

How Social Media Can Draw Visitors to a Quality Report

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Lise Rybowski

From the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, welcome to a podcast from TalkingQuality, a Web site about communicating comparative information on health care quality to consumers. I'm Lise Rybowski from the Severyn Group and I manage the TalkingQuality project.

Today I'm here with Barbara Lambiaso and Lauren Piccolo from Massachusetts Health Quality Partners, or MHQP, which is a health care quality organization with a membership that includes health plans, public and private purchasers, health care providers, and consumers. Since 2006, MHQP has been publishing reports on both the clinical quality of medical groups as well as patients' experiences with physicians' practices in Massachusetts. Those reports are available at www.m-h-q-p.o-r-g [www.mhqp.org].

Like many of their counterparts in quality organizations, Barbara and Lauren have employed several strategies to promote awareness and use of these reports. And like those others, they met with mixed success.

But over the last year or so, Barbara and Lauren have found a way to use social media – specifically Twitter and Facebook – to develop a following and draw people to their sites. I invited them to join us today to talk about their experience with social media, and to share what they've learned about what works and how it works.

Barbara and Lauren, thanks so much for being here today. I know a lot of people are very unsure about how or why they would use social media, so let's start with the basics. Tell me a little bit about the social media you're using and what does it mean to say that you're using those media.

Lauren Piccolo

We use Facebook and Twitter almost every day. We probably post on Twitter about three or four times a day, and on Facebook, we post a message about every other day, about three or six posts a week.

Lise Rybowski

Oh okay, that's interesting. So tell me how the two media are different. Do you use Facebook and Twitter for different purposes?

Lauren Piccolo

They're complimentary outlets. Twitter is a much more fast-paced Web site and there's a lot more information-sharing on it than there is on Facebook. And Facebook more -- is a Web site for a community. So on Facebook, I think people get overwhelmed with too many messages, so we try to only post three or six a week. While on Twitter, since the information is moving so fast, there's the ability to share a lot of information with different people.

Lise Rybowski

Thanks so much. That is really helpful. Barbara, could you talk a little bit about how you actually got started with both of these?

Barbara Lambiaso

Initially we started as a way to outreach and get in touch with consumers, individuals in the public. And we realized we needed to start-up and build a presence on these sites. So we started using Facebook at our clinical quality launch February of 2010. And we started using Twitter with our last patient experience report launch, which is June 2010, so about a year ago. I'm actually going to pass it on to Lauren, who can tell us a little bit more about building this presence.

Lauren Piccolo

Starting on Facebook and Twitter, it's really about relationship building. We're really building a network of people that we can bounce ideas off and they can give us ideas and we can give them ideas. On Twitter, we mostly have interactions with other health care or media organizations, especially local organizations in the Boston area. We do a lot of reposting and retweeting of other people's posts from local groups and media. We do similar things on Facebook as well, we're connected to a lot of local organizations and health care organizations and we try to post things that would be interesting to our followers.

We also, when we have a message we want to get out, we also have the ability to directly message, which is more of a private message to different organizations, to say hey this would be really interesting to the people who follow you, would you mind reposting it for us? And we find that since we've built up these relationships with organizations, they're more than happy to do it, and we're able to get our message out successfully.

Lise Rybowski

And do you know who you are sending these messages to?

Lauren Piccolo

We know the person at the organization. We communicate a lot with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. And we know we're communicating with them, but we may not know the specific person and our contact for our project may be a different person there. But since you've built up this relationship on the social media, you're able to have these relationships and have these back and forth quite easily.

Lise Rybowski

Oh, that's interesting. So tell me a little more about how this works. So how, for example, do you interact with a media organization and what does that do for you?

Barbara Lambiaso

More and more, we've realized that a lot of our outreach in media really is coming electronically, mostly from computer and listings of our press release and such. Twitter and Facebook really lent itself to building our presence out there in the electronic media. Less and less people are counting on print media as print media shrinks and papers are laying people off.

What we've done is we've started following different media organizations that we wanted to A) pull information in from and share with others, but also that we wanted to be able to build a relationship with to get the word out about our stuff.

Some of the media-specific groups that we follow and that follow us are our local NPR affiliate WBUR has a Common Health blog Web site and so we follow them on Twitter and Facebook, they follow us. The Boston Globe has a couple of different blogs; White Coat Notes is one and it's more clinically-focused and they also have Daily Dose, which is new and that's more individual and public-focused. And then there's lots of different health care bloggers in the realm of policy and clinical practice that are out there and well-known and, being able to connect and follow with them and having them follow you really can give your organization integrity out there.

