



Social Media Matters

The newest player in rehab

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We use the Internet for a variety of reasons, most notably for email and as an information search utility. From Facebook to Twitter, from blogs to websites, the Internet has evolved from static web pages to a complex and organic online conversation. The Internet, and in particular, social media has been playing an increasingly larger role in providing people with information on health. In “A Second Opinion: Health Information and the Internet,” Underhill & McKeown mention that “since it was launched commercially, the Internet has changed the way Canadians conduct their everyday activities, from viewing weather, news and sports to banking and paying bills. The Internet has also changed the way many Canadians obtain health information, and potentially, their relationships with physicians.” Fox and Jones, in “The Social Life of Health Information” note that “60 percent of American adults search the web for health information.”

“John Q. Public” has been tapping into the Internet to research health concerns, symptoms, treatment options, medication recommendations, and the latest medical research, all in an effort to arm himself with the medical and rehab knowledge he may not be getting elsewhere or simply not as quickly from other sources. But there’s so much information out there, available at the click of a mouse. How much of it is actually credible and reliable? Gauld and Williams note that “Ninety percent of the health Internet users canvassed... believe Internet information is reliable,

but only a third check the credentials of information providers,” while Underhill and McKeown mention that “Internet sources of health information (can) range from personal accounts of illnesses and patient discussion groups to clinical decision tools and peer-reviewed journal articles.” Those of us with the capability to ensure the credibility and reliability of information have a responsibility to do just that.

Our decision here at Brainworks to enter the world of social media was influenced by the presence of misleading and incomplete information we’ve found on web sites masquerading as credible medical and rehabilitation sources. It is essential that those seeking health information have access to the most reliable data, statistics, and research delivered by well-respected and well educated professionals who have trained long and hard to be the best in their professions. One of our goals is to help flood the Internet market with reliable and credible information on a range of rehab issues and draw people to it through postings, blogs, tweets, and Facebook community dialogues. It is important that this information be delivered in a tone and language that users can understand and learn from—some technical medical rehab terminology can easily be misinterpreted. As consumers, it is our right to be informed—but informed truthfully, without the risk of misinterpretation or being misled. Brainworks has decided to be a part of the solution.

We can’t afford to be invisible. To be client-centred, we have to go where our clients are ... and our clients are everywhere, throughout the community and all over the Internet.

What is the future of rehab? One thing we know for certain is that the future of rehab is inseparable from the Internet. The growth and complexity of knowledge, research and evidence for best practices in rehab mirrors the growth of the Internet and its tools to disseminate information, to provide forums for eclectic interactions and informative discussions. Our clients are aptly at this intersection – they are at the centre and we need to meet them there. This intersection is a magical place; it’s on fire with prolific activity.

We need to be a part of that organic online conversation. What matters in rehab is the client. If you don’t get on board – you will be missing out, and so will your rehab clients and community. Social media is a phenomenon and its popularity is growing exponentially. We’re very excited about our own involvement and invite everyone to get on board. It evens out the playing field for access to information and access to one another.

Top 10 Tips for Using Social Media

1. Always be client-centred.

First things first. We train our therapists to ask the following questions, at every decision point: ‘What does my client

want?,' and, 'What is in my client's best interest?' This is where our decision making must start. This is what it means to be "client-centred." This frame of reference is foundational in all our work—whether it is day-to-day rehab, or interacting via social media. With our social media initiatives, we also consider our questions from the perspective of the broader community. Keeping this frame of reference at the forefront of all decision making makes the process clear, and keeps us true to our stand. All of these tips need to be viewed through this lens.

2. Define your purpose.

Would you like to build relationships with customers? Would you like to share wisdom and expertise with others? Do you want to increase your web footprint? Do you wish to market your services? For Brainworks, our Facebook page exists to raise awareness about serious injury and to promote injury prevention. Our target audience is: everyone who knows someone whose life has been touched by an injury or loss. Our Twitter account is our forum for sharing the latest clinical research, best practices and rehab industry news. We tweet about what's relevant to the rehabilitation field and of particular interest to professionals. No matter what social media we are using (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and YouTube), it's been about building relationships and sharing valuable information.

3. Create a Social Networking Policy.

It's important to create a set of social networking guidelines for your corporation to follow before you begin. In developing ours, we've had to work through several considerations: What happens if a client sees a therapist on the Fan Page and subsequently 'friend requests' our employee? What kind of content can and cannot be posted? What about privacy and boundaries? A Social Networking Policy is key, especially for a corporation where several people may be involved. Employees need to know exactly what is expected and where the boundaries have been set.

4. Set up your corporate accounts.

Facebook offers two suitable formats: Fan Pages and Group Pages. We've found the best option for our business is the Fan Page. Facebook guides you step by step in setting up your page. Initially,

a URL is assigned, but once you reach certain benchmarks, Facebook allows you to choose your own, subject to availability. There is only one type of Twitter account, so decisions are easy here! You'll need to determine who the administrators of your page will be. They will have control over what is posted and will also be monitoring contributions from your community. Working as a team with multiple administrators works for us, but requires coordination and team work.

5. Begin building your community.

In social networking, "like attracts like." On Facebook, join groups and fan pages related to the rehab industry. There you will find others who are of like mind, and you can begin networking, joining their causes and inviting them to join yours. On Twitter, following relevant people and organizations will get you noticed.

6. Post informative, relevant and engaging content.

Once you've been noticed, your content will make all the difference. Make sure that what you post is directly related to your purpose, or the community you're building will not relate to your mission statement or the services you offer. Relevant posting is key to attracting relevant followers. Posting a discussion topic on Facebook and inviting responses allows your community to interact with you, and this in turn allows you to learn more about them.

7. Do not spam or over-post.

There is a delicate balance between posting too little and not being seen, and posting too much and becoming a nuisance. Social media users are constantly bombarded by requests and information. Keeping posts strong and relevant keeps them meaningful and useful. Be very aware of feedback, and continue to weigh the balance carefully. For us, it is more about the content than the volume. We post when we have something important to say. Different media have different acceptable posting frequencies. On Facebook, we limit our posting to one or two posts per day maximum. On Twitter, we tweet as often as there is news! Our tweet frequency varies depending upon what's going on in the rehab world.

Another balance to master is the split between information and advertising. Our rule of thumb is to use less than 20 percent of our postings to "advertise." Being aware of both parameters and perception, and respecting this balance will facilitate a positive reception in the social media scene.

8. Balance privacy with personability.

Make your Fan Page as friendly as it can be while maintaining a professional image. Don't hide who you are or what you do, but avoid posting any personal information about your staff. Your consultant's recent educational achievements may be relevant, but their girlfriend's shopping trip isn't. Decide in advance where you will set the boundaries, and then stick with your decision. Photos allow the members of your community to put faces to those they are following.

9. Carefully monitor your time.

Once you get up and running, it is important to carefully monitor your time. Social media is engaging, and unless you set boundaries for yourself, it can draw you in and consume your time. As a corporation, we limit our time to 30 minutes per day total for each media outlet. It is important to establish limits!

10. Client privacy is key.

The same strict protection you ensure for client information offline needs to guide your work online. Client information must never be posted. Tweets and posts are public and searchable.



About the Author

Arden McGregor is founder and Executive Director

of Brainworks, a rehab firm serving Ontario. As a Member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario, and a Certified Brain Injury Specialist and Trainer with twenty years experience, Arden's expertise in rehabilitation is both respected and sought after. She tweets at twitter.com/BrainworksRehab, and she can be found on facebook at www.facebook.com/BrainworksRehab.