

The Follower's Future

Where Social Media Is Headed in 2012



BY DELIA PAUNESCU / ASSISTANT EDITOR

With its constant pace, mercurial nature and endless updates, the world of social media can get very overwhelming. By October 2011, 1 minute out of every 5 spent on the internet worldwide was dedicated to social networking. That's based on data from 1.2 billion people around the globe, or 82 percent of the world's internet population, according to digital business analysis from comScore.

During that 20 percent of web time spent grabbing the online world by the horns, users may have patted themselves on the back for figuring out Facebook. Then Twitter came along. Just when they'd mastered hashtags, Google came out with Plus. And just as their Tumblr followers started reaching double digits, Pinterest took over the photo feeds. Most haven't even begun to consider the rising fame of Instagram and the photographers who love it. Yes, social media saw some exciting changes in 2011. But what do these inno-

vations mean for business in 2012? Thanks to sites like Mashable, magazines like *Wired*, newsletters like *VM's CLICK* and our corresponding annual conference, the divide between you and the internet intelligentsia grows less expansive.

In what's described as a "three-way brand page shootout" on technology site CNET.com, tech columnist Rafe Needleman concludes that the world's most popular social networking site is also the way to go where business interaction is con-

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cerned. “Facebook is where the power is, but Twitter’s clean design and interaction model makes it an attractive and necessary secondary platform for marketers to work on.” He added, “Google+ doesn’t have the features, reach or clarity to compete with these two power players yet. However, the clear and best course of action for a marketer or brand manager is to establish a presence on each platform. They can even reinforce each other to good effect.” It’s important to note that, according to Needleman, none of these sites offer adequate mobile experiences as each “presents a constrained view when called up on a smartphone.”

This coming year, the prevalence of smartphones is predicted to continue its growth.

According to Al DiGuido, CEO of marketing agency Zeta Interactive, in a column for eMarketing & Commerce (eM+C), consumers will spend increasingly more time accessing data on mobile devices, prompting marketers to reshape their websites in order to reap the benefits of this new mobile economy. Consequently, he supposes mobile search and advertising will “ramp up dramatically.”

According to AOL’s social media director Matthew Knell, social networking ultimately works best when you can establish a regular communication cadence with your customers, regardless of the platform. “It’s ok not to be everywhere and to limit yourself based on what your staff is capable of maintaining. It’s a faucet of content—don’t start the tap if you can’t deal

with the flow,” he told *Vision Monday*.

Knell went on to share his opinions with *VM* on the most popular social media sites out there, in terms of how they can benefit a business.

- **Facebook** is great for general purpose information and wide and diverse audiences, especially if you have supporting assets to display. Optimizing your OpenGraph tags will make your content look really attractive in the newsfeed.
- **YouTube** is great if you have a regular stream of video content that helps to tell your story in a way plain text can’t. YouTube videos should be entertaining since this is the primary purpose of visits there.
- **Twitter** is best if you have breaking or real-time content. Its ephemeral nature really requires you to keep communication constant, though. Otherwise, you’re going to get lost in the shuffle.
- **Tumblr** is great if you have a lot of visual assets that tell a story on their own. Photos, videos and short posts should be designed to be shareable and appealing. You may also use a Tumblr as a blog for your site.
- **Instagram** is developing a bit of a niche as a place to be creative with photos. If your brand is a very visual one, consider it as a way to tell your brand story using only pictures and filters.
- More and more, **Pinterest** is being used to sell products and services. See how other brands are using this new platform and determine what ideas you’d like to adapt.

“Engaging content and educating our patients about ocular diseases and new lens technology. That’s what our main social media focus is for both offices. The best thing that has been most effective for our social media campaign has been my personal Facebook page. Patients love the fact that they can see the other side of Dr. Lee. The connection is priceless. It fosters trust and also allows our patients to feel comfortable in referring their friends and family to our offices.”

—Derron Lee, OD, Midtown Optometry, Stockton, Calif.

- If you're a physical retail business, devote some time to ensuring your presences contain correct data on **Yelp, Foursquare and Google Places**, since these are the places, other than your website or social presences, where people will look for information. Take the time to review any comments and deal with negative ones with transparency and honesty. One bad review can kill a business, but being an active communicator can help to mitigate that risk.
- Use the new direction of **StumbleUpon** to help your evergreen content have life. Their new branded channels allow you to curate your "editor's picks" content.
- Don't forget the value of your own **blog**. Here, you can best manage and own conversations with your customers.

