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HOME CARE & PUBLIC HEALTH:
A RELATIONSHIP STEEPED IN HISTORY

Integrating the Web and Social Media into the Home Care Marketing Strategy

By Merrily Orsini



With the veritable onslaught of new and ever-changing technology of the last decade, businesses of all types and sizes are being forced to re-evaluate the efficiency and modernity of their marketing strategies. Those who have embraced Web and social media marketing are seeing some amazing results in brand recognition and customer loyalty. Why? Facebook boasts over 200 million users, and according to Eric Qualman, author of *Socialnomics*, YouTube is one of the top search engines in the world — which means that when companies integrate the Web and social media into their marketing strategies, they are able to virtually “hang out” with an enormous customer base.

As more and more people turn to the Internet to search for what they need, including care for their aging loved ones, home care agencies need to make their presence on the Web a priority and take advantage of the benefits of social media marketing. And while the task of overhauling your marketing strategy might seem daunting, if not frightening, having a plan before diving in will make the transition much easier.

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn allow you to create and interact with a community of colleagues, coworkers, and potential cus-

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tomers, but from a marketing standpoint, you’ll need to make sure you are getting the most out of these often-overwhelming sites. Start small with a well-planned strategy to make the social media integration process less cumbersome.

Set goals. First off, make a list of goals that you want to accomplish with your social media marketing plan. Perhaps you want to create awareness of your agency, interact with customers or other agencies and organizations on Facebook and Twitter, maintain a certain number of posts per week, or obtain a certain number of “fans” or “likes” within a given time period. Laying out all your goals

up front will help you determine exactly what you will need to achieve them.

Make time. Across all industries, static marketing is rapidly being phased out in favor of dynamic social and Web marketing, which means that these new, highly interactive marketing messages require constant attention and updates. Your agency will want to dedicate time and manpower to make sure your campaign stays fresh and relevant. From creating new content for posts to updating information on search engine listings to answering questions from your Facebook fans or Twitter followers, social media will certainly keep you on your toes. But if you make time to do the job right, the rewards will pay off in the end.

Join the discussion. After you’ve set aside the time and personnel for the job, it’s time to create a presence online and engage in conversation with your client base. Test the waters on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter with some informational posts and agency videos, working to establish the tone you want to set. Ask questions of your followers and be sure to follow up with any replies that you receive.

Analyze. Between each step, review your process and analyze what is and what is not working. It may take time to see true results from your efforts, but

analysis programs like Google Analytics can help you track your marketing return on investment.

While social media is all the rage in the marketing world these days, keep in mind that “tweeting” is not the only way to market your agency online. In addition to social media, a well-balanced Internet presence includes three fundamental elements that help present your message and give your agency exposure on the Web.

Beef up your website. Your website is the main source of information for your existing and potential clients. A well-designed and functional website gives your company a professional look and a leg up on your competition. Hiring a Web designer, developer, and search engine optimization (SEO) professional to create or revamp your site not only can improve the look of the site but can also increase its visibility on search engines, driving more traffic to your business.

Become a blogger. More and more

businesses are integrating blogs into their marketing plans as a way to provide helpful information and connect with their customers. Blogs are simple to set up and manage and posting relevant content like how-tos, videos, or industry insights on your blog will keep your customers and clients engaged. However, just as with Facebook and Twitter, blogs must be updated on a regular basis with fresh and interesting content, so make sure to dedicate time to your agency’s blog each week.

Get listed. Remember when you used to thumb through the Yellow Pages to find a local business listing? These days, with the ubiquity of computers and smart phones, nearly everyone can access the information they need with the click of a button, 24 hours a day. So it’s important to ask yourself, “If someone were to Google ‘home care’ in my area, would my agency’s name and information show up?” Make sure it does by utilizing local listing accounts like Yelp, Yahoo Local

Listings, and Google Places. These profiles are free to set up, easy to manage, and can give your agency a boost in search engine listings.

Don’t let the complexity of the Internet keep your agency from reaching its full marketing potential. Start simple when integrating Web marketing, plan out your steps to keep from being overwhelmed, hire professionals when needed — and most of all, have fun with it. Interacting with your clients online can give them a whole new perspective on your organization. Now, take a few deep breaths and dive in!

About the Author: *Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is managing director of corecubed, an Internet marketing communications company that specializes in the home care, home health, and hospice industries. She has been active in Internet marketing since its inception and is an 18-year veteran of the private duty home care industry, and served as chair of the Private Duty Homecare Association as well as on the board of the National Association for Home Care & Hospice. Orsini is a frequent national speaker and for further marketing tips can be followed on her blog at www.MerrilyOrsini.com, or on Twitter @MerrilyO.*