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The Power of Your Online Presence

Healthcare leaders should not overlook the advantages of social media.

In less than two decades, social media has redefined how people interact, communicate and share information. For instance, according to the *2016 Nielson Social Media Report*, individuals who belong to Generation X (age 35–49) spend nearly seven hours per week on social media, followed by millennials (18–34), who spend just over six hours per week.

Although many healthcare CEOs appear in images and videos on their organizations' websites, few have a strong presence on social media. According to the 2015 Weber Shandwick report *Socializing Your CEO: From Marginal to Mainstream*, 68 percent of CEOs appear on their company website and 38 percent appear on their company YouTube channel, but only 28 percent are active on a social network.

A *Forbes* article published in March 2018 says many CEOs are reluctant to use their personal social media accounts to help their companies' brands, instead preferring to lead from behind the closed doors of their offices. Too many executives fail to realize the incredible opportunities and benefits of being active on social media, including the ability to engage with stakeholders and demonstrate your ability as a leader to listen and lead change.

Social media also can be used as a tool to help attract talent and win the trust of healthcare consumers. Your stakeholders want to know that you're operating in line not only with your leadership values but also the mission, vision and values of the organization. In fact, a 2016 study by G&S Business Communications found 64 percent of Americans think it is important for senior business leaders to have an active presence on social media and 46 percent equate senior business leaders' active presence on social media with keeping the public informed about their companies business activities.

If you don't establish an online presence, you run the risk of people drawing false assumptions. In the age of instant information, many people believe if they can't find something online, it doesn't exist. Additionally, your lack of online presence could send the message that you fail to keep up with current technology. Used effectively, social media gives you a platform with considerable reach to showcase who you are as a leader.

Below are just a few of the ways healthcare leaders can leverage social media.

Connect With Your Network

Have you ever wished you could be in more than one place at once? As an

executive with a demanding schedule, you must be highly protective of your time. Your schedule may not always allow you to make phone calls to stay in touch with the leaders in your professional network. Fostering professional relationships with your colleagues and peers is important, and social media platforms can serve as a bridge of contact between phone calls and in-person networking events. Building and maintaining your professional network using social media helps to:

- Increase how often people in your network hear from you
- Communicate apart from when you need something, such as a new job
- Celebrate special occasions, work anniversaries and birthdays

You don't have to wait for a monumental event to connect with the people in your network. When something thought-provoking happens, share it with your entire network. Sharing on social media begins with your own network, but you can expand your reach by using hashtags—words and phrases preceded by a pound sign. Hashtags create archives of messages on specific topics from social media users across the globe, connecting like-minded professionals. Using a hashtag, you can find every post ever made on a social media platform on your topic of interest, as long as the user making the post also used the same hashtag. Create a habit of regularly taking a few minutes each day to engage with your network through social media.

Though tempting, avoid delegating your personal or professional online

presence. Having someone else post on social media for you may save time in the short run, but you run the risk of your followers detecting inauthenticity in your brand, which is the opposite effect you want your online presence to have.

Just as your expertise in healthcare helps you thrive as an executive, your online presence can help you remain connected with the people who are most affected by your vision.

Learn From the Marketplace

Many people think of social media as a platform to share content, but monitoring online conversations is equally valuable as a way to hear and learn from customers, stakeholders, colleagues and even competitors. The reach and convenience of social media allow customers to express their views in ways never before possible, including sharing positive and negative experiences or opinions they may have about your organization. Healthcare leaders can potentially use social media to find out what patients and stakeholders are saying about their organization and even use that information to engage, resolve issues and boost satisfaction.

While it is not prudent to delegate your personal or professional brand to someone else, it is wise to assign the task of regularly monitoring your organization's social media to a dedicated professional or team. When a customer expresses dissatisfaction with you, your organization or its services on social media, your team is given the opportunity to connect with the customer, understand the issue and rapidly address the source of the problem. Social media can

turn a dissatisfied customer into a vocal advocate. People love to tell family and friends about how a less than desirable situation turned into a positive experience. In the past, without a platform to express their displeasure, these relationships between customers and an organization may have been severed without an organization's knowledge.

In addition to monitoring customer satisfaction, social media platforms such as Twitter can help you stay up-to-date with the latest news. We no longer have to wait for traditional media outlets for the latest news. In fact, many broadcast networks now accept video footage from citizens who capture current events. In 280 characters or less, news hits social media platforms almost as soon as it happens. You can set up alerts in the areas of healthcare most important to you to ensure you're notified any time a post is made on the topic.

Your online presence not only gives you an advantage with your customers, but also with peer leaders across the healthcare continuum. It's not enough to connect with other healthcare executives on an annual basis at conferences; private groups on social media can serve as an outlet for you to discuss challenges with fellow leaders and brainstorm solutions.

Lead Change by Example

Many websites today are modeled after social media platforms. Social media is setting the standard for website design, intranet layouts, online learning platforms, content management systems and more. When leaders are social media savvy, they can adjust to new online mediums as technology advances. Similarly,

staying abreast of social media trends keeps your technological skills sharp.

One of your top priorities as a leader is to support the development of others. Your online presence can help you lead emerging executives by example. Many professionals rely on their employer and organization to help them establish their brand. This could be a big mistake because few organizations offer professional development related to building employees' brands. But your online activity can send a message to your team members, mentees and successors about the importance of owning and developing your own branding strategy.

Embrace the Power of an Online Presence

Few executives currently have a strong social media presence, so now is the time to prioritize building a brand. The 2015 Weber Shandwick *Socializing Your CEO* report found CEO online engagement has increased by 122 percent since 2010. The longer you wait to invest time in developing your online presence, the farther behind you will be.

Creating a strong online presence demonstrates you are open to engaging in a two-way dialogue with stakeholders and you are comfortable with change. Having a social presence can put you in a powerful position to share stories and connect with a large audience for the benefit of improving health. ▲

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