Physician Recruitment and Social Media Networking

Source: Calvin Bruce serves as senior staff writer with Jackson & Coker and has contributed to RPT a number of times. He also manages the firm's 10 social media sites. Robyn McHussey is creative manager with HealthcareJobBoards and has previously published articles on social media.

Social media networking is a growing phenomenon that adds a new dimension to traditional physician recruitment. This innovative approach allows in-house recruiters to reach busy prospective candidates through a wide variety of web-based technologies and digital applications that “engage” participants in real-time virtual conversations.

“Effective recruitment has always been a matter of establishing ongoing relationships with doctors who are either passively or actively job hunting,” mentioned Edward McEachern, vice president of Jackson & Coker. As a faculty member of the American Academy of Medical Management, he occasionally teaches seminars on social media and physician recruitment to in-house recruiters and hospital administrators.

“The key to social media networking is to connect with physicians in the ‘virtual doctor lounges’ where they visit. Using a low-key, indirect approach to introduce them to appealing practice opportunities establishes trust and confidence, something that busy doctors appreciate,” McEachern further explained.

The Growth of Social Media

Over the last few years, social media sites have sprung up like dandelions. YouTube boasts hosting over 100 million videos daily. Since May 2010, around 65 million tweets have been posted on Twitter daily (over 2 billion monthly). From 2009 to 2010, LinkedIn experienced a meteoric growth from 42 million to over 70 million members worldwide. Perhaps the fastest growing social media site, Facebook now has over 500 million fans worldwide, with content posted in over 70 languages.

The tremendous growth of social media has substantially impacted the medical profession. According to the “Hospital Social Network List,” as of Fall 2010, over 870 hospitals manage one or more social media sites. Furthermore, it’s estimated that 65 percent of practicing physicians regularly participate in some form of social media communication.

Some hospitals, in fact, have hired full-time social media managers to teach their physicians and other staff the techniques and protocol of social media participation.

A number of established medical organizations have also incorporated social media into their recruitment and staffing program, notably:

• Kaiser Permanente (Facebook)
• Maryland Medical System (Twitter)
• Tenet Healthcare (Facebook)
• Hardin Memorial Hospital (YouTube)

As social media becomes more conducive to physician recruitment, these initiatives will serve as models for other hospitals and medical groups to develop their own tailor-made recruitment strategy using social media networking.

Of note, the Mayo Clinic, a pioneer in physician blogging, recently established the Center for Social Media. The center offers
Social Media as a Recruitment Tool

A number of direct and indirect benefits are associated with social media as an indispensable recruitment tool in physician searches.

- The potential reach to prospective candidates in cyberspace is unlimited. Once content is tweeted or posted on social media sites, it’s instantaneously transmitted to “fans, friends, and followers” across the globe. They, in turn, can forward the information to others within their social networks that might be interested. Through LinkedIn, for example, doctors can disseminate information throughout their online circles of influence, much like the rippling effect in a pool of water.

- The speed of communication is greatly enhanced through social media networking. Posting a position opening on Twitter can reach prospective candidates much more quickly than sending out a mass mailing, running a print ad, or emailing a professional association. When physician searches are acutely time-sensitive, reaching prospective candidates expeditiously is extremely advantageous.

- Social media sites like YouTube add a personal touch to marketing a medical practice. What better way to sell the practice and opportunity than to send prospects a video describing the hospital, showcasing the medical staff, and highlighting the area’s drawing cards? Candidates can take a virtual tour and feel part of the medical community long before they set foot on the premises.

- Through social media, it’s possible to tap future recruitment prospects: doctors in the Gen X or Gen Y category, who are avid users of technology and digital apps. Although medical students, interns, and residents in training programs are not current targets as prospective candidates — they can be in the future. If they’re digitally connected to a hospital’s or medical group’s cyberspace presence, they’ll be more likely to keep the organization on their radar screen when they are ready to explore career opportunities.

Practical Tips for Using Social Media to Recruit

Depending on organizational policy and recruitment focus, hospital and group practice recruiters can benefit from using social media as a helpful tool in developing a candidate pool.

Start with LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the largest social network with a professional focus; so it’s a great starting point for establishing new professional connections. If they haven’t done so already, recruiters should create a personal profile on LinkedIn and start establishing a network of connections. Recruiters should also ensure that their facility has a complete company profile. The personal profile serves as a way of reaching out to others, while the company profile allows potential candidates to research the facility itself and get a glimpse of who is already working there.

Make It Easy for Physicians to Find You

Think of each social network as a “virtual doctors’ lounge.” Some doctors prefer to spend time in the third floor lounge, while others prefer the first floor. Likewise, some doctors prefer Facebook, some like Twitter, and others restrict their social network activity to LinkedIn. Recruiters should utilize all of these channels to ensure they are in a position to connect with physicians wherever they are.

To reach Twitter fans, consider following these accounts: @physicians, @doctorslounge,
For physician recruiters, there are certain key questions that will never change: When do physicians search for jobs? What sources do they use to generate leads? However, the rapidly evolving recruitment landscape begs new questions: What social media do physicians utilize? Do physicians use mobile applications?

In an effort to reveal the answers to these and many other questions, the New England Journal of Medicine Classified Advertising Department commissioned Zeldis Research Associates, Inc., to conduct an independent, blind study of residents, fellows, and newly practicing physicians.

The results paint a picture of how the modern physician searches for jobs. This information can help recruiters adapt their strategies to keep up with the ever-changing recruitment industry. An electronic copy of this study is now available at www.nejmjobs.org/jobstudy.aspx.
This Fall, Reach Top Residents, Fellows, and New Physicians!

Fall is an important time to recruit new physicians, and the New England Journal of Medicine has just made it easier than ever.

Simply run your paid line or display recruitment ad in the September 8 issue of NEJM, and your ad will be reprinted in the Specialty Delivery booklet that is mailed to more than 30,000 young physicians.* You can also have your ad posted to the searchable part of NEJMJobs.org for a small processing fee.

Contact us at (800) 635-6991 or nejmads@nejm.org for complete details and to reserve your ad space for these special fall issues.

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*The booklet will be mailed to over 30,000 physicians. Direct mail counts are based on counts provided by the AMA and are subject to change.

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to the blog from your facility’s website and use RSS feeds to distribute new posts to Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedln. Ask for comments on the blog and be sure to respond to comments left by your readers. A helpful starting point is the “Top 50 Blogs by Physicians.” The list was selected based on Google rankings as well as by how often the sites were recommended by other doctors.

Utilize Your Marketing Department

Chances are your facility’s marketing department is already engaging in social media. Ask questions and get their opinions on how you might leverage these channels for recruiting purposes. They will likely be happy to help and appreciate you getting their advice before creating another Facebook page on behalf of the facility. It definitely pays to work with the marketing team to ensure that the facility presents a united front, supporting a consistent organizational brand throughout all social media initiatives.

A Caveat

As enthusiastic as hospital recruiters may be to incorporate social media into their recruitment programs, they should seriously consider the ethical and legal ramifications associated with their efforts. A noted employment attorney offers some practical guidelines for health care staffing professionals in this regard. As always, “look before you leap.”

Endnotes

1Ed Bennett, “The Hospital Social Network List.” http://ebennett.org/hsnl