

CARING®

January 2010
Vol. XXIV, No. 1
\$5.00



Fulfilling the Promise of Health Reform:
Home Care Preserved, Long-Term Care
and Support Services Advanced

Social Media Meets Home Care? Take a Look at Social Media Marketing

By Merrily Orsini



By now, most people are familiar with what a blog is. But have you wondered what people are talking about when they mention words like “social media,” “Facebook,” and “Twitter?” If you don’t already know what they are, as a home care, home health, or hospice agency concerned with marketing, you would be wise to learn. Marketing as we know it is changing based on the interactive conversations now possible between a business and its customers. According to Wikipedia, social media marketing (SMM) is the latest form of Internet marketing which seeks to achieve branding and marketing communication goals through participation in various social media networks. Basically, social media encompass many new forms of interactive and online media, including videos, images, and audio exposure. Sound like something for just the youngsters and geeks? Wrong. One of the largest and fastest-growing groups now on Facebook is senior citizens! Integrating SMM into your overall marketing efforts will give you a huge advantage over competing agencies. Let’s dive in!

Planning still applies

At the core of the SMM revolution are changes regarding the way businesses communicate — not just with customers,

but with vendors, employees, prospective customers and employees, and the media. The audience reach has been amplified exponentially. And because SMM is low cost or free, you can reach thousands for an investment of pennies and personal time.

The use of new SMM techniques might seem glitzy, frivolous, time-consuming, or just somewhat overwhelming. Remember, however, that no matter what medium or channel is being used for marketing, the key tenets still apply: definition of business goals, objectives, and overall process for execution. While you need to create the roadmap for marketing a business online, you must still decide what goals and resulting metrics you want to attain, and if it is right for your agency.

Specifically, SMM can help you increase the activity around:

- **Website traffic and user behavior:** Because SMM provides you with an instant reach to a broader audience, an increased number of visitors will be driven to your Web site. Use tools such as Google Analytics (which is free) to monitor which pages of your site visitors spend the most time on or visit the most frequently. This information can be very useful when deciding which services to promote.

- **Search engine optimization (SEO):** The shortest, cheapest, fastest, and easiest route to prominent Google rankings is to blog. In fact, nothing boosts your search engine’s standing better. Neither a press release nor a full-page ad in the New York Times will boost your search engine rankings as much as regularly updated blogs. For an example of a blog in the home care industry, visit mine at www.merrilyorsini.com.
- **Conversion and sales tracking:** Done correctly, it is possible to check metrics on who visits, downloads information, interacts with your agency and then refers to you, or actually purchases products or services. It takes some planning, but to really know if any campaign is working, metrics must be used.
- **Page views and ad exposure:** SMM is great for niche marketing. If you have a new service that you want to push or really showcase, it is possible to increase traffic to the page that showcases that new product or service. Rarely do I ever recommend advertising, but to combine Internet advertising (specifically Pay Per Click) with some SMM is a way to crosslink and drive traffic.

- **Growing brand awareness:** The more chances you have to flaunt your brand, the more chances there are that someone will remember it when there is a care need. Having a well-recognized quality brand also increases the perceived professionalism and expertise of your agency.
- **Business development and broader customer reach:** One of the many great benefits that SMM brings to the table is letting a company market to a broader audience for a smaller price. Using the open communication to which SMM lends itself, listen to this broader audience's requests and insights. Then use the information to tailor your company's services to the customer's needs.

Where to start?

Start by just observing. Go online to Facebook and Twitter and review home health care blogs to see how others are communicating. Here is a quick description of what I consider to be the top four current SMM outlets:

- **The blog** — One of the first SMM tools, the blog is a great way to boost communication and SEO. It allows you to post original content — advice, thoughts, current trends — and have others read it. A good blog should build interest, awareness, enthusiasm, and trust. A blogger who is an authentic, passionate expert with knowledge to impart draws the attention of users who are interested in the product or service. As trust is built through this communication, it becomes a customer generator.

Customers become company champions and encourage others to use the company's services. Additionally, there are many ways to market a blog through directories, PR, and SEO. If you don't already have one, consider the blog as the first step into the SMM world.

- **Facebook** — You may have seen this on Oprah, but Facebook is currently the fastest-growing social media Web site. In a nutshell, Facebook is a place where people create profiles or fan pages with information about themselves and invite others to be their friends. Think of the six degrees of separation theory. On a profile or fan site, links to videos, news articles, and blog entries can be posted. It has now become standard practice for companies and groups to create a Facebook presence. A quick search turned up several agencies with profiles. Check it out on www.facebook.com.
- **Twitter** — A little more difficult to explain, Twitter focuses on providing quick snippets of information based on what someone is doing at the current moment. Think of it as an interactive look into a person's daily activities, or micro-blogging. Tweets are posted via cell phones, the Web, or various applications and can be followed through e-mail, the Web, and blogs. So your next question is, "What is the application for a home care, home health, or hospice agency?" Well, you can tweet about a new local resource, helpful articles, or new services you provide at the

exact moment they launch. Or consider tweeting a new caregiver position that is open. Twitter can be a great recruitment tool. Take a visit at www.twitter.com.

- **LinkedIn** — Mainly a way to connect with others, showcase activities, and recommend people or services, LinkedIn is becoming more widely used to grow referral bases. The connector service allows those in your network to connect with others who are also in your network, and spreads the social networking to groups you belong to or are interested in as well. Additionally, you can update your status (what you are working on) and get others in your network to take notice. Take a look at www.linkedin.com.

There is a wealth of information to impart about integrating these great SMM tools into your home care marketing strategy. Take a few moments to begin learning about SMM and the world of interactive marketing. It promises to be the future of marketing, and ready or not ... has already been seen to have far-reaching impact on your agency's target clients, their families, and their referral sources.

About the Author: *Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is Managing Director of corecubed, a marketing communications company that specializes in monthly marketing programs as well as web and collateral design for the home care and home health industries. Merrily has been active in Internet marketing since its inception. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry, is Chair of the Private Duty Home Care Association, and serves on the National Association for Home Care and Hospice's Board of Directors. Orsini is a frequent national speaker, and for further marketing tips, can be followed on her blog at www.MerrilyOrsini.com, on Twitter @MerrilyO, and on FaceBook.*