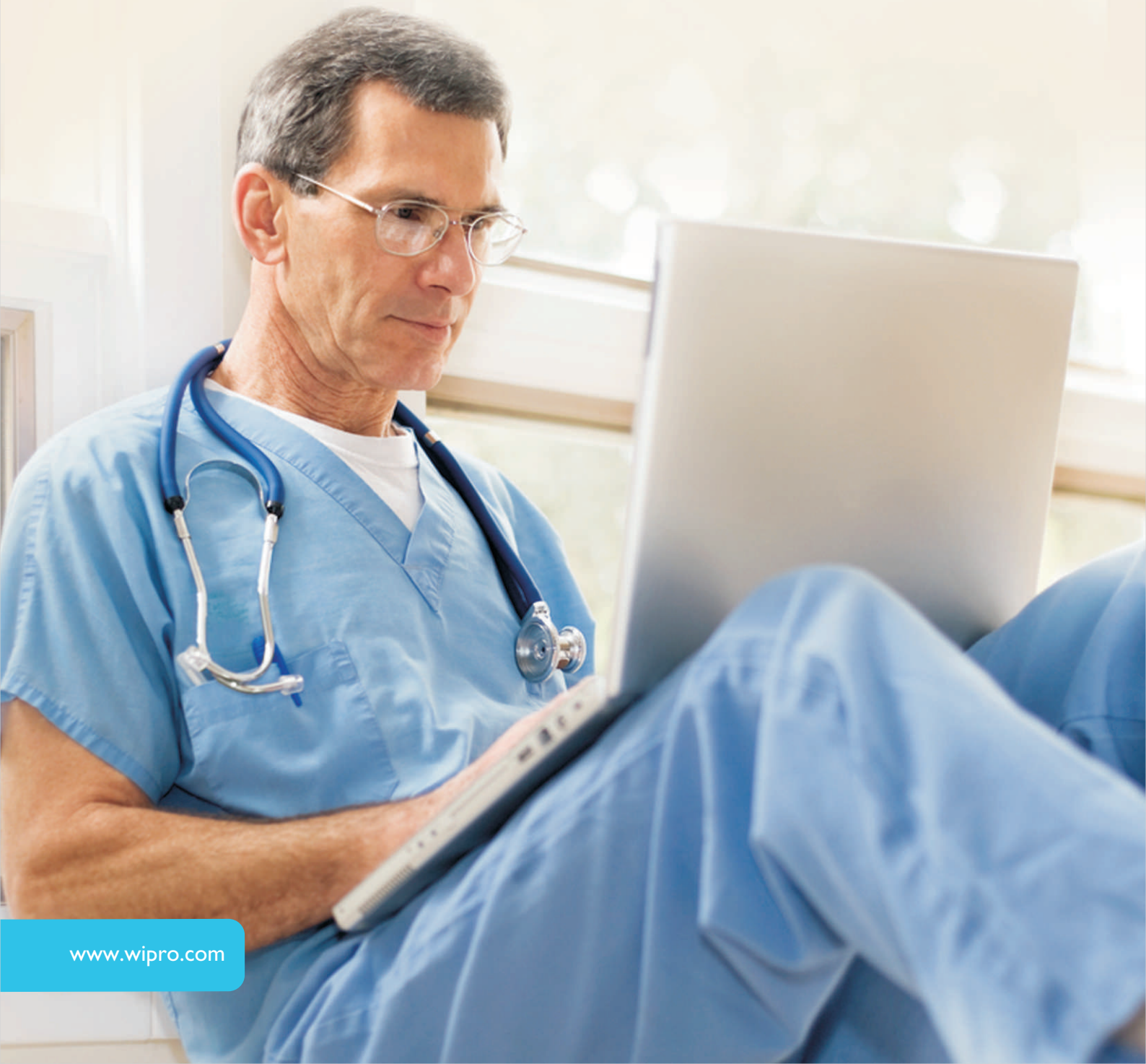


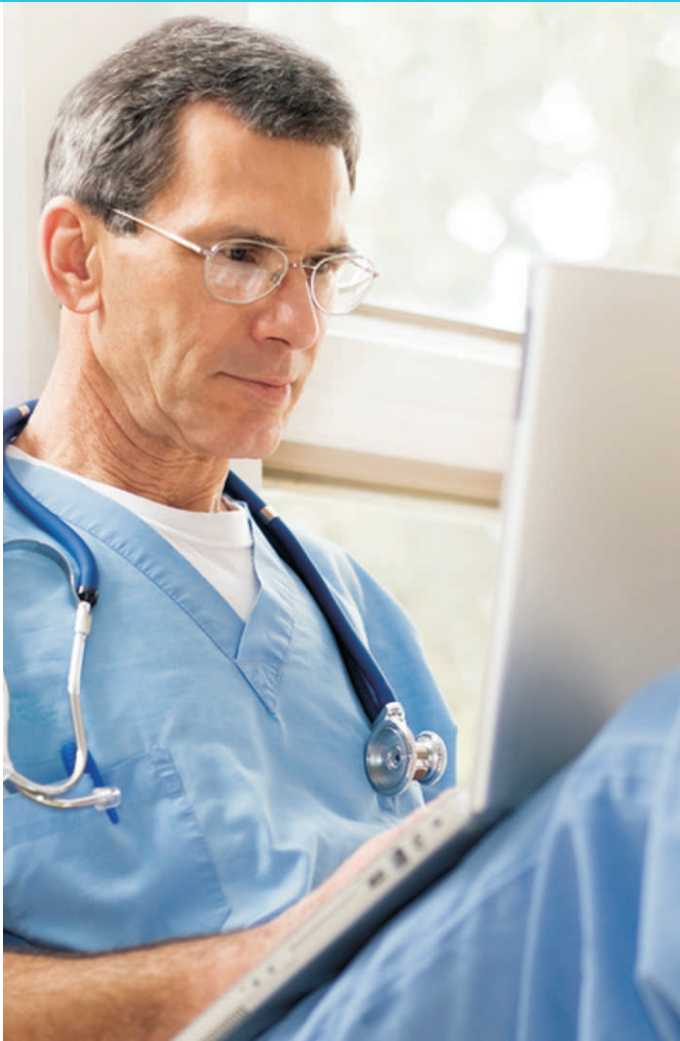
Transforming Healthcare through Social Media

Social media has moved beyond being a tool for young individuals to share their private lives (pictures, messages) to fostering serious discussion on technology and business.



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Introduction

Social media has moved beyond being a tool for young individuals to share their private lives (pictures, messages) to fostering serious discussion on technology and business. Increasingly driven by regulatory pressures, the need “get it right the first time” and minimize costs remains a concern in the healthcare industry. Customer feedback to improve business has thus become very important. User generated content in the form of peer reviews on service/ products often paves the way for businesses to understand any unique requirements as well as pain points of the existing services they provide.

Social media is making interactions between end users and service providers possible by providing relatively simple, easy to access (one can access social media even using a mobile phone) and unbiased platforms for sharing feedback. Little wonder then that many healthcare providers in the world are on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogs.



Why is social media important in Healthcare?

Discussions around personal health, and by extension healthcare, are no longer private issues. Citizens today are taking keen interest in their health and prefer sharing health related information with their peers. With governments across the world re-looking at their healthcare systems and taking measures in a bid to extend healthcare benefits to as many citizens as possible, public health and associated policy remains a key topic of discussion. At the same time, the internet has emerged as the main medium to enable such information sharing, with social media taking the lead.

