To Post or Not to Post: Plastic Surgery Practice Marketing, Websites, and Social Media?

Sarah A. Mess, MD
Gaurav Bharti, MD
Ben Newcott, MBA
Abigail E. Chaffin, MD
Bruce W. Van Natta, MD
Reza Momeni, MD
Scott Swanson, MD

Summary: Social media is beginning to eclipse practice websites and other traditional electronic marketing utilized by plastic surgeons. First, highlights are presented from the relevant electronic marketing literature. Next, this article presents a new case study of how, why, when, and what social media is being used by ASPS members (n = 100). Results suggest a significant disconnect between plastic surgeons and the highest impact platforms reported in the literature such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook. Plastic surgeons currently prefer to focus electronic marketing efforts on practice websites over social media platforms. This study suggests that instead of relying on their practice websites to disseminate information, surgeons should be utilizing social media, posting promotions, before-and-after photos, and videos to develop their client base. (Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open 2019;7:e2331; doi: 10.1097/GOX.0000000000002331; Published online 25 July 2019.)

For practice building in plastic surgery, the days of relying on physician referrals, word of mouth, and academic pedigrees are gone. Google is the largest single referral source and third-party validation by consumers on websites like RealSelf has become more critical to patients’ trust than education or training. Plastic surgeons initially responded to this electronic shift by focusing on website content and search engine optimization. However, Google’s algorithms place plastic surgeons with more social media followers to the top pages and RealSelf reports a 17% drop in click-through traffic to practice websites since 2016. Now the spotlight is on social media. When building a new practice, there is a higher return of investment with Facebook and Instagram than search engine optimization and referral websites Yelp and RealSelf. Only 5 short years ago, social media was perceived as an inevitable force but having no impact on practice building by most ASPS members surveyed. Perhaps, those were established practices reliant on word of mouth and return of existing patients. The current case study provides an important update.

From *Johns Hopkins Plastic Surgery Private Practice, Columbia, Md.; ¶HKB Cosmetic Surgery; ¶Allergan; ¶Department of Surgery, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; ¶Meridian Plastic Surgeons; ||Plastic Surgery Center, Summit Medical Group; and **Maricopa Medical Center.

Received for publication December 11, 2018; accepted May 3, 2019.
Copyright © 2019 The Authors. Published by Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc. on behalf of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives License 4.0 (CCBY-NC-ND), where it is permissible to download and share the work provided it is properly cited. The work cannot be changed in any way or used commercially without permission from the journal.
DOI: 10.1097/GOX.0000000000002331

Disclosure: Ben Newcott is an Allergan employee. This research stemmed from an Essential of Leadership project in which he was invited by American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) to participate. The other authors have no financial interest to declare in relation to the content of this article.
(72%) performed both cosmetic and reconstructive surgeries, 16% cosmetic only, and 12% reconstructive only.

Participants were asked how they digitally market for their practice. The majority indicated they use a personal/practice website (70%) for marketing and/or social media platforms (60%), with e-mail, blogs, lead generation sites, and short message service (SMS) messaging selected less often (Fig. 1). Interestingly, participants also indicated that personal websites were the most important channels to them for online marketing, rating this method higher (4.51, \(P = 0.00\)) on a 5-point Likert scale than all other options.

Of social media platforms, Instagram (29%) and Facebook (27%), were the platforms used by most participants. Only 5% selected YouTube, IGTV, and Twitter and none mentioned Snapchat.

Also addressed was why participants electronically market. Attracting new patients and promoting their practice and services were most important, with keeping patients connected to the practice and highlighting accomplishments also noted.

Questions were asked about what the content was for online marketing with “information about my surgical procedures and techniques” and “bio/personal information about me” being the top types of content (73%–74% of respondents). More than half of respondents indicated they market information about noninvasive offerings, practice branding, information about injectables, and before-and-after photos (Fig. 2).

When asked about when or how often they post to social media, the participants \(n = 54\) posted several times a week (57%), every couple of weeks (24%), daily (16%), multiple times per day (11%), or very little (11% once a month or every 6 months) (Fig. 3).

As might be expected those who did not engage with social media regularly, rated their practice websites more important than other channels.

![Fig. 1. ASPS young plastic surgeons were asked how they digitally market for their practice. The majority indicated they use a personal/practice website (70%) for marketing and/or social media platforms (60%), with e-mail, blogs, lead generation sites, and SMS messaging selected less often.](image1)

![Fig. 2. ASPS Young Plastic Surgeons were asked what the content was for online marketing with “information about my surgical procedures and techniques” and “bio/personal information about me” being the top types of content (73%–74% of respondents). More than half of respondents also marketed information about noninvasive offerings, practice branding, information about injectables, and before-and-after photographs.](image2)
There may be a disconnect between how prospective patients seek information and plastic surgery practices’ marketing efforts. Most plastic surgeons view their websites as the most important way to communicate with patients. While only 15% of plastic surgeons post on social media daily, 71% of Millennials engage multiple times a day on Snapchat and Instagram and nearly 68% of adults engage daily on Facebook. Social media has become a primary means of exploring online, and aesthetic patients include social media in their decision-making. Potential patients now equate presence and activity on social media with depth of experience and competence. Moving forward, plastic surgeons need to recalibrate their efforts to engage with social media in addition to their websites. To post, or not to post, that is no longer the question.

REFERENCES
1. Walden JL. Commentary on: patients’ and surgeons’ perceptions of social media’s role in the decision making for primary aesthetic breast augmentation. Aesthet Surg J. 2018;38:1088–1091.
2. Low R. “Competitive Advantage in an UBER-Competitive Market” Sciton User Summit Tysons Corner; Nov. 2018, verbal presentation.
3. Gould DJ. Commentary on: are you on the right platform? A conjoint analysis of social media preferences in aesthetic surgery patients. Aesthet Surg J. epub; DOI: 10.1093/asj/sjy269
4. Gould DJ, Nazarian S. Social media return on investment: how much is it worth to my practice? Aesthet Surg J. 2018;38:565–574.
5. Vardanian AJ, Kusnezov N, Im DD, et al. Social media use and impact on plastic surgery practices. Plast Reconstr Surg. 2013;131:1184–1193.
6. Pew Research Center. Social Media Use in 2018; 2018. Available at http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/. date accessed: Nov 17, 2018
7. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Cosmetic surgery national data bank statistics. Aesthet Surg J. 2017;37(suppl_2):1–29.
8. Nayyar A, Jadi J, Garmella R, et al. Are you on the right platform? A conjoint analysis of social media preferences in aesthetic surgery patients. Aesthet Surg J. 2018. epub; DOI: 10.1093/asj/sjy238
9. Sorice SC, Li AY, Gilstrap J. Social media and the plastic surgery patient. Plast Reconstr Surg. 2017;140:1047–1056.
10. Montemurro P, Cheema M, Hedén P. Patients’ and surgeons’ perceptions of social media’s role in the decision making for primary aesthetic breast augmentation. Aesthet Surg J. 2018;38:1078–1084.