

# eHealthcare Strategy & Trends

**Internet Management, Marketing, Analysis and Intelligence**

Volume 11 Number 6 • June 2009

www.strategichealthcare.com

## The Social Media Manager: Coming Soon to a Marketing Department Near You

by Stephanie Thum

It only takes a glance at the latest statistics from Nielsen Online and Facebook to see why healthcare PR, marketing, and business development departments are scrambling to learn more about and profit from social media. Facebook's fastest-growing user segment is people older than 30. Twitter's unique audience has grown by 1,382 percent, while Facebook's has grown by 228 percent in the past year, according to Nielsen Online. The same Nielsen statistics reveal that Facebook users spend almost three hours per day on

the site – a 170 percent increase in the past year.

The ability to reach a growing number of healthcare decision makers through online social networks, where they spend an increasing amount of time, suggests there is an emerging need for a uniquely qualified, social media-savvy manager to oversee and maximize an organization's social media presence.

However, there is no consistent, clear picture of the social media manager's role. Depending on the organization and its target audience,

social media could take the form of a podcast, a patient testimonial video on YouTube, the corporate blog, or a Facebook page – to name a few possibilities. Different options bring about the need for different skill sets and experience. Senior executives, media users, also don't grasp the potential of this new force in healthcare and may view social networking as an activity for teens and twenty-somethings. This lack of understanding makes it difficult to obtain necessary resources.

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## Hospitals Take Digital Signage to the Next Level

by Kathryn Stoppel

From one 42-inch screen to information streaming on every monitor in the hospital, digital signage solutions are as unique as the hospitals they support. Also called electronic billboards and corporate narrow-casting, digital signage, whether it costs \$1,000 or \$10,000, seeks to inform viewers in the most educational, eye-catching, and relevant way possible.

Two years ago, Flagstaff (AZ) Medical Center employed a 42-inch LCD screen and 10 to 15 PowerPoint slides to direct information to employees in the hospital's high-traffic dining area. Seen as a way to centralize communication and reduce the number of messages directed to the hospital's more than 1,900 employees, the \$7,000 installation included a monitor, software, and sound system.

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In addition to his responsibilities at the University of Maryland Medical Center, Bennett also regularly blogs and compiles data about hospital social media activity. He recently documented a sharp increase in hospitals' adoption of YouTube and Twitter. Between September 2006 and July 2008 – approximately 22 months – 100 hospitals established YouTube accounts. It took just 15 months, between November 2007 and January 2009, for 100 hospitals to launch Twitter accounts; as of mid-May, the number stands at 167. Twenty-five hospitals host blogs. There are 98 Facebook pages sponsored by hospitals. The number of hospitals starting a social media presence in one outlet or another grows every day.

However, across the broad spectrum of healthcare organizations, social media is still largely a novel concept in the executive suite. And, of course, there is the ever-increasing difficulty in obtaining resources. In rural areas, for example, where re-


sources are even more constrained than in the metropolitan hotbeds of social media adoption, garnering the help of a social media manager may entail heightened levels of creativity, according to John Eich, director of the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health in Madison, WI. "But people who like social media are like evangelists," Eich says. "Ask around your hospital, find someone who loves this stuff, and deputize that person to help you. It may be a younger person in the organization – someone who is good with a video camera and can post your hospital's footage to YouTube, for example. Or maybe it's a nurse on the night shift. Ask around!"

Hospitals interested in pursuing social media should open an account, watch for a while, and then decide if they want to pursue it long-term. "Invest a few days to set up a basic presence. If you get to the point where you want to dedicate serious resources, then it's time to come up with a strategic plan with goals and

milestones, including metrics for measuring results," says Bennett.

Resource-strapped hospitals also should match social media to strategic goals. "Don't just go for whatever is new and shiny. Pick a couple. YouTube is easy. Throw a video on, add a good description, go away, and you're done. It's like a static page that's well positioned to be searchable," says Eich.

In the end, it is about getting out there and getting invited to the discussions happening in social media. "Other hospital Web managers and I are having conversations with our executives about the power of Twitter. They remind me of conversations I had with businesses in 1994, to take the Web seriously," says Bennett. "The resistance I see now to social media is similar to the resistance I saw back then to the Web. Today, no organization would dream of not having a Web site."

*Stephanie Thum is a freelance writer in St. Louis. You can reach her at [stephaniethum@yahoo.com](mailto:stephaniethum@yahoo.com). *

## Hospitals Take Digital Signage to the Next Level *continued from page 1*

Now, says PR/marketing specialist Starla Addair, the system is live 24/7, staff members make requests to display information, and the hospital proactively uses technology to go beyond PowerPoint by taking the system online for training and crisis updates. Used primarily for internal communication, the center's digital signage now generates "buzz," according to Addair, and has become an integrated component of her department's communication outreach.