In the past, we've put information out in the Metro, which is a free newspaper and it was paid for space, an editorial, and it gets out there because it's an outlet for commuters but we don't really get a lot of feedback from that. We're not really able to monitor that because people don't always think about and remember that they've read this article and they don't go right to their computer to key us in, but when people see us on a blog or in an electronic media, they're able to make a direct link or impact.

For example, with our latest release, we had really started building up a presence. And so this past February, we had our annual clinical quality release and we could see how many people connected to the Daily Dose and came to our site. And we really promoted that Daily Dose blog posting on Twitter and on Facebook when it came out. So basically, we were able to see by looking at our Google Analytics how many people came to our Web site from the Daily Dose blog. And what we learned was really almost 90% of the people that came to our site came from that blog posting in particular.

We also learned that people were staying on the site about an average of two minutes which is really, really good and people were also first-time visitors. So one of the really exciting things about this sort

of media is that you're able to track it and you're able to monitor it and you can sort of see where people are coming from. And we've really gotten the sense that it's this social networking and social media that really helped boost our latest public release to numbers that were higher than we've ever had before.

Lise Rybowski

That is really interesting. It's a very different way of working with the established media then. Let me ask you now, you mentioned that you resend or repost a lot of information that comes to you. What else do you post or Tweet about?

Lauren Piccolo

We try to post and Tweet about things that people who are interested in MHQP would be interested about, such as health care quality or health care reform news. We think that people appreciate the perspective we bring and how it connects to the environment here in Massachusetts. We also try to post things related to MHQP about once a week -- messages that will draw people to our Web site such as "Do you know that 8% of people in Massachusetts have asthma? Find out how you can control your asthma." And we'll bring them to our asthma guidelines on our Web site or our asthma clinical quality measures on our Web site.

We try to do this only maybe once a week or so because we don't really want to inundate people with "we're MHQP and this is what we do." We really want to be part of the community and talk about health care quality and all this other stuff and then kind of fold ourselves into the mix. We also try to put news from other Aligning Forces for Quality communities and Chartered Value Exchange communities. We're a part of both of those. When those other communities that have a public release or produce a new report, we try to publicize it just as a way to help them out since we're all health care quality organizations.

We try not to post things every day if they're not relevant. So sometimes when there's a lot of things going on in the news, we might post eight or ten things during a day. Whereas if it's a slow news day and there's not much going on, we don't want to just put things out to put them out there, so maybe we'll only post one or two things a day.

Barbara Lambiaso

I think one thing that Lauren mentioned which is really important, is you really do want to be careful. This is about building relationships and building cadres of followers. And you don't always want to be putting things out there and self-promoting yourself so heavily that it's like hitting somebody over the head with a sledgehammer. Part of the experience and part of the excitement of having this sort of media is really trying to create a relevancy in a space, and a perspective for the work that you're doing and for creating a space and understanding for quality measurement within the realm of health care.

There's so much going on and things are so complex.

And by posting different sorts of news and policy information and things like that that really kind of connects with the work we do in performance measurement and reporting, I think really helps builds a context for why this work is important and why having these public reports is helpful.

Before we had social media, we always wanted to be able to share the news that we would see in the media everyday but we really didn't have a way to do that on our Web site. Social media really gave us a way to do that and a way to create a conversation and context.

Lise Rybowski

That's great, Barbara, thanks. Can you tell me how many followers or fans you have now?

Lauren Piccolo

Sure. On Twitter, we just hit the 300 mark. We have a little bit over 300 Twitter followers and on Facebook, we have about 117 fans. And these people run the gamut; they include providers, people involved in health policy, patients, other health care quality organizations, and health care organizations in Massachusetts. When you're on our Twitter page, if you want to see who follows us, if you click on the MHQP page, you can see all of the people that MHQP follows and all of the people that follow MHQP to get a good idea of kind of what's going on in the health care quality world on these two Web sites.

We also want to make the point that it's not just the number of followers or fans that you have; it's the interactions that you're having with them. You're not really getting the true experience of social media unless you're interacting with everyone who you're following and who's following you.

Lise Rybowski

That's really interesting, now do you do anything on your site to encourage people to follow you?

Barbara Lambiaso

Well on our site, we offer the ability to follow us on Facebook and Twitter. We have the icons for Facebook and Twitter on our site, so people can link through that way. And you can also join our e-mail list and we know that people are signing up for our e-mail list more frequently than they used to because we're able to track that. We're not really sure how effective the Web page has been in terms of drawing followers to Twitter and to Facebook but it's something that really can't hurt. And while it's not the main way to get people, it does promote to people that we are out there, that we do have a presence in social media. So they might take a look.

Lise Rybowski

And has all this posting and Tweeting had an impact and how do you know that?

