

SOCIAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES & PITFALLS

Social media is an incredibly useful tool for your hospital or health care system: it keeps your community aware of programs and services your organization offers, as well as timely issues that need to be communicated immediately. Clear and consistent messaging heighten your organization's credibility and visibility within your community. However, social media can also be dangerous; it has many pitfalls. It opens doors to negative reviews and nasty comments from unhappy customers, and the platforms your organization uses need constant monitoring by your organization's staff.

So, how should your organization balance the pros and cons of social media? There's no perfect answer but choosing the proper platforms and risk-mitigation techniques can amplify your hospital's mission, vision and values – and ensure stronger connectivity with your audience.

PLATFORMS

Social media platforms come in all shapes and sizes – from Twitter to TikTok. Here are a few tools hospitals use regularly:

Facebook

Facebook is one of the largest social media platforms globally, and thus a great place for entertaining content to reach a wide audience. Hospitals can use this tool to announce programs, services, awards, quality and safety commitments, and employee or patient spotlights. Community management is necessary and encouraged; ensure a staff member is dedicated to monitoring posts and discussion.

Instagram

Some hospitals and health care systems prefer image-based content, turning to Instagram for aesthetically pleasing imagery of locations, workplace culture and employee/patient storytelling. Important to remember: excellent photography is key for Instagram, as this platform is known for its "influencer" ways.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a solid platform to nurture relationships and business development. It allows you to find other professionals and talent in your extended network. If your organization is hiring, consider posting your open positions for qualified candidates.

TikTok

The newest on the scene, TikTok showcases authentic content in an entertaining way, and reaches the youngest audience. This platform could highlight the day in the life of a nurse or doctor or other behind-the-scenes events, humanizing your organization for your audience.

Twitter

Twitter is the platform for real-time conversation, updates on hospital activity, and emergency announcements, to name a few. Twitter can support both evergreen and moment-based content and is great for creating dialogue with followers and industry experts. To grow a following, however, attentiveness to this platform is required.



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REVIEWS: RANTS AND RAVES

Reviews on social media can solidify your organization's reputation – or create havoc. Excellent reviews boost your hospital's credibility and encourages community members seeking care to visit your facility rather than a competitor's.

- Welcome patient reviews following appointments, but do not incentivize a patient to leave a review. (As in, no gift cards, merchandise or complimentary services!) Satisfied patients will willfully leave reviews. Always remember to thank patients who leave positive reviews on your social media platforms.
- Poor reviews from customers, on the other hand, undermine your organization's hard work and dedication to patients and quality. Keep in mind that patients may post multiple times across platforms if they've had a negative experience, or may post false negative reviews, for example, if they are having a billing issue that is not easily remedied.
- Mitigation, in the form of a timely and considerate response, is vital for your hospital's image. When responding to a negative review, keep emotions at bay. Remember that large responses draw attention, so keep the response short and non-confrontational. Do not ask patients to remove bad reviews but thank the reviewer for their concern; do your best to address the concern in a general way publicly, and offer to speak to the patient personally.

A sample response can follow this format:

"Thank you for your feedback. I'm very sorry to hear we did not meet your expectations. This is definitely not the standard of service we aim to provide. I would like to speak with you personally to better understand the situation. My office staff will be reaching out to you to find a time we can visit. We will work hard to resolve your concerns."

DEFAMATION

If you fear a reviewer is defaming your hospital, you may have legal options. Proving the claim may be an uphill battle, as a reviewer may claim they were sharing an experience or opinion – and not stating actual facts. There are laws that support defamation claims, which include:

- False statement(s) of fact to a third party
- Reputational or material harm caused by the defamer
- Negligent or purposeful harm caused by the defamer

If the damage is significant, quantifiable and documented, seek legal counsel. Ultimately, the courts have the final decision.

SERVING YOUR COMMUNITY

Ultimately, social media should circle back to support your organization's mission, which likely centers around high-quality health care delivery to your community. Keep this in mind every time your hospital posts a tweet, an image or a news clip – and ensure the content upholds and safeguards your values.