During the same time period, Riverside Medical Center in Kankakee, IL, went from having kiosks in two of its three lobbies to instead having one 42-inch video screen, with two more large screens

on the way. The new system may make the \$8,000 kiosks obsolete in the next six months. Using digital signage software from Four Winds Interactive, the hospital can update the new screens in real time, rather than rely on the PowerPoint solution used for the kiosks, and provide information on hospital services and events, physicians, and staff recognition. The screens also address issues the hospital was having in terms of wayfinding. "Current directories were not working," says Crystal Senesac, Riverside's marketing and public relations manager. "Because [digital signage] is a way to enhance wayfinding and because it has a marketing approach, it was a natural replacement."

### A targeted solution

Organizations are taking advantage of what digital signage does best: present current, strategic, audience- and location-specific information to a variety of constituents.

"Getting the message out to the right audience at the right time within the patient experience is paramount," says Robert Loeb, CEO of Vericom Corporation, a Roswell, GA, company that has 20 years of experience in helping hospitals communicate their messages. "It used to be that you could throw anything on the wall and it would stick. Not today. Audiences demand specific communications."

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As an example, Loeb compares a patient experiencing a three-hour wait before surgery to someone waiting 10 minutes for a scan. "You have to know your audience," he says, "and understand [that person's] mindset."

At Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia, messages are targeted to all audiences with information relevant to where they are in the system, whether they're on-site or at an off-campus location. Using Vericom's ChannelCare digital signage solution, the hospital is able to tailor its messages in real time, in sync with its mission and values.

The hospital currently uses 23 monitors, which range in size from 32 inches to 42 inches, to improve internal and external communications. Of the 23 monitors, 13 are in patient/staff areas while the other 10 are in areas frequented by staff only or are located in off-campus locations such as the fitness center, day care centers, and office buildings. "We're a close-knit institution," says Julia Goplerud, senior director of regional marketing and physician relations for Fox Chase. "It's important that all employees feel they are part of the communications and branding strategy and that patients are aware of the services and support we can provide them. I want to make sure everyone is experiencing the culture and flavor of the institution."

While internal staff may receive messages about employee recognition or meeting schedules, patients throughout the center may see a two-minute vignette on staff physicians, event listings, fund-raising opportunities, and cancer education information, or a series called "Fox Chase Firsts," which showcases the cancer center's achievements. Messages are tailored by site and audience, which means employees or parents in the day care center may receive information on

immunizations or field trips while patients waiting in radiation oncology may receive updates on whether a machine is available for use.

The monitors also display live video streams of town meetings and events for staff members who can't attend, and they were even used to stream the last presidential inauguration and the World Series playoffs. The goal, says Goplerud, is to make content increasingly robust. Most messages are produced internally by three or four marketing and communications staff members who have access to Vericom's content templates and library, which includes 3-D animations focusing on health and prevention topics.

Fox Chase also uses Vericom's SoundCare solution for callers temporarily placed on hold. The on-hold system is compatible with information shown on the monitors; however, information is specific for each medium.

#### **A holistic concept**

George Washington University Hospital also needed a more strategic approach in its digital signage, but didn't want to limit itself to one, 10, or even 20 big screens. Instead, the District of Columbia hospital partnered with Netpresenter, a New York software company, to communicate via thousands of plasma and PC screens, using the hospital's own computer infrastructure. The result is a mix of interactive PC screensavers and digital signage presentations.

"We were looking for a solution that staff, patients, and visitors in the hospital could access and that required no end-user training," says Gretchen Tegethoff, the hospital's chief information officer and director of information technology. "Messages also needed to be easy to post. Finally, [the solution] had to reduce clutter by replacing posters

and paper fliers. We found Netpresenter met all these requirements. [The product] was also reasonably priced and used existing computer infrastructure, which made it an easy choice."

Using Netpresenter software, the hospital has complete control over messages, which are targeted to the audience and monitor location. During the 2009 presidential inauguration, the Netpresenter system was used exclusively for communicating inauguration preparations and updates, including security information, sleeping arrangements, command center instructions, and transportation updates. "I don't know how we would manage such an event without this tool," Tegethoff says.

