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Promoted and sponsored social posts: Can your practice benefit?

ORIGINALLY, SOCIAL MEDIA WAS A WAY TO GET “FREE” VISIBILITY and publicity for your practice. Of course, nothing is ever free, and the cost of social media over time and/or the cost of hiring a social media manager still existed. However, with Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms shifting to a “pay-to-play” environment, marketing on social platforms has changed.

THE SHIFT TO PAID SOCIAL

While the up-front cost of paid social promotion is aggravating to many practice owners who have worked hard to make their practices more visible and to organically grow a following, there are several benefits to the new ad-based social environment. ROI, for example, is much easier to measure because there is a computable cost for each conversion. Since nearly a quarter of the world’s population is active on social media,¹ you can’t afford to pass this marketing channel up.

With that said, ads and social media don’t go together flawlessly. How can your practice put promoted and sponsored content to work while maintaining the relaxed, comfortable tone that social media users have come to know and expect? There are three main things to remember:

1. **Social media is still about conversation, not yelling.** Advertorial content has never worked on social media, and it never will. The end-users won’t stand for it.
2. **You are paying for conversions, not eyeballs-on.** Don’t get trapped into measuring “reach,” only to later realize that you just spent your budget on something that didn’t result in any measurable actions by the viewers.
3. **Be transparent, and be enjoyable.** Don’t pretend an ad isn’t an ad, but instead, make your ad so great that it’s worth reading or watching anyway. Think about Super Bowl commercials: Nobody complains when their favorite show breaks to show that hilarious Snickers/Brady Bunch spot one more time—nobody.

EXPERIMENT ON THE PLATFORMS YOU ALREADY USE

If your practice has already established a presence on one or more social platforms, plan to dip a toe into the pay-to-play pool. Each platform has a different way of allowing you to promote or sponsor content.

- **Facebook** allows three different kinds of sponsored or promoted content. Your posts on Facebook are shown organically only to some of the people who already have liked your “Page.” “Boosting” or “Promoting” increases a post’s reach among your own followers, and it also allows you to reach out to users who are not fans of your practice’s Page using the internal targeting system. You can also create pure ads in Facebook, which will be shown only to new prospects.²
- **Twitter** allows you to promote Tweets, accounts, or trends. You can target users by their keyword searches, TV show engagement on Twitter, type of device, location, age, gender, or interests.
- **Instagram** currently allows links back to businesses or practices with image postings; a new API is being tested that will allow users to join the formerly “only-for-big-business” advertising options.³
- **Pinterest** allows both image ads (“Promoted Pins”) and video ads (“Cinematic Pins”) with the new interface. Ads can be activated as cost-per-click, cost-per-engagement, or cost-per-action.⁴

Each platform has analytics, tools, and tracking to measure ROI. Research your chosen platform’s best-practice guidelines for ad creation and posting, and plan on adding post promotion to your marketing budget. While organic reach is still an option, social media platforms are deliberately throttling your reach, and pay-to-play is here to stay. **DE**

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