


# How to Ride the Social Media Wave in Your Practice

During the course of setting up a new practice, we always  discuss the role of social media in the practice's marketing strategy. We do not recommend a cookie cutter approach to marketing and social media, as every practice is unique in its needs and the marketing investment will depend on the practice specialty, the practice's target demographic and the practice model (**see my recent slide deck on 12 practice models**).

Many of our client practices ask for social media education, but until recently, I did not have a resource to provide. Then I met Janet Kennedy. She has 25+ years of marketing experience and is a member of the Mayo Clinic Social Media Health Network. She is also the host of **Get Social Health Podcast**, an amazing lineup of healthcare social media luminaries, including Physicians!

Janet has filled the great need for social media education for the physician practice by creating The Get Social Health Academy – a resource that fits the bill – affordable, available on demand and very pertinent to today's medical practice.



**Mary Pat:** *What exactly is included under the title “social media” and is all social media considered marketing?*

**Janet:** The simplest definition of social media is “**websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.**” In essence – any online platform that allows users to generate content, share

it and connect with others. In the broadest sense you could say that any activity in social media has the potential to be marketing because it is building awareness and brand recognition. If by marketing you mean “selling”, then no, social media is not always marketing.

***Mary Pat: What was your first experience seeing social media used in healthcare?***

**Janet:** As with most users, I probably didn't notice when I had my first experience with healthcare social media because if it was done well, it would have appeared seamless with my other online experiences. Once I began to look for instances of healthcare related social media I found it in many consumer facing channels – Facebook, Google searches, etc.

***Mary Pat: Previously only very large medical groups and hospitals used and had staff and money dedicated to social media. How do you see this changing?***

**Janet:** It's a combination of inevitability and acceptance. Many smaller healthcare practices are realizing that they have to commit to a basic engagement in social media in order to rank in search queries and better serve their current patients. While larger healthcare groups may be expanding their involvement in social media by adding more social media platforms, I am seeing a lot more smaller practices taking a look at social media and determining what they need to get started even if it's by dipping their toe in the water

***Mary Pat: Are there any types of practices that don't need to use social media as a part of their marketing effort?***

**Janet:** First, I don't think there is a way to totally avoid social media whether you want to or not. So at the very least, **claim your online profiles** to ensure that your practice is represented correctly and you can receive notifications when your practice is mentioned in social media. That said, you might think that a healthcare practice that deals with

sensitive health issues, like mental health or substance abuse, would not be able to utilize social media. If you view patient education as an important role for healthcare, social media offers the opportunity to reach a wide audience and share needed information. The concern for these type of practices is patient privacy and the fear that a patient might reach out in social media. As long as your practice has a social media policy, have trained your staff and posted the policy so your patients understand, you should be able to engage safely in social media.

***Mary Pat: Are some social media platforms more applicable/amenable to healthcare than others?***

**Janet:** From a business standpoint, there are platforms that are more popular than others. 71% of online adults have a Facebook profile versus 26% for Instagram, for instance. Therefore you need to know who your patient is and where they are likely to be found in social media to make efficient use of your time, resources and budget. With a commitment to the use of social media to educate, **a blog is the best place to start for any healthcare practice.**

***Mary Pat: I know many practices are wary of using social media because of HIPAA and Privacy rules. What is the most basic concept that practices needs to understand about HIPAA/Privacy when using social media?***

**Janet:** It is really very simple. Disclosures made on social media concerning a patient's PHI (protected health information) without that patient's authorization is considered a HIPAA violation.

***Mary Pat: What are some other barriers that keep practices from utilizing social media?***

**Janet:** Most healthcare practitioners tell me it boils down to three issues (not necessarily in this order) regarding not committing to social media:

- Time (where do I find it?)
- HIPAA (what if a patient tries to talk to me on social media?)
- Resources (how much will it cost me in terms of staff and expense?)

**Mary Pat:** *All businesses need to understand the return on investment for any resource or money expended. How can practices determine how much they should be spending for social media, either in-house or externally, and how can they measure the effectiveness and return from social media efforts?*

**Janet:** Calculating a financial benefit to any investment is important in business and I'll be one of the first to say you should track, analyze and improve your marketing based on metrics. However I would like to encourage healthcare practitioners to also consider the value of "ROE" or return on engagement when evaluating social media success. If your social media strategy is founded on content marketing and educating your patients, then there is a true value to having content liked and shared in social media networks.

It may seem like you have to invest a lot of time when you launch into social media. Developing a strategy, finding and creating content, planning and tracking your success; when you are new to social media it can take time. Once you are into a regular schedule the process becomes much more efficient. If you need help, I would recommend hiring an experienced social media manager, ad agency or investing in online learning to speed up your learning process.

If you have a good sense of what you want to accomplish in social media and have some experience, your investment is primarily time plus a few online tools to aid in management, curation and tracking. Costs for content creation, management and writing can start at a few hundred dollars per month and up.

**Mary Pat:** *You've developed a "Social Media for the Small Healthcare Practice" curriculum as part of your Get Social Health Academy. Tell us about the course content and who the course would benefit.*

**Janet:** The *Get Social Health Academy* was created to help the healthcare practitioner, especially in a small practice, to get up to speed on social media and how to use it in healthcare. The courses cover a wide variety of topics from an introduction to social media for healthcare to HIPAA compliance and breaches, content development and social media strategy.

The courses were developed to inform and educate team members who may have little formal marketing background. They are focused on practical learning and tactical actions and would be effective in any size or type of practice.

✘ Very generously, Janet is discounting Academy classes to all Manage My Practice readers. For more information **click here**. You can also contact Janet via email at [janet@getsocialheath.com](mailto:janet@getsocialheath.com) or by phone at 919-802-1423.

**Full Disclosure:** *I like Janet's courses so much that I've agreed to promote them through my website, and for this I receive compensation. There are very few companies that I've partnered with in this way because I stand behind anything I personally promote and very few products meet my standards for pricing, quality and customer service.*

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