A recently concluded consumer survey in the US says

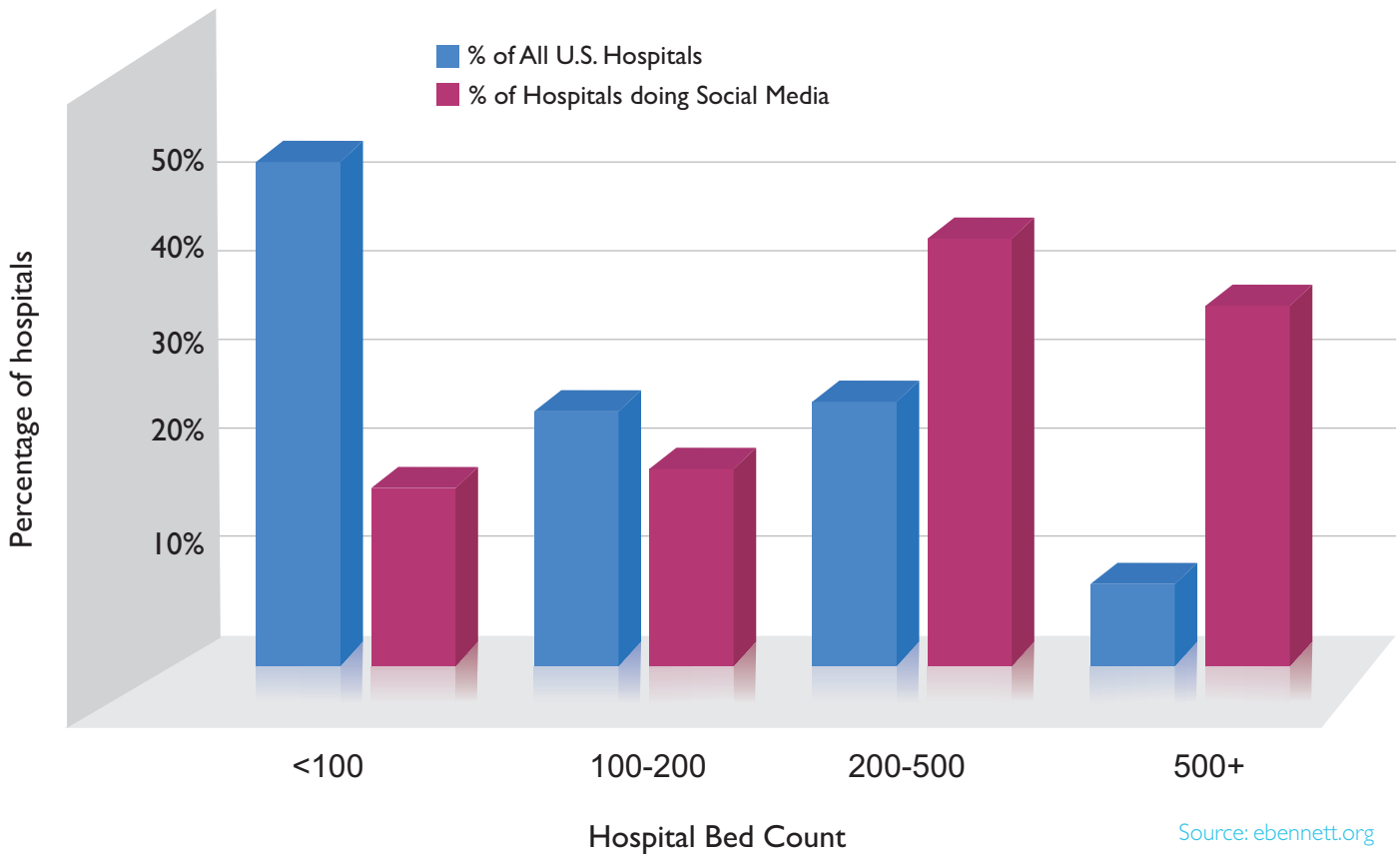
- 60 Million Americans exchanged their medical experiences online with each other last year.
- Almost 72 % of patients searched for online information before or after a doctor visit.
- 890 hospitals in the US used social media to engage with their patients

(Source: <http://ebennett.org/hssl/>)

Other key healthcare trends for 2010 include:

