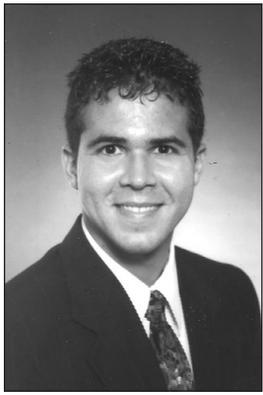


# Health care organizations must understand, harness social media

By Daniel Casciato



Welcome to our new monthly column about social media where we'll offer you the latest tips and advice on how to best leverage social media

to bolster your organization's image.

Social media continues to change the way organizations shape their identities, communicate and share information. Does your health care organization have a social media presence? If not, consider one of the hundreds of social media platforms now pervading the Web today such as blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and podcasts. These platforms connect groups of people who share similar tastes, interests and agendas.

Why do you need a presence? Your stakeholders — patients, customers, prospects and even your employees — are already active on these online sites. If you don't have a presence, you run the risk of being overlooked. Social media expert and founder of Social-MediaExaminer.com, Michael Stelzner, said that visibility equals opportuni-

ty. He said that without being visible, you don't have the opportunities to expand your services.

According to the Social Media Marketing industry report, 88 percent of marketers are using some form of social media to promote their organizations. By leveraging some of the platforms we mentioned earlier, you can be interactive and build trust and relationships with your key stakeholders.

Social media is different from traditional marketing in that instead of "pushing" out your message (i.e. ads and static Web sites), you're engaging in a two-way conversation with your stakeholders. This two-way conversation has a tremendous amount of value because you receive feedback and learn what your stakeholders want in return. At a recent social media online conference, the keynote speaker said to think of social media as attending a party and actually talking to people rather than trying to close the deal.

Today, it's not enough to have people come to your Web site. They want to interact and chat with you. They want to post messages on your blog or Facebook page, or simply follow your tweets. As they get to know you, that's when opportunities emerge.

Social media can transform an organization in a positive and negative



manner. The best example of a company truly using social media to its fullest capability is Zappos.com, the online retailer of shoes and clothing. All of its employees have Twitter accounts and all of its customer service is done using Twitter. By using social media, they're extending that customer experience by engaging with their customers and also by monitoring their brand. And any time you tweet something about Zappos, you'll get a direct message from the CEO, Tony Hsieh.

Social media can also hurt an organization. Consider what happened when a Ketchum PR agent from New York City flew into Memphis and posted on Twitter, "True confession I'm in one of those towns where I scratch my head and say, I would die if I had to live here."

He was on his way to do a presentation on digital media to the worldwide communications group at FedEx. A FedEx employee saw the post and forwarded it to several people at FedEx, including the company's corpo-

rate vice president, vice president, directors and all management of the communication department, as well as the chain of command at Ketchum. At the end of the PR agent's presentation, FedEx sent him and his superiors at Ketchum a letter saying, "...with all due respect, to continue the context of your post; true confession: many of my peers and I don't see much relevance between your presentation this morning and the work we do in Employee Communications."

As you can see, social media is extremely powerful, so be very careful and be rather intentional about what you say.

Next month, we'll take a closer look at Twitter and provide you with some useful tips to get you started. 📌

*Let us know some of the ways you are using social media. Also, if there are any topics you'd like to see us discuss in future issues, email the Social Media Monitor at [writer@danielcasciato.com](mailto:writer@danielcasciato.com).*



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