



## HEALTHCARE +

---

# Social media marketing for physicians.

### JOHN GONDA

senior healthcare strategist  
[johng@teamddm.com](mailto:johng@teamddm.com)

### CHRISTINE VAN TIMMEREN

social media and content strategist  
[christinev@teamddm.com](mailto:christinev@teamddm.com)

**Whether it be through the use of traditional media or emerging approaches, physician marketing is evolving—for the better. Social media and digital content are beginning to blur the lines of what is and is not advertising, and physicians are now actively interacting with consumers in more ways than ever.**

Social media offers physicians a proven way to attract new customers while further building a trusted reputation among current patients. Through an understanding of available opportunities, as well as an awareness of potential risks, physicians can use social media to amplify their voice and further their connection with patients.

## EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Social media offers a powerful opportunity for healthcare providers. Its channels can be used to promote wellness, encourage patient compliance, and communicate vital health and preventative information.

In our constantly changing and 24-hour society, social media is a way to quickly ensure that patients are aware of the latest issues, guidelines, advisories, and breakthroughs that affect their health and well-being.

---

**“Social media has definitely helped me to not only enhance my personal brand, but also create an increased awareness around functional medicine throughout my community. For me, it has been another way to target, educate, and connect with ideal clients.”**

---

According to Erica Armstrong, MD, founder of Root Functional Medicine in Grand Rapids, Michigan, social media is allowing her to connect and interact with potential patients more than ever before.

“Social media has definitely helped me to not only enhance my personal brand, but also create an increased awareness around functional medicine throughout my community,” says Dr. Armstrong. “For me, it has been another way to target, educate, and connect with ideal clients.”

The possibilities for success are endless. Whether healthcare providers operate in a private practice or a large multi-specialty medical group, social media is a valuable tool for acquiring patients and growing an existing patient panel.

In addition to patient acquisition, social media helps physicians increase their level of brand awareness and establish themselves as experts in their specialty. By being positioned as a local and knowledgeable medical expert, there are countless opportunities for physicians to introduce and reinforce new services, expertise, or technology.

When utilized correctly, social media can be a powerful business tool for physicians, providing not only an outlet to share perspectives and expertise, but also to show a commitment to delivering the latest health and wellness information to followers.

In today’s competitive marketplace, being active on social media can be the difference in acquiring, or losing, a new patient. To help ensure success, always remember to start slowly, define goals, identify audiences, and above all else, provide consistent messaging to your followers.

## RISKS + CHALLENGES

While social media interactions offer many positive outreach and networking opportunities, there are also significant risks and challenges to be considered as well. To help mitigate these risks, special attention should be given to adhering to industry best practices before beginning any social media efforts.

**The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) recommends seven common best practices to avoid potential pitfalls.**

- Be personable but professional.
- Refrain from offering medical advice.
- Be careful when posting about patients.
- Be selective when interacting with patients.
- Protect against misinformation.
- Follow institutional and organizational policies.
- Avoid conflicts of interest.

## RISKS + CHALLENGES (CONT.)

These guidelines provide a high-level overview of industry best practices, but it's also important to reinforce a few specifics.

Obviously, physicians should be extremely careful when it comes to online behaviors such as potentially violating patient privacy, not revealing conflicts of interest, giving specific medical advice, or making unprofessional statements.

To prevent these behaviors, most hospitals and medical groups have policies in place that detail how physicians may interact with patients on social media channels. A social media policy addresses legal requirements, privacy, security, and other guidelines. If an organization does not have a policy in place, it's recommended that one be created and shared with patients as part of their practice intake forms.

These policies and best practices not only help set clear boundaries between doctors and patients, they also contain details relating to protected health information (PHI) and patient privacy. Well-written policies and plans can help physicians avoid the potential negativity of social media. Having, sharing, and abiding by an approved and well-written social media policy will help protect your reputation, information, and employees.

Engaging on social media can certainly be daunting to physicians, however, when done correctly the return will quite often outweigh the risks. While staying properly connected on social media can be time consuming, it is a solid investment in practice.

## ESTABLISHING A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Engaging in social media is an investment in time, money, and resources. Despite how easy it is to create a post on social media platforms, doing it successfully is not always easy.

Before you create your desired social media account(s), it's critical that you develop a comprehensive strategy. Without a well-planned strategy, you're operating without direction and could be missing potential patient acquisition opportunities.

A strategy serves as the foundation for why you're using social media, what you hope to achieve, how you plan to use it, and what content will be shared.

A social media strategy gives purpose, intention, and clarity to your efforts. It ensures that everything you say and every image you create aligns to your or your audience's goals.

No social media strategy should be developed in a vacuum. It must work in partnership with other marketing tactics and campaigns to create consistent messaging.