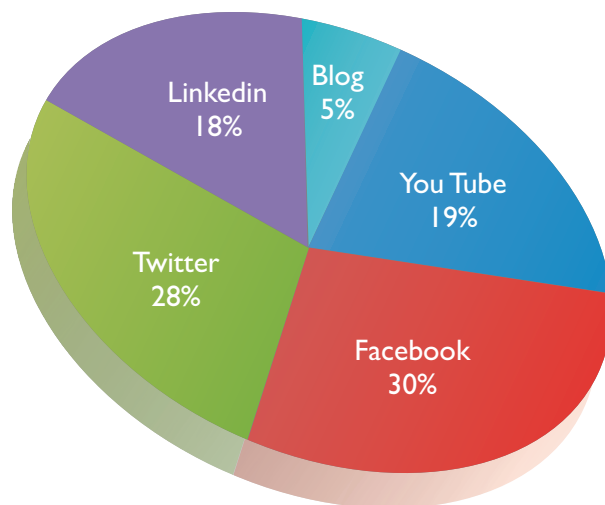
- 73% of US consumers consider being physically fit important to being 'well', with 74% including 'feeling good about themselves'.
(Source: The Hartman Group, August 2010)
- An estimated 500 million people worldwide are expected to be using mobile healthcare applications by 2015.
(Source: Research2Guidance, November 2010)
- There were nearly 17,000 health apps available in major app stores in November 2010, with 57% of them being aimed at consumers rather than healthcare professionals.
(Source: Research2Guidance, November 2010)
- The heaviest use of health or medical related apps is by young adults: about 15% of those aged 18 to 29 have such apps, compared to 8% of users aged 30 to 49.
(Source: The Pew Internet Project, October 2010)

Another study highlights the efforts taken by hospitals to use social media to their benefit. The graph below illustrates the same.



It clearly shows that larger hospitals are early adopters of Social Media. Hospitals with a bigger patient base have clearly more scope to engage in more user generated content. Also most big hospitals such as Mayo Clinic, who for the last 100 Years have relied on word of mouth to propagate their services, are rapidly adopting social media and have dedicated personnel who are engaging patients like never before.

The same source also indicates that there are a total of 2,337 hospital social networking sites in the United States today. State wise, New York is the clear leader with almost 253 sites across various hospitals. California is second at 144. Channel wise, both Facebook and Twitter are equally popular, with You Tube and LinkedIn coming in second. Blogs are a distant third.



Prevalent models of social media engagements in the healthcare industry

In healthcare Social Media has been used consistently for recruitment, Sharing Ratings, Introducing new products & Services and Awareness Creation. Let us look at these models with some current examples.

Recruitment – Since the industry requires specialized skills, organizations have moved beyond placing advertisements in conventional media to more targeted social media channels such as focused websites (those of medical schools), blogs (written by industry professionals, students) and various professional networking sites such as LinkedIn (dedicated pages, profiles, job postings, announcements). Also, since most of the target audience for recruitment is mainly under 30 years of age and social media savvy, organizations prefer reaching out to them on platforms they are most accessible – social media. For example the HCA group (<http://www.acareerathca.com/>) actively uses twitter (@acareerathca) to advertise for open positions in the hospital. These positions are mostly niche clinical positions and the requisite skills here are not easily available in the market.

Facilitating customer ratings – Hospitals are increasing using blogs as tool for customer rating and feedback. Some organizations also allow users to blog about their experiences on the company blog or link the blogger's personal blog to their company website. Prospective customers always see more value in peer reviews as compared to company generated content such as advertisements/ brochures.

