Untangling the web

Warren Knight, social media and digital commerce expert, provides an introduction to social media for the therapist

By using social networks in the most resourceful way, a therapist can harness social media to build connections, promote their therapy services, target marketing to a captive audience with an active interest, and instil trust in clients.

Social media acts as a channel of communication that bridges the gap between the impersonal online experience and personal interaction. In this article, I will look at some of the main social networking sites therapists can use, offer advice on appropriate and effective social media usage, and some tips on driving visitors to your website through social media.

**Tweeting**

With more than 200 million users, Twitter can make it easy for businesses to connect with potential clients and to share their brand with people in the industry. Having registered your account with details such as name, email, profile picture, business description and web address, it is then possible to ‘follow’ business contacts, industry figures and clients, so that their tweets will appear on your newsfeed – and vice versa.

Avoid the risk of isolating contacts and customers through uninteresting, uninspiring and useless tweets; with only 140 characters for each tweet, make it worth the read. Consider only tweeting three times a day so that followers don’t have an overload of your tweets on their timeline and make tweets original and brand specific, such as new products and treatments, time-specific special offers and promotions, industry trends, developments and news, interesting and relevant links, blog updates and so on.

At the heart of every tweet should be the customer – ask yourself what this tweet will give your customer; how can they use it; how will it help them? An appropriate photo and commenting on your followers’ tweets will help increase brand awareness and create a positive image. Measure the effectiveness of the content by monitoring followers who ‘retweet’ your tweets and replies to your tweets.

**Linking in**

Reid Hoffman’s LinkedIn is a social networking site for professionals, boasting 100 million users. Ideal for business to business (B2B) marketing, it is also an invaluable business profile, similar to a CV, to link to your website and other social network pages. The LinkedIn website allows professionals, companies and the public to connect on a working level within their industry, for business purposes and job opportunities.

Make sure that your profile is complete, connected and consistent with your business, with information including education and career history, achievements, what your business can offer contacts and any relevant website links. The more industry-specific keywords used, the higher you’ll be in search results. Seek recommendations from existing clients and business contacts to boost your brand image.

Therapists could use LinkedIn to connect with people in their industry, gain new clients, create events and groups, build brand awareness, and also find new employees. LinkedIn allows people to post questions, so provide high-quality answers to establish yourself as an expert in your field. Integrate your LinkedIn profile with Twitter updates and blogs, and experiment with other relevant applications such as polls for market research, and Company Buzz to track what is being said about your company.

**Facebook**

Facebook is the most well-known social networking site with 800 million subscribers – 62 million in the UK use Facebook for an average of 60 minutes a day. Facilitating personal engagement and interaction, Facebook can help propel your brand to the forefront of your customers’ – and their friends’ – minds, as they share their experiences with their online social community.

Both personal and business profiles are available on Facebook.

To register your profile on LinkedIn, visit http://uk.linkedin.com

To sign up for Twitter, visit http://twitter.com

To register for Facebook, visit http://www.facebook.com
Any shared content on social media sites should be engaging, relevant and encourage people to share it; remember to KISS – Keep It Significant and Shareable. Create content that fans can recommend or pass on to other people. A Twitter follower may link your blog on their account, or a Facebook fan may ‘like’ a product or treatment, or recommend an offer to others, thus potentially encouraging their friends to become fans – and all are potential customers.

Keep your target market on their toes – choose content, pictures and links that stimulate your audience’s curiosity. Consider their specific needs and interests when developing your content, for example, special offers on treatments, news updates relevant to your industry, events attended and awards won. Sponsored stories can be successful, as can linking with other relevant sites that are current and topical; common ground will encourage people to talk more.

Make sure it’s easy for people to leave a recommendation or post an opinion – word of mouth is one of the most valuable marketing tools. Don’t be afraid of negative opinions – it may be the voice of that one customer that changes your approach to future consumers.

Another great way to promote your therapy services is to find experts. Cut through the barriers surrounding very well known people and just Tweet them, respond to their blog or post a question. Make yourself interesting and maintain regular contact and you are more likely to get noticed and receive a response. If you can offer them a product or treatment for free, they are more likely to publish a comment on your service.

**LEAD strategy**

The best way to develop the most appropriate and effective social media usage is to implement the LEAD strategy:

**LISTEN:** Listen to your customers to find out what interests and engages them, and take your competitors into consideration. For example, if a client is talking about a certain procedure from another salon that you haven’t invested in, create an online poll for your clients to answer regarding new treatments or equipment to discover if it is something they would be interested in.

**EXPERIMENT:** The best way to find out what works for your business is trial and error, but try not to invest too much time and money in a small project that may not work out. Take advantage of existing proven solutions, many of which are free, for example, ratings and reviews when advertising a mother and daughter day at your salon for a discounted price in order to see if you are successful in building brand awareness.

**APPLY:** Put the results from your experiment into action – by providing customers with a compelling reason to use social media, you are expanding your brand. Share the success of the mother and daughter day with all your followers/fans on all your social networking sites. A free social media and marketing dashboard to bring all of your social media platforms into one place is MarketMeSuite (www.marketmesuite.com).

**DEVELOP:** As social media is constantly changing, you need to make sure your brand is up to date with all the new tools and technology.

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**Monitoring social media results**

When monitoring your social media results, do not just assume everything is working – continually watch, test and assess.

Monitor your Facebook fans (visit www.facebook.com/insights to view data including total, and new, fans, plus demographic breakdown by age, gender and geographical location, mentions and interactions), Twitter followers, LinkedIn connections, and comments on blogs.

Check your search engine optimisation (SEO) rankings (a good website is http://googlerankings.com) and consider possible ways of driving more traffic to your website. The social media world and your target audience will be in constant change and what works Tuesday morning might not work on Sunday afternoon.

