



# Marketing your Practice With Social Media

Social media is a new buzz word that encompasses Internet technologies that are collaborative and dynamic in nature. There's a lot of talk surrounding sites like Facebook, Twitter and Myspace, yet the messages are mixed and can be overwhelming. This paper will illustrate the general concept of social media and more importantly, it will give you an overview of how to incorporate these services into your practice marketing mix. There is potential that exists within each of these sites and services to grow your practice, engage your existing patients, and expand your presence. Integrative physicians can benefit from these services because of the high demand for their knowledge of wellness and science.

## **What is social media?**

Social media is a type of mass media such as print, radio, TV, film, etc. However, at this point, it is entirely encapsulated as a web-based media. This implies that social media lives entirely on the Internet and is accessed through electronic mediums such as a computer or mobile device. (One service, Twitter, is able to be utilized through cellular phones, however 82% of Twitter users access the service from a computer or mobile device). What sets this media apart is its ability to forge relationships through two-way engagement between the users. Because the concept of two-way communication is central to the idea of social media and its related services, the end user is able to interact with the developer and a form of relationship begins. More recently, end-users have been afforded the ability to interact with other end-users under the auspice of the developer thus increasing the depth of the online engagement experience and strengthening online relationships.

Sites like Facebook allow massive groups of people to forge virtual networks where they can interact, share media with each other, interact with corporations they care about, receive notification of family/friend happenings and exchange messages, from one central location.

## **Where does social media fit into marketing?**

Your practice is a business and marketing is the activity of promoting your business to others. Marketing your practice may seem daunting, but it is a necessary function that ultimately increases your return on investment or ROI.

Your social media use is part of your overall marketing mix. A marketing mix is the combination of tactile tools used to achieve your practice's marketing objectives. Just as you would devote resources to creating a print ad, or a mailing campaign, social media requires attention and maintenance.

## Starting a dialogue

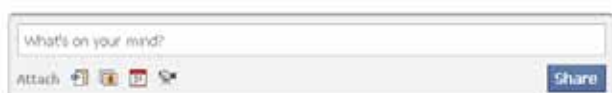
Corporations and small businesses are discovering that by having a presence on these sites, they are able to “talk” to their customers. Companies can comment on posts, interact with other users, and develop a more human approach to marketing. As a physician, your patients and potential patients look to you as a healer and partner in health, extending your presence online with social media can help create the human connection that is often lacking with traditional marketing tactics.

## Do you blog?

Some physicians have discovered that having a blog, or online journal is very beneficial. A blog is a running stream of content you create and is displayed as “posts” on a website. Similar to a vertically-orientated newspaper or magazine, a blog affords you the ability to publish articles, research, or happenings within your practice albeit without the effort of publishing in physical media. Readers can comment on your posts should you allow them to. Sophisticated online software such as typepad or blogger allows you to create a high-quality blog for little or no money. You can find examples of blogs at <http://acam.typepad.com> and <http://blog.drgina.com>

## Facebook Fan Pages

Building a presence on Facebook is not only easy, but rewarding. Create a Facebook fan page for your practice by signing up (for free) at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com). Fill out some basic information and you’ll be well underway. In order to interact with people, you’ll need to attract “fans.” Fans are Facebook’s term for individuals who have opted-in to receive your messages. These targets are highly valuable because they have all made a conscious decision to hear your message. Make sure to keep them engaged. Send out healthy tips, recipes, quotes and any supplements you recommend. Post links to your website, or if you have one, your blog.



All you need to do is use the “what’s on your mind” toolbar to send out links, content and advice. Your messages will be sent to your fans, they can then interact with what you send out thus making the information more relevant and effective.

To attract fans, we highly recommend you create a Facebook ad. Facebook’s advertising engine is very simple and straightforward, however it is extremely robust and powerful. It can target individuals based on their likes and dislikes, profile interests, etc. Most importantly, it can target potential patients/contacts geographically. People are very likely to see your ad and view your message on Facebook when you personalize it to their geographic location. For example, “Irvine, CA Integrative Physician, Dr. Weaver, is here to partner with you for optimal health, Click here to view our page” is a highly compelling text ad. ACAM’s targeted ads in California have an unheard of 29% click to action rate, which means 29% of people who click on our ad, become fans of ACAM. We did this by targeting individuals based on geographic location, and incorporating

*“extending your presence online with social media can help create the human connection that is often lacking with traditional marketing tactics.”*

that information into our ads. You can specify your daily spending maximum for your ad and choose to pay per click (CPC) or pay per 1,000 impressions (CPM). As you attract more fans, your presence increases on Facebook and more people will learn about your fan page. The more you interact with your fans, the higher your ranking on Facebook and the more business you can secure.

**Twitter**

Twitter is a free service that enables its users to send and read messages known as “tweets.” Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers who are known as followers. Tweets can be forwarded to other people or groups in a process known as “re-tweeting.” Businesses, and medical practices can use the service to tweet links to content on the web, promotions, or even just to say hello to customers. Twitter is accessed through the Internet at twitter.com, through applications on mobile devices or even through SMS on cellular phones. ACAM tweets links to blog posts we have created, to member blog posts, and to member home pages, as well as quotes, and we even hold promotions through Twitter. We have found Twitter as a great way to spread the word about various functions within the organization. Currently ACAM has over 1,500 followers on Twitter, all who receive our content and links about 3-5 times a day.

**Tying it all together**

In order to effectively use social media for marketing, its imperative that the services you select be managed by yourself or an office manager. Social media marketing is not hard, but it does require consistent input. This means that your services should link together and talk to each other, ensuring cross-promotion of your message across your services. This is where social media management comes into play. Social media management is the act of maintaining your services to ensure your message is being consistently heard and devoting time and resources to your services to build momentum. For example, your blog postings should be linked through your Facebook page and your tweets should promote your Facebook page etc. The more consistent you are with your postings, tweets, etc, the bigger impression you will make online. As a bonus, search engines like Google now use highly advanced technologies to monitor your overall Internet presence and assess your search engine ranking accordingly. Gone are the days where “Search Engine Optimization” and “Meta-Tags” were the driving forces behind your rankings on Google. Your overall Internet presence now powers your ranking. Start blogging today!

**Conclusion:**

You probably already know that ACAM membership, in addition to affording all the benefits of membership to a professional society, is a great marketing vehicle. ACAM’s Physician+Link is a powerful and widely used source for patient referrals. In fact, ACAM provides over 300 referrals a day though web, print and phone. Recently, ACAM has incorporated social media into our business marketing. We use these technologies to build not only awareness of our organization, but of the many physicians who comprise it also. In a way, if you are a member of ACAM, you already participate in social marketing. Our Facebook and Twitter sites are great places to get ideas and benchmark, and we have staff whom specialize in social media that can assist you.



**About ACAM:**

The American College for Advancement in Medicine (ACAM) is a not-for-profit association dedicated to educating physicians and other health care professionals on the latest findings and emerging procedures in complementary, alternative and integrative (CAIM) medicine. ACAM is the voice of integrative medicine; our goals are to improve physician skills, knowledge and diagnostic procedures as they relate to complementary and alternative medicine; to support integrative medicine research; and to develop awareness of alternative methods of medical treatment. ACAM enables members of the public to connect with physicians who take an integrative approach to patient care and empowers people with information about integrative medicine treatment options.

Celebrating more than a quarter century of service, ACAM represents more than 1,000 physicians in 30 countries. ACAM is the largest and oldest organization of its kind in the world dedicated exclusively to serving the needs of the integrative medicine industry.

**Sources:**

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