

Just Tell me: Yes or No: Should Our Medical Practice Be On Facebook?!

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PUBLIC RELATIONS
AND MARKETING

I wrote an article on “the Facebook question” in October of 2011 because so many providers were asking me whether their practices should have a presence there. They knew many of their peers had Facebook pages but were concerned that it might be a waste of time and resources. “Would our current and potential patients even go there?” they wondered.

I said to ask yourself a few key questions. Who is your targeted audience? Do they use Facebook with any regularity? Do you have something to say? And do you have anybody to manage it? A key part of my advice was, in ten words or less: if your users will be over 50, don’t bother. Why did I say that? Because at the time, the data showed that people 55-64 comprised only 7% of Facebook users.

Things have changed, folks, big time, and so has my advice. The answer now is Yes, absolutely. Why?

2014 Pew Research Center data, however, now show that 71% of all Internet users are on Facebook. That means three out of four people who go online for *anything at all* go to Facebook at one time or another. Here are the percentages of people in each age group that used Facebook in 2014.

	2013	2014
Age 18-29	84%	87%
Age 30-49*	79	73
Age 50-64	60	63
Age 65+	46	56

* Twitter use in this demographic rose from 19% to 25% in the same period.
These people are not gone; they’ve moved.

You should still ask yourself the same questions you explore with any new marketing endeavor. Who is your targeted audience? What do you want them to do? What are you going to do to make it happen? Who will be responsible for it? How will you know when you’re succeeding?

Your practice should use your FB page as a source of reliable information about you: your office hours, your tag line, maybe your mission statement; map, emergency contacts, updates about your staff and the like. I know, they can Google you. But many who are on FB all the time use it instead of email and as their first search engine. You should be more, though, than just your brochure online. You can also be their go-to site for other things that are important to them: new research in your field, health tips, health events in your area ... today’s pollen count, health insurance filing deadlines, school closures, Medicaid changes, your policy on vaccinations, and links to other reliable wellness sites your audience cares about.

Excellent practices take it to the next step: they post to promote dialogue, hits and “shares.” Invite them to post a tip or to ask others for ideas. Put a survey out there. Try a contest. Comment on a relevant film. Promote a charity and match the donations. Have a monthly photo gallery (babies in the snow, healthy vacation spots.) You are only limited by your imagination, common sense, and, of course, HiPPA. Be professional always. Avoid politics. Be careful about controversy. The rule is: when in doubt, don’t post it.

Last, the quality of your FB posts, as with every form of communication from your office, must reflect the excellence of the medical care you deliver. A Facebook page is easy to set up and posting takes minutes. Set clear guidelines and, if others are posting to your site, have someone monitor it often to step in with a comment or remove a post. And, as with all marketing tactics, this should be part of an overall strategic plan to achieve clear goals. Track the results and adapt to improve.

And yes, many experts say you should be on Twitter, too. I’m watching the data. I’ll keep you posted.