By now, you've likely heeded the advice of infinite articles telling you to get online and make your business present in some type of social media. The next step, Knell said, is setting consistent rules and cadence in your communication. "What matters most is how you deal with comments and how often you communicate with your consumers. Communicating in an open, honest and jargon-free way is possible. Make your content relatable to real world events," he stressed.

At the next level, Knell recommends investing in better analytics and tracking tools in order to gain an understanding of what social

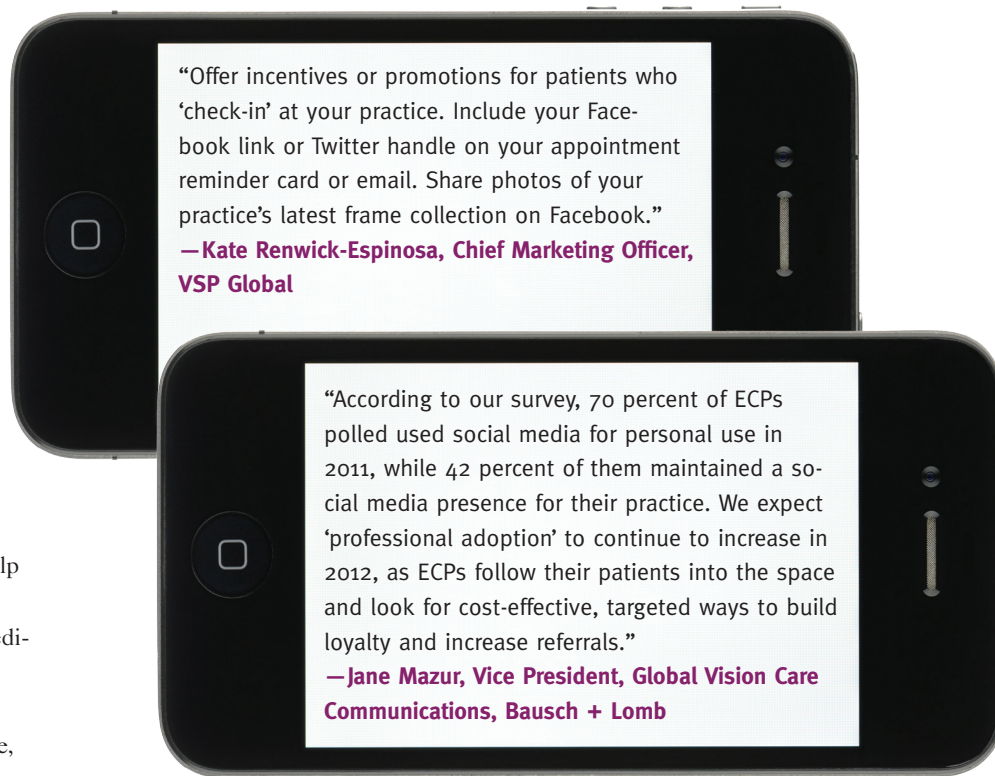
traffic does to your site. "How do Facebook and Twitter ads change the user experience? How often are other brands using new platforms like Pinterest and Instagram? And how are larger networks adapting to them?" He added that social media managers should end their expectation that people genuinely care about their brand. "They either have an affinity for your brand, or they don't. Don't expect them to parrot your message unless there is free stuff involved. Is that really engagement?"

Ultimately, Knell believes that real engagement is the key to social networking, both now and in the future. As he put it, "We're going to

see a new return to the true 'social network' where it really is talking about life and what you're doing on a human to human basis; talking to people as people and not as imaginary robots."

Since the optical industry is all about giving people what people need, vision-wise, *Vision Monday* also reached out to a group of web-savvy industry leaders, asking them to share what they thought should be a part of every social media initiative for the new year. Ahead is what they all agreed are the top must-haves for 2012.

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The Top ‘Can’t Miss’ Ideas for Social Media in 2012

BY JOHN SAILER / SENIOR EDITOR

GO MOBILE



With smartphones overtaking feature phones and tablet use rising at an unprecedented rate, it's become a requirement that anything you do on the web must be viewable on a mobile device:

“As phones and tablets continue to grow, it is more important than ever to make sure your main online presence [website, blog, apps] is mobile friendly,” said Nathan Bonilla-Warford, OD, president of Bright Eyes Family Vision Care in Tampa, Fla.

“Mobile!” agreed Sheila Haile, marketing director of ClearVision Optical. “With consumers buying more items through their phones than ever before, this is an extremely important aspect to consider moving forward.”

