

Twitter and the Business of Healthcare

by Nicole Thomas

<http://twitter.com/VericomCorp>

It seems like you can't turn on the TV, listen to the radio, or surf the Internet these days without running across someone talking about Twitter. And it's no wonder – Twitter's traffic has been growing since its inception. A study by eMarketer.com estimates that Twitter will have over 18 million users by the end of 2009*.

The concept of Twitter is a simple one – users can post 140-word "tweets" about anything and everything, from the latest news story to links to press releases. Organizations both big and small are using this deceptively simple tool to change the way they connect with their customers and the community. And best of all? A Twitter account is free.

Why would I use Twitter?

This is probably the number one healthcare marketers ask when confronted with the idea of signing up for a Twitter account. It's easy to take one look at Twitter and see one big waste of time and space. After all, who cares what someone had for lunch, where they're going after work, or what kind of coffee they like? The main question twitterers answer is "What are you doing?" and sometimes that can look like a bunch of irrelevant information.

But that's not all that's out there. Millions of Twitterers are also using the platform to build networks, discuss important issues, and share breaking news stories. Twitter can foster real-time communication between your hospital and your unique audiences. Some hospitals are engaging their customers by asking questions, requesting ideas and feedback, as well as providing the latest health news updates. (Check out Vericom clients who proactively use Twitter:

The Cleveland Clinic - <http://twitter.com/CleveClinicNews>; Children's National Medical Center - <http://twitter.com/childrenshealth>; Scripps Health - <http://twitter.com/ScrippsHealth>, for some great examples of this kind of communication.)

What can Twitter do for my hospital or healthcare organization?

At first glance, Twitter seems like a very limited application. One-hundred and forty characters is short. What could you say in 140 characters that is worth saying? And how could broadcasting something to your entire network—to no one in particular—be worthwhile? It's easy to be skeptical. However, Twitter really is another way to communicate directly with your patients, consumers, and employees. When you tweet about new programs, services, and upcoming events, all of your followers see that information immediately. Direct them to your website for further information; guiding both new and existing consumers to the variety of services your organization offers. Granted, only a small percentage of your audiences are on Twitter (today) but there are still people there you can connect with. Just ask computer company Dell, which has tracked over \$3 million of revenue from Twitter**.

Twitter and the Business of Healthcare

by Nicole Thomas

<http://twitter.com/VericomCorp>

Twitter can also help you better communicate with your employees. Encourage your employees to follow your Twitter feed, and post timely and relevant information. Are you offering flu vaccinations to staff? Has a physician, nurse, or department received an award? Do you have a new company-wide initiative? Tweet about it! You can even link to your hospital's website, blog, or press releases so employees can seek out more information.

What should we Tweet about?

Once you build your organization's Twitter account, the next step is to gain followers and maintain your page. But just one or two tweets a day is enough to keep you, and your facility, in the forefront of your followers' minds. Keep these tips in mind when you begin tweeting:

1. Rather than answering "What are you doing?" try to answer "What are you thinking about?" This can include an interesting news article, a response to another twitterer's question, or the latest award presented to your organization.
2. Follow interesting people, and don't be shy about responding to their questions and comments. Their followers may see those things, and follow you, too. Commenting on others' tweets is a great way to build a community.
3. Ask questions. Twitter is a wonderful place for gathering feedback.
4. Share the personal, emotional, and human side of your healthcare business. If employees are doing something extraordinary outside of work, like participating in a charity event or 5k race, give them a shout-out. Twitter users enjoy learning about the people behind the organization.

There's no promise that your Twitter page will be the "next big thing." But it's a great way to connect, to build relationships, and to see what's out there. So build your organization's Twitter account, get started by following <http://twitter.com/VericomCorp>, and start Tweeting!

References:

<http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1007271>

http://www.newsfactor.com/story.xhtml?story_id=032002XVO9LS#

800-800-1090

www.vericom.net