself, and you will be richly rewarded. The social media train is leaving the station, and we hope that we have shown you how to hitch a ride. See you online! 🚗



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