

## **4 Social Media Trends Your Practice May Have Missed**

By Debra Beaulieu-Volk

[Social media](#) is the most important factor in managing your practice's brand today, according to a [post](#) from *Physicians Practice*. But despite the multitude of benefits that practices have realized by having a presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other sites patients access every day, the "rules" for optimizing the tool are a moving target.



Here are four trends experts now understand about healthcare social media and how to use them to your advantage:

- **It doesn't take much time to reap benefits.** In as little as six hours per week, more than 84 percent of marketers increased their online traffic while more than 66 percent gained new business leads. And almost 50 percent reduced their marketing expenses, [according](#) to Hubspot.
- **Giving patients a forum to post complaints can actually be good for business.** As long as practices make it a priority to dedicate some of their [social media time to customer service](#), you can make yourself look good by managing dissatisfaction online. A healthcare organization's response to negative comments and complaints can carry equal or more weight than positive consumer engagement, according to one [report](#) from PricewaterhouseCoopers.
- **It's not as hard to stand out as you'd think.** Just because so many practices use social media these days doesn't mean they do it well. Distinguish yourself from your competitors by knowing better than to use it as a sales pitch. Focus on providing value and gaining respect, [recommends](#) *MedCity News*.
- **'Friending' patients isn't necessarily off-limits.** Most physician groups advise doctors to keep their personal and business lives separate online. However, new guidelines from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) soften that stance by leaving it to physicians to decide whether to "friend" patients. "If the physician or healthcare provider trusts the relationships enough...we didn't feel like it was appropriate to really try to outlaw that," Nathaniel DeNicola, an obstetrician-gynecologist and clinical associate at the University of Pennsylvania, who helped write the ACOG guidelines, [told](#) *CNN*. Whether other specialty societies will follow suit--and friending's impact on the physician-patient relationship--is not yet known.