“The need to have social media sites ‘mobile ready’ will increase,” added Kathryn Simpson, marketing coordinator of The McGee Group. “Making sure posts are formatted for a mobile phone will be essential.”

BLOG ALONG



An integral part of any social media platform for years, blogs continue to plug along as a way of not only providing information but generating business as well:

Richard Hom, OD, MPA, of Family Eye Care in Tulare, Calif. and GrandRounds4ODs.com recommended having “a blog of original content that is linked to as many social media channels as you have time available.”

Haile observed, “More and more consumers read online, and how and what people read online will continue to evolve,” so she also suggested that having a blog continues to be a “can’t miss” idea for 2012.

MEASURE UP



You can't manage what you don't measure, so keep a close eye on the metrics of those you are reaching. Knowing their demographics is imperative for a successful social media campaign:

“Monitor, monitor, monitor,” said Dean Browell, executive vice president of Feedback Agency, the social media agency of record to The Vision Council. “Whether it’s ad spends in social networks or your community activity, pay attention and adjust accordingly for maximum effect. Watch the demographic differences,” he said. “Different demographics use different channels and at different times. People aren’t just signing up for social accounts. They are choosing where they’re spending their time and engaging. Pay attention to what your targets want.”

“Measurement shows how a social media page is growing and succeeding, as well as how it can be changed to better reach an audience,” added Simpson. “Knowing how to attract more followers and making sure they are getting the information they need is what will make social media marketing worthwhile.”

“If you happen to have a good following on any of your social media platforms, take advantage of measuring how much influence you have on your followers,” said Rob Tomas, customer relations specialist at VSP Vision Care. “Sites like Klout+ or PeerIndex can help analyze how well we reach out through our social media.”

“Metrics are absolutely vital,” concluded Hom.

EXPAND WITHIN TRADITIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



Most social media initiatives already include the use of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, but experts suggest drilling deeper into these sites to take advantage of their lesser known features:

For example, “For Facebook users, a great method to meet new friends is its Ask Questions feature, which allows you to formulate a question and tap into the 800 million users on Facebook,” said Tomas. “For LinkedIn users, engage in conversations by joining Groups that interest you or you find useful in bettering yourself in your industry or career. You can also follow professionals in groups that seem influential in group discussions.”

In addition, Jane Mazur, vice president of global vision care communications for Bausch + Lomb, suggested, “Use Facebook Insights to learn more about your fans and ensure your marketing efforts [and tone] reflect this audience.”

“For hardcore twitterers who like sharing thoughts and opinions, consider the use of hashtags (#) to control how to feed your tweets,” added Tomas. “Re-tweeting news to friends and family on Facebook, for example, can be fed by typing #fb. Re-tweeting pertinent articles to LinkedIn can be fed by typing #in.”

MAINTAIN MULTIPLE MEDIA



In addition to these social media sites which have quickly become commonplace, others are proliferating as well. It's important to be selective about which ones you choose and use them well:

“Focus,” implored Haile. “Select which channels work and focus on those. Maintaining multiple channels poorly doesn’t work.”

“For people who have multiple social media sites, consider using an all-in-one app on your smartphone, pad or computer to view your social feeds all at the same time,” said Tomas.

Bonilla-Warford recommends, “Going smaller. As the proliferation of apps and sites with overlapping features continues, many of these will fail or be acquired in the near future. Social

media ‘dashboards’ are becoming less useful the quicker things change. For both long-range strategy and short-term efficiency, select just a few key areas of social media and be effective.”

EMPOWER EMPLOYEES



Let's face it. Sometimes there's barely enough time to manage your practice let alone add social media to your list of responsibilities. Here's your chance to enlist your social media savvy employees:

“Get your staff involved,” suggested Mazur. “Empower them to help manage your social media presence, create content and respond to inquiries.”

“If you think you don’t have the time to engage in social media, perhaps you should be tapping the expertise of your staff,” said Kate Renwick-Espinosa, chief marketing officer for VSP Global. “Whether it’s your office assistant or optician, find someone on your staff who has a passion for social media, set some basic ground rules and policies, determine the right channel for your practice and let them run with it. Your employees can help you connect with existing and potential patients through fun and genuine online interactions.”

RE-EVALUATE REVIEWS



Encouraging reviews, positive ones of course but negative ones as well, will not only drive traffic to your door but will also demonstrate to potential patients how you react to all types of consumers:

“The importance of having a diversity of other people express their appreciation is becoming more significant, both for social proof and search

engine rankings,” said Bonilla-Warford.