Todd Linden, the CEO of Grinnell Regional Medical Center in Iowa, used his blog to publish the Patient Satisfaction Ratings. Though the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS), published jointly by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS) and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), are published online, it was interesting to note that Mr Linden used blog to publicize the result rather than using traditional media engagement models like a press release. (Source: <http://toddlinden.blogspot.com/2009/02/numbers-are-in-and-winners-are-patients.html>)

Incidentally most hospitals with high integration of social media in their marketing & communication plan have done better than their peers in the HCAHPS. A good example is Sarasota Memorial in Florida which is active on Twitter ([@SMHCS](http://www.smh.com)) with 1,230 followers as well as on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/SarasotaMemorialHospital?ref=mf>). This is a good example of how a Healthcare provider that has incorporated a two way communication channel with its patients, physicians and community is seen as a symbol of an evolved organizational culture. Sarasota has a 6 % advantage over its competitors in the HCAHPA ratings and is in the 'Definitely would recommend' category.

Introducing new services and Patient education – Many hospitals use blogs to introduce new services and to educate patients, particularly with increasing focus on preventive care as a method to reduce costs. The Holy Cross Hospital, part of the Catholic Health East group, has blogs dedicated to each therapeutic group. Most of the blogs have information on new therapeutic methods, preventive health and other general health information including recent awareness campaigns. Each blog group has its own set of patient testimonials and comments on the benefits that the patient received from the hospital.

(Source: http://www.holy-cross.com/main2.php?main_id=10&sub_id=175).

Awareness Creation – In a bid to enter new markets, particularly developing countries, companies traditionally relied on qualified third party research to understand local culture and its impact on business potential. Today, a large portion of that research is being replaced by user discussions on dedicated websites. A good example is Johnson & Johnson's BabyCenter chain of websites that focuses on expecting mothers' and children's health. It not only provides valuable information on pregnancy related issues, but also allows users to blog or share their views via discussion boards. Discussion topics include rating/ endorsing gynecologists, tests during pregnancy, baby products, feedback on hospitals and facilities, traditional birthing/ post birth practices versus modern practices and exercise routines during and post pregnancy.

(Source: <http://www.babycenter.com/>)

The site first started as a pilot in the UK in 1997 and has today spread to 22 markets worldwide. It currently has over 100 million members including 20 million new visitors every month and it available in 12 languages. BabyCenter is on Twitter and Facebook too.

Another example is when some researchers at The Massachusetts General Hospital (Mass Gen) came up with an iPhone application for locating the closest emergency room anywhere in the US. Mass Gen, with a very mature social media policy, created a YouTube video about the app and pitched it to bloggers to use the application. They also tweeted the app and posted it on their face book page. This led to the app getting listed on media sites like Boston.com and Wired.com's Geek Dad Blog. The YouTube video had 1146 views and the other social media sites helped take it to many thousands. Had traditional media been used for publicizing the application, such results would not have been achieved in the short time frames. (Source: <http://lisaneal.wordpress.com/2010/12/03/mgh/>)



Key concerns in using social media in Healthcare

A key concern with using social media in business has been the reliability of information. In heavily standardized and regulatory driven industries such as Healthcare, it becomes imperative to have well recognized/ accredited sources of information. For instance, a department of HHS approval could become far more valuable than 100 user reviews on a product.

Due to increased privacy laws and regulation, healthcare centric discussions need greater moderation than any other industry. This also extends to social media in terms of defining clear criteria/ guidelines for how much of content to share and in what form. According to Lee Aase, Manager Syndication and

Social Media, Mayo Clinic, HIPAA does not prevent individual patients from presenting their own story on social media. However, when they talk about a family member, then the social media risk management team (of Mayo Clinic) de-identifies the patient with either an alias or just the first name to protect patient identity on the social media site. If the hospital has to upload a patient video they get a consent form just like one would do in a TV interview. This way the hospital is able to sustain itself in keeping with the boundaries set by HIPAA. (Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O60KBugBtFM&feature=related>)

The future implications of social media on Healthcare

While it is important to get feedback from customers, organizations must know how to incorporate this feedback in a meaningful way in their business and brand strategies. In keeping with that, one can be expected to see the impact of social media in the following areas:

Brand monitoring and management

Social Media in healthcare could become the number one source of brand monitoring. Currently not too many Healthcare firms are doing that. But organizations outside the healthcare industry, such as Dell, have built their reputation by monitoring their brand on social media. The company, which has been on social media since 2006, mines data from all social networking sites and keeps track of what customers are talking about when it comes to their brand. Complaints are responded to, new product ideas are encouraged and orders are booked through Twitter (In 2009 the company generated business of \$3 million through Twitter.) The company has also created a platform to syndicate content and aggregate content so as to monitor the brand.