Use some of the available social media tools to monitor your channel performance, such as Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics), making sure you turn on the social media and e-commerce options, which can specify the number of visitors to your website and the sources of traffic. Run regular reports into what your clients are reading; where they are coming from; how they found you; what they chose to share; what generated the most comments, and use the information to amend your content.

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**Spread the word**

Therapists may wish to blog about their therapy business, and one free and easy to use website for this is WordPress. Content should be relevant to your business, such as information on products and services, recent industry news, latest developments in your field, and events and seminars attended.

Make sure that you maintain brand image consistency and, to establish yourself as an expert in your field, ensure information is high-quality, topical and useful.

Drive visitors to your blog and build an audience by promoting it via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and pull in leads from these websites. Set up an RSS feed by clicking on the RSS button, which allows readers to subscribe to your blog. RSS (or Really Simple Syndication) allows people to subscribe to receive updated posts as soon as they are published. I would advise blogging between one and two entries a week to improve your search engine ranking, without isolating subscribers through information overload.

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**For more information, visit http://www.wordpress.org**

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**– the former tend to connect friends and family; the latter connect industry contacts.**

The two can be connected by starting a fan page or a group. A fan page allows fans to ‘like’ the page and receive updates on your business, helping to promote brand presence and share news/events with their community. Unlike a fan page, members have to be invited to join a group. When creating a business account, fan page or group you can include information including name, address, phone number, email, web address and a logo or image. It is then possible to select applications to create an event; integrate a blog; create a poll; allow customers to review your products and services; integrate your Tweets; or display YouTube videos.

Build your business profile around your brand image – displaying photos suggesting drunkenness or a wild character may not build confidence in the potential customer, so be mindful of what photos you choose.

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**For more information, visit http://www.facebook.com**

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Business | Social media

Driving traffic to your website

When using social media, one of the biggest questions is ‘how can I drive more traffic to my website?’ A few tips on how a business owner could drive traffic towards their website include:

1. If you’re launching a new site, or publishing new content, write an introduction and submit it to social sites like Digg (http://digg.com), Reddit (www.reddit.com) and Now Public (www.nowpublic.com). A share site allows you to submit content to be judged by other users and increases business exposure.

2. Place a free ad for your company on ads’ere (www.adsere.com), which is an online trading platform that allows you to upload unlimited ads free of charge.

3. Offer something for free or at a discount or special offer. People often tell their friends about good deals.

4. Bookmark your site on Del.icio.us (http://delicious.com) and consider adding a Del.icio.us button to your homepage.

5. Advertise your site on Craigslist (http://london.craigslist.co.uk). Free, relevant and localised, Craigslist is an online community featuring classified advertisements.

Case study - Mary Atkinson, MFHT

I wanted to drive more visitors to my website and, although social media seemed overwhelming at first, I started by changing my website to Wordpress so that I could have a blog (www.maryatkinson.com) and update my own website information easily.

I publish two new posts a week on my blog to encourage search engines to pick up the updates, which helps improve my Google ranking. My blog entries usually contain useful information, my aspirations, events, interviews with other therapists to promote their work, course details and available treatments. I may also blog about any current, topical news that I would like to comment on or raise awareness.

A good tip is to set up Google alerts. I receive alerts and links daily for up to date information on the web about Indian head massage and massage for children, which I can then utilise in my own blog.

My website is much more interactive now, with visitors who are looking at training courses then being directed to a relevant blog entry. It offers more information and encourages people to stay a bit longer and discover other areas of my work. Recently I was asked to provide a seminar on ADHD and also write an article for Bamboo, a Canadian magazine, about my book Healing Touch for Children, when the editor followed a Google link to my website through one of my blog features.

I then set up a Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/MaryAtkinsonHolisticTherapyCourses) to keep people up to date with courses, special offers, talks and so on.

I try to avoid bombarding people with selling and provide general information too, such as a link to a newspaper article about massage in schools or a link to nominating the

6. Set up links via your social media sites, in particular Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Online customers are three times more likely to trust recommendations from fellow social network users than from online adverts. Facebook has had 22 million people make a purchase based solely on their recommendations. The social customer is 35 per cent more likely to buy a ‘liked’ item purely because they trust their fellow users, with 25 per cent of customers connecting with brands on Facebook to receive discounts and 23 per cent of Twitter users following businesses to find special promotions or sales.

How you act online is your virtual CV. It’s a footprint of behaviour that never goes away, so make sure you represent your brand appropriately to ensure you maintain and grow your online following.

Define your online voice according to your business image and make sure the message that is on your business website matches the message you are putting across on the various social networking sites.

An incredible journey

The world wide web (WWW) was invented in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee, and although seemingly alike, the WWW and the internet are not the same thing. The WWW is a way of accessing information over the internet; the internet is a network created to bring computers together globally.

Web 1.0 TheDot.com was invented, and four years later the first web browser was running successfully on the Windows operating system. Microsoft Hotmail was launched in 1996 and Google two years later. Web 2.0 was key to the development of web-based communities, web applications and hosting services, and saw the onset of social networking and video-sharing websites. Currently at Web 2.5, the WWW has been combined with the internet to offer the most impressive technology yet, with the past few years seeing social media and sharing information taken to the next level by platforms like Wordpress for blogging and Twitter for micro-blogging.

Warren Knight is a social media and digital commerce expert with 20 years of experience in helping small to medium size companies sell products and services globally. He is a speaker, consultant and author, who specialises in social media marketing, and is co-founder of Glooiple, the UK’s first ‘social sharing’ e-commerce platform designed for SMEs.

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