“If your patients are happy, invite them to spread the word,” said Mazur. “Place your social channel links or Yelp locations on appointment cards and office materials.”

Renwick-Espinosa explained how both positive and negative reviews can benefit your practice: “It’s important to claim your business on online review sites and encourage your patients to share their experience. Yelp is one of the leading review sites with more than 22 million reviews and over 200,000 people searching for ‘optometrists’ every month. By claiming your business and monitoring the activity on your listing, you have another way to engage with patients. They may become advocates for the experience your private practice delivers, and their review may attract new patients.”

She continued, “Don’t be intimidated by negative reviews. Consumers expect to come across bad reviews online. If you’re searching for a restaurant review and everyone is perfect and rated five stars, you’re likely to be suspicious that it isn’t credible. As a business owner, you can set yourself apart by how you respond to a negative review. Instead of fearing negative reviews, treat them as an opportunity to let your customer service shine by addressing the issues head on as soon as possible. Find out what went wrong and reply directly on the site. By righting the wrong publicly you will build credibility of your customer service and gain trust with others who are reading the reviews.”

GO TO THE VIDEO



Video remains among the most popular media on the web, so be sure to continue using it if you already are and definitely start if

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you haven't already:

“Get your practice on YouTube,” said Alan Glazier, OD, owner and founder of Shady Grove Eye and Vision Care. “Make some short videos. They are free and easy and can bring many benefits.”

“Add video or slideshare to enrich content,” added Hom.

A FEW MORE ‘CAN’T MISS’ IDEAS



Some social media suggestions defy categorization but are helpful nonetheless. Here are some final tips from our web-savvy optical leaders:

“Add your social media links to all of your web properties,” said Laurie Bergman, AOA social media manager.

“Use social email marketing more effectively, like Demandforce, Smile Reminder, Websystem3, etc.,” said Glazier.

“Over 250 ECPs and 150 practices already have a presence on Google+,” said Bonilla-Warford. “Major improvements have been made, and the positive effect on search engine ranking is undeniable.”

“Don’t be distracted by the savvy users. Doing something cool certainly makes you feel good, but be careful that you’re only targeting a very savvy few,” said Browell.

While these are the top ideas our social media mavens of the optical industry suggest for success in 2012, there are plenty more. Choose the ones that work for your practice and come up with some of your own to make sure that you take advantage of the techniques that will surely help you build your practice like never before.

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VM’s Quick Guide to Today’s Social Networks

Facebook – The world’s most popular social networking site, currently clocking in at 800 million users. While pages (those used by brands) still have some limitations not found in personal profiles (those used by individuals), it is widely believed to be the most effective way to reach consumers.

Twitter – Bringing mini-blogging to the masses in the form of 140 character updates. Twitter’s brevity encourages instant information which businesses can parlay into on-the-scene updates to connect to their audience.

Google Plus – Google’s foray into social media, still a very new platform but growing fast. It recently allowed the creation of brand pages, allowing marketers to stake their claim in this latest piece of the internet pie.

Tumblr – A fully customizable blog hosting platform allowing users to post text, images, videos, links, quotes and audio. The platform is also network heavy, encouraging users to “like” and “reblog” other users’ postings.

YouTube – The world’s foremost video sharing site. Businesses can use their own profile to share self-produced videos with an audience, as well as curate their favorite videos from around the web.

Pinterest – The newest and most rapidly rising social platform, Pinterest is a visually-based internet pinboard that allows users to create and curate photo collections which they can share with their followers and friends. For business, the images easily link to an external site, encouraging users to purchase items they’ve expressed interest in.

Instagram – An iPhone-only app which enables users to take photos, apply a color filter and then share the photo to their social network of choice. Users can also rate photos, enabling the most popular snapshots to gain their own internet notoriety.

StumbleUpon – A type of web search engine that recommends internet content to users, who are encouraged to discover and subsequently rate those suggestions (which have been personalized using the individual’s postings on other social media platforms).

Yelp – The local business search site has turned to social networking, allowing its users to rate and review their experience at any and all establishments. Most recently unveiled Yelp Deals, tapping into the bulk buying market made popular by Groupon and Gilt Groupe.

Foursquare – Location-based social networking exclusive to mobile devices. Users “check in” at an establishment using their smartphone’s GPS capabilities. Businesses can encourage checking in by offering coupons or discounts, which are unlocked by consumers via the app.

Google Places – Local platform from the mega search engine that allows businesses to upload photos, videos and descriptions telling consumers about themselves. The information pops up when one searches for a type of business in a particular area.

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