



IS A SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE STILL RELEVANT?

Social media networks are something with which most of us are familiar. Many physicians use social media in their practices and clinics—but are these media still relevant for attracting new patients? I am certainly no expert, but hopefully this issue of *CRST Europe* provides you with some food for thought. Here I share my ideas and thoughts on social media, and I also asked some younger, more knowledgeable friends and family to share theirs, too (see their comments to the right).

Many of my friends and family have either deleted their accounts or significantly scaled back their activity on some social media platforms. Due to some high-profile investigative journalism, some users report they are more aware that they are numbers in an algorithm and are manipulated in more ways than they initially realized.¹

Whatever you think of social media for personal use, these facts remain:

1. A huge percentage of your patients currently uses social media on a regular basis;
2. Your patients feel overloaded with news feeds, so-called *fake news*, and other information;
3. If your content does not offer anything useful, your patients are likely to swipe right by it; and
4. Effective use of social media can still deliver excellent returns.

To learn more, I recently read a book that helps navigate this information overload, and the most prudent paragraph, in my opinion, is in the box below.

AN EXCERPT FROM

THE ORGANIZED MIND: THINKING STRAIGHT IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD

A large part of efficient time management revolves around avoiding distractions. An ironic aspect of life is how easily we can be harmed by the things we desire. Fish are seduced by the fisherman's lure, a mouse by cheese. But at least these objects of desire look like sustenance. This is seldom the case for us. The temptations that can disrupt our lives are often pure indulgences. None of us needs to gamble, drink alcohol, read email, or compulsively check social networking to survive. Realizing when a diversion has gotten out of control is one of the great challenges of life.¹

1. Levitin D. *The Organized Mind. Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*. London: Penguin Random House; 2014.

Keagan Cummings, MSc

MSc in Information Systems for Business Performance:

Social media corporations have recently been in the news for more negative than positive reasons (Facebook and the Cambridge Analytica scandal, for example), and some users are approaching these platforms with more skepticism.² Despite any scandals, use of social media remains one of the most effective and personal ways to engage with potential patients and to share informative and authentic content.

Stephanie Zirker

MSc Student in Digital Innovation: When used appropriately, social media can be a valuable way to gain viewership from a wide audience and grow quickly and exponentially. Additionally, it can support an environment of collaboration when used in moderation. However, when engaging on various platforms, there should be an understanding of the potential bias that may sway or affect the perspective of what is shared.

Brendan K. Cummings, MB ChB, BAO

Ophthalmology Senior House Officer, Royal Victoria Eye & Ear Hospital, Dublin, Ireland: It is wiser to use social media to build or enhance your reputation as an authority in your field than it is to sell a service. People will follow your accounts and engage with your content if they find it beneficial and educational. Social media can also be used to introduce your team to your followers. This way, when people arrive for a consultation, they have a sense of familiarity with your clinic. Remember to focus your content on your clinic's ideal patients. You want patients who have realistic expectations, do their research, and appreciate your expertise.

Lulu Cummings, MSc

Analyst at HubSpot: Try to create a stream of inbound marketing. This is focused on attracting customers through relevant and helpful content and adding value at every stage in your patient's journey. Social media sites are just tools.

Instagram, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Foursquare, and Pinterest are additional platforms that can be woven into your social media presence, depending on how you would like to engage with your patients.

Social media marketing helps to validate your brand and your service. A company's social media presence, when done correctly, tells consumers that the brand is active and focused on healthy communication with consumers. Social media marketing has the potential to increase customer loyalty and thereby increase referrals to your service.

For businesses, the use of social media has five distinct advantages:

1. It builds relationships with existing and new patients;
2. It helps you to share your expertise with your followers and their circle of friends;
3. It increases your visibility exponentially and for less cost than with any other medium;
4. It can help to educate you on how your brand is perceived in the market place; and
5. It allows you to connect anytime—day or night.

For a long time, I have believed that word of mouth was the most impactful, valuable, and authentic source of referrals for my practice or clinic. Social media have the potential to put this feature in cyberspace to reach more people and, in the process, put your word-of-mouth on steroids. I hope it works well for you. ■



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1. Handley L. Four in 10 people have deleted a social media account in the past year due to privacy worries, study says. *CNBC* website. June 18, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/18/people-are-deleting-social-media-accounts-due-to-privacy-worries.html>. Accessed August 20, 2018.

2. Granville K. Facebook and Cambridge Analytica: what you need to know as fallout widens. *New York Times*. March 19, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/technology/facebook-cambridge-analytica-explained.html>. Accessed August 20, 2018.