Internal hospital news, urgent information, and healthcare news items automatically imported from an online news site are broadcast on 1,200 staff PC workstations as an interactive screensaver and on large screens in restricted areas, such as staff elevator bays. Monitors in public sites, such as visitor elevator bays, display marketing-focused material for visitors and patients. A large flat screen in the lobby, set to go live in the next couple of months, will welcome visitors and provide routine information such as cafeteria or gift shop hours. Information also may be conveyed using mobile devices.

"Using existing screens, your message isn't just on a couple of big screens, but on thousands," notes Netpresenter CEO Frank Hoen. "There's nothing magical about big-screen digital signage solutions. The magic is getting your message across to everyone. And the best way to do that is to make sure your message is everywhere, targeted to each audience," he says.

"The fact that Netpresenter allows the targeting of messages to specific

audiences or locations is a big plus for us," Tegethoff says. "We now have one single system to inform and motivate staff, update visitors and patients, and alert everyone in case of an emergency."

The options for targeted audience presentations are nearly limitless. For example, a welcome message may be displayed at the entrance, news headlines might appear near staff elevators, and the lunch menu could be displayed on patient-facing monitors.

Netpresenter's emergency alert software notifies staff in critical emergencies, such as fire and floods, and is a documented part of the hospital's emergency management plan. For Netpresenter, whose software is being used in more than 30 U.S. hospitals, the emergency functionality is a logical extension of its service. The company helped develop AMBER Alert Netherlands, a system of all-media notification used by Dutch police to alert citizens when a

child has been abducted or is missing.

A George Washington University Hospital internal survey shows that employee satisfaction with hospital communication increased by 33 percent as a result of implementing Netpresenter's communication software.

#### Maximizing your investment

Although their digital signage solutions differ, both Loeb of Vericom and Hoen of Netpresenter say the bottom line isn't about software or flat screens, but rather communication.

"Traditionally, marketers plaster a hospital with big screens, but for effective digital signage, you don't need hundreds of plasma screens," Hoen stresses. "Think about all the other screens already available at no extra cost, such as PCs, kiosks, PDAs, and mobile phone screens." He advises hospitals to use a trusted and proven technology and to take advantage of existing infrastructure

so that the digital signage system is simple and cost-effective.

Netpresenter currently is offering non-profit hospitals its software, free of charge, limited to two screens. Its product fees typically start at \$75 each month or \$995 for a one-time purchase that includes content creation and management to cover 10 PC screens and one plasma/LCD screen. This starter pack also can be extended to include more screens, automatic content creation from sources such as an intranet or the Internet, and software to alert viewers in an emergency. The company also provides hosted solutions for small or medium-size businesses.

Vericom provides both software and hardware. Loeb says digital signage is affordable and demonstrates a return, but that marketers first must do their homework to make the most of their investment.

*Kathryn Stoppel is a freelance healthcare writer and editor living in Missouri. She may be reached at [dkstrop@cvalley.net](mailto:dkstrop@cvalley.net). eH*

## MY INTERNET ... Personal Solutions

### Shop the Internet for Kitchen and Bathroom Renovations

With the housing market in the doldrums, many owners are staying put and fixing up their homes. It makes sense to visit local retailers to view actual products. But once you have selected exactly what you want, a wise move is to check your choice's price on the Internet. At [www.Homecannex.com](http://www.Homecannex.com), you will find thousands of bath, kitchen, door hardware, and lighting items, as well as furniture. You will find everything to do with bathrooms and kitchens at [www.Faucetline.com](http://www.Faucetline.com). To compare prices at many Internet sites, go to [www.PriceGrabber.com](http://www.PriceGrabber.com). There you can investigate virtually any product category.

### Foreign Language Translator

Forget about purchasing a paperback foreign language dictionary or dusting off your high school or college text. Instead, get the pocket-size Nyrius LT12 Global Talking Translator. It translates English into 11 different languages, with the translation displayed in text and spoken. The device includes 700 travel-related phrases. Cost is \$50 at Amazon and other online and offline retailers.

### Staying in Touch When Outside the Country

Most U.S. cellphones won't work outside the country, with the possible exception of Canada. The best solution is to purchase country-

specific calling cards, available at small shops abroad, and then make calls on public or hotel phones. Another inexpensive solution is to use Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)), which you can access through your own computer and Wi-Fi connection or at an Internet café. For those who need to stay in constant communications, the answer is to rent a BlackBerry for international use. At [www.CellHire.com](http://www.CellHire.com), rental is \$49 per week, plus \$20 for delivery and set-up fee. Incoming and outgoing charges for calls and text messages vary depending on the destination and whether users want to keep their U.S. number. Vodafone has a similar offering ([www.Vodafonrental.com](http://www.Vodafonrental.com)). eH