

Social Media Toolkit

Your acupuncture practice is unique, just like you are. You make decisions on professional development priorities, and you similarly make decisions on your marketing investments. This Toolkit is a quick overview of several Social Media activities that you may wish to consider. Remember that Social Media is only one part of an overall marketing plan; it is most powerful when it can amplify your real-world efforts.

Decide how Social Media fits (or if it fits at all)

While you might already be using Social Media to some extent, it is wise to take a step back and ask *why*? Your answer should help you determine *what* you do with Social Media, as well as *how much time* you may wish to spend.

Is your goal to generate awareness of you and your practice? Or is it to credentialize you as a thought-leader and go-to healthcare professional? Or perhaps your Social Media goal is more modest: to be found if someone searches for you, but otherwise to be inactive in the space.

There are other types of goals, including developing a national media profile, interacting with other members of a medical team for professional development and professional support, or interacting with your patients. (Be very careful re patient confidentiality: the public social networks are notoriously open. And always be careful about what you say in a public space: even the most benign comment might be taken as professional medical guidance.) Please consult Acupuncture Canada's Social Media Guidelines for more ways to protect yourself.

Whichever your goals, we recommend a three-tier strategy. Each tier requires a greater investment of your time and effort.

Tier One: Passive

Register yourself and your business on each key Social Network: Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, and Twitter. Having a presence on each of these means that if someone is looking for you, or someone with your credentials, at least you have the possibility of being found. Each of these sites should have some basic content (e.g. an updated profile with the appropriate keywords embedded within), and a link back to your main site.

Tier Two: Broadcast

At this level, you are using Social Media to share the communications that you likely already produce, to a wider audience. The idea is that your content has such high value, that the recipients will share this content out to their networks. In doing so, your name – and your knowledge – will be put in front of many new prospective clients. The most common channels for "broadcasting" include

blogging, updating your status on Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and Twitter, and by sending out a periodic email to your patients.

Tier Three: Active

In this tier, you are engaging actively by commenting on others' posts, participating in LinkedIn groups (and the Acupuncture Canada social media venues), and fostering a two-way dialogue between yourself and the community that develops around you.

While these three Tiers may appear to be mutually exclusive, you can mix and match if it suits you: Be passive on Facebook, Broadcast on Twitter, and Active on LinkedIn.

Additional Strategies and Tips

Integrating your website and your blog: If you are redeveloping your website, make sure that it is using the "WordPress" platform. (Over 20% of all new websites are developed using Wordpress.) Wordpress is an easy-to-use content management system that allows you to have both regular webpages *and a blog*, all in one site. Having a separate blog means that the search engine ranking benefit that your blog will give you will be totally lost. The WordPress program itself is free, although you will probably want to pay a web designer to customize it for you.

Repurpose whenever you can: Instead of writing completely new content all of the time, look for ways to improve your productivity by re-using content from one medium, to another. For example, an article from your newsletter can be re-posted on your blog, Tweeted, and linked to from within a status update in Facebook and LinkedIn. It can be re-done as a YouTube video (featuring you as the "star"), and printed out as a hand-out in your office. More here: <http://budurl.com/ToolkitRepurpose>. (Twenty ways to Repurpose content)

Facebook Profiles and Pages: One of the areas that is often very confusing is Facebook. To get onto Facebook, you must create a personal Facebook Profile. This is your *personal* page, where you might share information with your friends and family. Once you have a personal profile, you can then set up a Facebook "Fan Page", which is your *corporate* page. The Fan Page is where you connect with your community as a professional. Fan Pages can have several Admins: you can delegate update responsibility to another person if you wish.

How often should I post/comment/tweet? Just as your practice is different, the answer to this question is also unique to you as well. There is no right answer as to how often you should engage in Social Media – or even if it should be part of your plan at all. (We do think, however, that it should be – at least at the *Passive* level.) No matter your social media strategy, we recommend that you start small, and then grow. As you see results, you can add more time or resources. If there aren't any results, then you may wish to re-examine your plan and make some changes.

Seven Ideas for Social Media Success:

- 1) Tweet a benefit of acupuncture each week.** The Tweet (and Status Update) can be a link to something that you have written (an article or blog post), or to a page sourced from elsewhere on the web. The idea is to become recognized as a reliable source. As a professional, Tweeting "specials" and discounts cheapens your reputation.
- 2) Create a YouTube series on a professional subject of interest:** The YouTube video (no more than 2-3 minutes) can serve both as an outbound "hook" for others to find you, as well as something that you can reference in one-on-one discussions. Over time, your video library will let people *test-drive* what it is like to work with you.
- 3) Set up LinkedIn to credentialize:** LinkedIn is the social network of choice for professionals. Create a profile for yourself, and then set up a free *company profile* that gives more details on your practice. Embed keywords into the text of your profile so that it comes up more frequently when searched for.
- 4) Blog regularly:** Instead of lengthy posts that might not be read, aim for three paragraphs once each week. Not only will a blog propagate across the web, but it will credentialize you as an expert in your area. Bonus tip: Use WordPress plug-ins to send a Tweet when a new blog entry is posted,.
- 5) Double-dip productively:** Instead of setting your status on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc all individually, use the free www.Hootsuite.com service to do it all at once. This same tool can schedule Tweets into the future.
- 6) Monitor for your professional interests:** Use www.Hootsuite.com to also monitor any Tweets and status updates that contain any keywords you are interested in following – including your name. Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) does the same for new web pages.
- 7) Don't overdo it:** Between seeing patients and the regular day-to-day administration that you do, you already have a full load. Depending on the Tier you are at, start small – less than 15 minutes each day – you can always increase it later.

Resources

- 1) Blogging:** Free six-segment course on blogging for professionals: <http://budurl.com/108blogging>
- 2) Get up to speed on Social Media:** Free five-segment course on the basics and strategies of Social Media; aimed at executives, but relevant for you as well: <http://budurl.com/ExecBriefing>
- 3) Social Media Action Tips:** 400+ action-oriented tips to help improve your Social Media effectiveness: <http://budurl.com/randallcraigtips>
- 4) Search Engine Optimization:** What can you do – or tell your Webmaster to do – to help improve your 'findability' for your website? This 40 minute audio program reviews 43 principles of SEO, and gives practical ideas that can be implemented immediately: <http://budurl.com/108SEO>.
- 5) Online PR and Social Media for Experts, 5th edition:** The latest book on developing Social Media profile for subject matter experts. <http://www.onlineprsocialmedia.com>.