In the healthcare industry, the need for brand monitoring is not only to respond to a problem or complaint but also to measure marketing effectiveness and create new channels for visibility and eventually sales. For instance, with the coming up of the health insurance exchanges, individuals can buy health insurance on their own, without depending on their employers. This will open up a big channel for health plans across the US to effectively leverage social media and reach out to prospective customers with real time updates on aspects such as plans with the lowest premium for the day/ month/ quarter or lowest co-pays. Further they could also have special schemes for the holiday season or discounts on specific schemes, thus turning the social media channel into a revenue generating channel.

Hospitals on the other hand should be able to offer services like online consultation, availability of appointments/ doctors, special discounts on the pharmacy products and booking operation theatres for minor procedures via social media like twitter. Blogs can be used for fostering research and collaboration across hospitals.

Faster industry cycles

In the last few decades, we have seen how the coming of age of computers helped reduce industry cycles and helped products go to market faster. The internet revolution resurrected the services business. In a similar way social media is today influencing industry cycles by:

Helping bring out products faster – by enabling co-creation and collaboration

Customizing products to suit individuals – by providing data on individual preferences

The healthcare industry could benefit from both these aspects. In the area of health plans, the general move is towards offering customized plans to suit individuals and not offer them group plans. To do so, companies typically invest in third party research to obtain certain demographics and psychographic trends, which are then applied to tweak their existing plain vanilla insurance offerings. These tweaked plans are then tested in the market with focus groups to ascertain the potential for success. The entire process typically can take about 6- 12 months.

This time frame can be reduced by half if companies start monitoring social media and engage in relevant conversations with consumers and prospects, seek opinions and incorporate these into customized plans. Using a content syndication and aggregation tool, not only would they be able to reduce dependence on research firms, but also get closer to the consumer and launch more feasible products.

In the medical devices industry, a lot of devices prescribed to patients for home use are not very user friendly. At some stage if patients are involved in a greater way in the manufacturing and design aspects of these devices, then the acceptance for these devices would be much higher.

Conclusion

Social media is pervading businesses like never before. Employees use it and so do customers and prospects. It is shaping public opinion and eventually government policy. Healthcare organizations need to understand how the chatter in the social media universe can be harnessed meaningfully to grow business and visibility. While some organizations have taken the lead in this area, many others are struggling to understand this new medium of opportunity. Developing a social media policy is no longer an option today, it is a necessity. If healthcare organizations do not take efforts in this direction, they run the risk of becoming stagnant and perhaps obsolete in the long run.

About the author

Dr. Vikram (Doc) is the Marketing Manager for the Healthcare and services business unit of Wipro Technologies, a leading global Information Technology services provider. Doc is responsible for Wipro's brand development in the Healthcare IT market globally. He has 9 years of experience in the Healthcare Industry spanning healthcare providers, health plans and life sciences. His strategic interests include tracking e-health initiatives, healthcare public policy, regulatory frameworks, healthcare quality analytics and business intelligence.

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About Wipro Healthcare

Wipro Healthcare, ranked #15 in Healthcare Informatics Top 100 technology vendors, has over 4000 dedicated techno-functional associates. Wipro caters to Healthcare payer; Healthcare provider; Healthcare Distribution and Healthcare Services market segments. Besides its strong IT proposition, Wipro has strong verticalised offerings for the Healthcare segment. Wipro helps its clients in achieving better quality of care, patient safety, through technology enabled innovation.

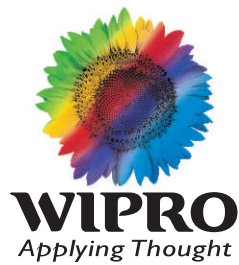
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