Barbara Lambiaso

Well, the really great thing is that there are reports that help monitor for both Twitter and Facebook and we get these reports in an e-mail or we can just go visit them on the Twitter pages. But we also use Google Analytics for our Web site to sort of measure and track how people are coming and going from our site, and how many people have been to visit. So in February when we released the update of our data, our normal number of visitors in the past would be between 400 and 600 on the day of an update or on a launch.

This year we had over 3,200 visitors. That's almost five times more visitors than on a typical launch to the site as a result of the work that we did to promote the launch. And we have a sense that this came from social media because we used a lot of the same similar strategies that we've always done in the past. And social media was really the new piece, the new aspect to it. That was the one big difference this year than in other years. We were able to build up followers so we can really attribute some change to that. It didn't just impact the launch itself but also the number of visitors to our site after the launch. Typically our hits were anywhere in the single to double digits on a day-to-day basis during the rest of the year and now consistently, they're way higher than in the past.

In the week following the release, we had over a 1,000 visits and after that, we've still had somewhere between 500 and 700 a week. We also used a Facebook ad, which is paid advertising where you pay by click.

It's really not so much about the launch per se as being visible. When we have an update or a launch of new data that goes out on a day, what we really want to do is spread that. We want to keep some visibility. We want people to know about us all year round, not just on a day when we do an update and so social media has been a really great tool for keeping that presence going beyond just the day of the launch. People are more likely to go use info when they need it so that's why visibility is critical. People need to be able to find you when they want the information.

Lise Rybowski

You mentioned a Facebook ad; tell me how did that work?

Barbara Lambiaso

What we did was you can sign up and buy ads where you pay for click and you can target, specifically target the Facebook ad to pop up on Facebook pages that people are using. So we developed a Facebook ad that targeted women in Massachusetts and you can specify age range, education, whether they are married, whether they have kids and a whole host of other sort of socio-demographic information. So you can really target your audience. And what happens is our ad would pop up on the Facebook page of people that fit that demographic and if people clicked on it, then they would come to our site.

Basically what we've learned from our Facebook ad is that during the first three to four weeks when we had this ad running, we had over a 1,000 visits each week. And then once the Facebook ad ended, while we still had a lot of visits -- between five and 800 -- it did go down a little bit. What we did see with our Facebook ad is that while a lot of people were still like hopping onto our site, they

weren't staying there. So people might have clicked MHQP Facebook ad and gone to our site and sort of gotten off right away.

But once again, you know, that doesn't really worry us because the really important piece is that people did go to our site. They popped on for a second and even if they popped back off, that might give them pause. It's still an opportunity to make a connection and they might be more likely to come back when they need that sort of information.

Lise Rybowski

So I admit, I think we talked about this before, that I'm kind of a skeptic about social media. But I'm so impressed by your experience with Twitter and Facebook and have a much better understanding of their potential. So I'd like to end by asking what advice do you have for other people who are in your position?

Lauren Piccolo

We started out really skeptical too and now I am the biggest proponent to use this in our office. The only way to jump into it to start using Twitter is to physically go on Twitter and Facebook and start it and it's really not as hard as it sounds. You can devote 10 minutes, 20 minutes a day just going on the site and seeing what's up there.

The first thing you should do is establish a user name for your organization or for yourself and make connections with other organizations that you're interested in. For example we were really interested in local health care organizations and national organizations like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the American Cancer Society. Start by reading their posts and looking at how they interact with other people.

Once you start seeing how other people are interacting on social media, once you see articles, blog entries, or Web sites you're interested in, repost them on your page so the people who are now following you will be able to see them. And once you're more comfortable doing that, you can begin to post your organizations or your opinions on the articles and things that you're posting. And once you start doing that, you can start to create dialogue with people that you're following or are following you. And it will just build from there.

It really is intimidating, I think, when you haven't done it before, but as I said, once you go on the site and you look around for a little while, you realize oh, this isn't really that hard, I can do this. If I want to, I can devote five minutes a day to do this -- slowly build up my knowledge and my followers and stuff like that. And even here, we still don't spend a ton of time on social media because we have lots of other great things that we're doing. It's become a little bit more a part of our day and we think it's having a really great impact on our organization, on our reporting, and on the things we do here.

Lise Rybowski

Thank you, Lauren and Barbara too, for talking with me today. This has really been enlightening, and I think it's going to be very helpful to other quality reporters.

You can check out MHQP's site at www.m-h-q-p.o-r-g [www.mhqp.org]. And you can follow their Tweets or become a fan on Facebook by clicking on the links on the MHQP site. To learn more about other strategies for promoting quality reports, be sure to check out the "Promote" section of the TalkingQuality Web site at www.talkingquality.a-h-r-q.gov [www.talkingquality.ahrq.gov]. And to hear about future podcasts, be sure to subscribe to the TalkingQuality e-mail list by clicking on the little red envelope at the top of our Web site.

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