Additionally, social media is a place to share professional content like blog articles, white papers, videos, media coverage, and events.

## METRICS + MEASUREMENT BEST PRACTICES

One of the easiest ways to see whether or not your social media accounts are performing is to invest in a social media analytics tool such as Sprout Social or Hootsuite. While the native platforms can give you basic information, an analytics tool allows for faster analysis and more options.

Where it gets more complicated is understanding how the metrics available to you connect to your social media goals. Which metrics do you look at? How do you interpret them? Your social media strategy should outline your goals, which may include brand awareness, community building, conversions, and website referrals, and the metrics you analyze for each might be different.

If your goal is brand awareness, you can track follower count, reach, and impressions. If you want to build an engaged community, you should measure likes, comments, shares, and mentions. For conversions and website referrals, you'll need website traffic analytics, like Google Analytics or UTM tracking. These tools will help you see how much website traffic is coming from social media and whether those individuals call, sign up, register, or click to learn more.

Beyond the metrics, take a look at which posts get the most engagement and replicate them. Listen to what followers are saying in their comments and determine whether content can be created to address their concerns.

With clicks, likes, shares, and comments, your audience will tell you what resonates and what doesn't. The more you experiment, the more you learn. And the more you learn, the more successful your social media strategy will be.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Once you establish your social media accounts and begin posting, consistency is key. Social media success is about showing up for your audience over and over. Of course, keep an eye on your analytics and if there is clear evidence of the need to adjust, do so. If you're not consistent, your followers may not see your posts in their feed.

Another way to make sure posts get the maximum reach is to produce content that followers want to share. It takes compelling content to motivate audiences to tap that share button. The social media and public relations platform Meltwater summarized the findings of a study titled "Why Content Goes Viral."

The study looked at 7,000 articles published in the New York Times to see which ones got the most views and social shares and why. Researchers found the more the content evoked a high-arousal emotion such as awe, anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, humor, or wonder, the better its chances of being shared repeatedly.

Make sure audiences feel empowered to interact with your content. Shares are great, but you also want to foster two-way conversations with followers. Ask audiences questions to encourage comments and feedback. That not only means your target audiences, but also employees within your organization. Let employees know you want them to engage with your content, provide them with examples of how, and consider incentivizing them to do so. The more followers interact with your posts, the more likely they are to be seen by a wider audience.

While it can be tempting to publish social media posts that are always evergreen in nature, being relevant and timely is essential. The health advice and condition-specific information might be the same as it was a decade ago but find a way to connect that advice to the here and now. Connect your posts to current events, seasons, holidays, health awareness months, and events.

Finally, spice up your content in new ways. Try varying your content types by sharing a combination of videos, photos, infographics, short animations, and bold graphics. If your account is dull and predictable, your audience won't have a reason to keep coming back. If followers are not responding to one type of content, try another one.

## WHAT'S NEXT – THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The past year has turned many social media strategies upside down. Social media became a lifeline for important COVID-19 updates, office hour changes, patient visit protocols, and inspirational stories of hope and healing. The social media accounts of some healthcare organizations thrived because they committed to sharing up-to-date, relevant, and patient-centered content.

In Sprout Social's 2020 trends and 2021 predictions guide, the company said 2020 saw increased use of video, emphasis on brand voice and authenticity, useful content vs. engaging content, and a focus on listening. Some of these elements will continue to remain at the forefront in 2021.

Listening to your audience will be key to meeting your followers' needs. Authenticity and standing up for what you believe in will still be imperative for organizations.

It's difficult to know what 2021 will bring. But it's safe to say, be prepared for change. Build a solid social media strategy and lay out your goals but be open to sudden shifts.

Choosing a partner that has specific experience with physician marketing and communication initiatives is vital to succeeding in this highly complex world of social media.

At ddm, we know healthcare, because we've been there. For more information on how we can help acquire new patients for your practice or health system, please visit [teamddm.com](https://teamddm.com) or contact **John Gonda** at [johng@teamddm.com](mailto:johng@teamddm.com).

### Sources

[https://www.aafp.org/journals/fpm/blogs/inpractice/entry/social\\_media\\_best\\_practices.html](https://www.aafp.org/journals/fpm/blogs/inpractice/entry/social_media_best_practices.html)  
<https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/psychology-of-social-media-the-science-behind-why-people-share-online>  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5353b838e4b0e68461b517cf/t/5385049ae4b01dc8cdbaea6f/1401226394038/what-makes-online-content-viral.pdf>  
<https://media.sproutsocial.com/uploads/2020/09/2020-Trends-and-2021-Predictions-for-the-Year-Ahead.pdf>