

body language

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Working with the new media

Wendy Lewis offers her observations on how social media platforms are changing the media landscape in 2016



As social media is igniting at a rapid pace and new platforms are emerging on a daily basis, the value it can bring to brands is also on the rise. Aesthetic practitioners and clinics are discovering the ways social media can contribute to success and growth by generating more customers, increasing their traffic to their website, blog and Facebook page, and generating buzz for their brand.

Social media is undoubtedly transforming how businesses communicate directly and honestly with their customers, and it has also revolutionised how we receive and share news and information. The pendulum swinging from print to online in terms of how people around the world consume news, has had a massive effect on the way media work.

Journalists now use social media in their day-to-day hunt for great story ideas and expert sources to interview. Over the past decade, digital tools and mobile platforms have had a significant impact on journalistic practices and they are providing value as a media tool that can help reporters research story ideas. In light of these developments, now is the perfect time to revamp how

clinics can generate publicity and elevate their profile with local, regional and national media outlets.

Digital is the new print

Up until very recently, brands relied mainly on print media to get their message out. That has changed considerably with the advent on digital media. Online is the new print, and it continues to be the most popular source for news. More and more people are getting their news from digital sources and on their mobile devices. Even devout newspaper readers are increasingly consuming content on their smartphones and tablets. This represents a sea change in peoples' consumption habits, and explains why many popular magazines and newspapers have shut down their print editions in favor of going online only. Many other magazines are staffing up their online outlets and scaling down their print teams.

The large majority of online outlets also have way higher circulations than traditional print publications. So if you are keen to get ink, don't only focus on print media outreach. Online placements will optimise your web presence and boost your ranking on search engines. Online also offers a 24-hour news cycle, so you can share breaking news without delay. Print outlets may have super long lead time; long lead glossy magazines may start working on their April or May issue by January 1. Print outlets also cannot deliver the instant gratification that consumers today demand. It can take months or even a year or more from the time

you relay your message, connect with a journalist, until the story appears in print. Another plus is that online content lasts forever and are easy to find and recycle, which is a big benefit to your media campaign.

Managing your message in the virtual world is a critical part of this equation. A strong press release outlining why the topic is significant or interesting is key. The most effective releases tie into current news, announce a new treatment, or share a key industry development. Press releases and pitches can attract the attention of bloggers who have tons of fans and followers. Getting the attention of top-tier bloggers with a huge social media presence can help to catapult your brand in a matter of clicks.

The downside is that when a story goes live online, it is nearly impossible to recall. If a blogger or writer gets some facts wrong, you can possibly reach out to ask for a correction, but that may only be done at their discretion. They are not under any obligation to revise their feature. So, give some thought about how your news item will be picked up and repackaged on social media before you send out a pitch to control your message.

New rules for press releases

The purpose of a press release is to get your story in front of as many people as possible. By posting a press release to a newswire service, it will be sent out to thousands of publications, and will get reposted on other outlets online. Newswire services will also distribute releases directly to social media channels, especially Twitter, for broader reach. The more journalists who view your press release, the more likely it will be picked up by other publications. However, journalists literally get hundreds of press releases daily so it is getting harder and harder to stand out.

Press releases are a lot less effective at actually generating media coverage now, especially in the era of social media. In fact, lots of press releases will be deleted before they ever get read, particularly if the release was not targeted to the right media at the right time, or if it is not well thought out or written badly. Before you contemplate sending out a release, ask yourself if the information you are planning to share is remotely newsworthy? For example, if you have surveys, clinical study results, or trend data to share with media that they can use—a new procedure, combination therapy, case study—these make for good reading. Awards and milestones are fair game because they will elevate your clinic's status and profile. Launching a new website or blog is definitely not of interest to media, so these cheesy SEO tactics should be abandoned.

A great headline and well-crafted lead paragraph are the most critical things to get right in your release. The opening paragraph should summarise your story succinctly and in a way that will generate interest. Include a sharp subject line if you are sending the release via email, and also visuals whenever possible. Visuals including logos, photos, and video clips can make your content more interesting and thus, more likely to get noticed.

The good source

A journalist who covers a regular beat, such as health, beauty, or lifestyle, will find himself talking to the same people on a fairly regular basis. Actively participating in conversations on various platforms is the new normal way to forge relationships with sources that they may not have otherwise come across. This especially helps when a journalist needs a source at the last minute. There will always be someone on Twitter or Facebook who will respond in record time to a query when a reporter is on deadline. Sources for stories almost always share the stories, and their audiences will often comment which can lead to new story ideas.

In recent years, social media has notably impacted the direction and practice of journalism. While these platforms are not replacing the industry all together, they are adding another layer and providing access to a wider range of subjects and sources. Social media platforms have also changed how we store, publish, search and consume news. The online universe continues to provide would-be bloggers and journalists with a platform to disseminate their messages, actively promote their work, develop their own online presence and engage with readers at a very personal level.

To become a media darling, respecting deadlines is crucial. All writers and reporters are on tight deadlines and will come back to sources over and over again who respond in a timely manner and give them what they need. The preferred way editors want to reach their sources are: email, mobile phone or text, or through their PR.

Nailing the interview

Before taking an interview with the media, brush up on current events that may affect you, your community or aesthetic medicine in general. Check current news stories about trends, statistics, and any negative stories that may have surfaced. You can never be too prepared!

A great sound bite can make the difference between getting media coverage and ending up by being cut from the story. Jot down a few key messages that you want to get across. Review them with your colleagues, staff, marketing manager or publicist. Come up with some memorable sound bites. Typically a sound bite is 10-15 seconds of video or audio time, which translates to about two or three short sentences in print or text. A sound bite should begin with a conclusion. Offer one or two brief points of explanation and support. Explain how the information will affect the viewer/reader, or what action you want them to take away from the sound bite or what you want them to think about.

Convey your message with every answer. Think about what the writer's readers would want to know. Ask yourself why the reporter should care, and why his readers, viewers or listeners will care. Guide your sound bites so they will catch the reader or listener's attention. Incorporate phrases such as: "The most important issue here is that..." or "We want to educate consumers to avoid that risk..."

Be genuine, friendly, timely and prepared to tell the truth and provide honest, factual commentary. Never lie or fib to media or they will remember it and may never use you again. Listen and respond to the questions being asked. Use brief sentences and keep your answers on point. Don't feel like you have to fill every void in the interview. Add anecdotes, a human element, new angles or news hooks to make the topic more interesting.

Repeat yourself if necessary, or if you are not sure the interviewer understood what you are trying to say, especially when it comes to explaining anatomy or specifics about treatments. Don't use medical jargon or technical terms. Show them visuals instead of talking them through it. Today's beauty writer may have been on the food or home décor desk last week.

Use facts, anecdotes, data, statistics, and point to trends whenever possible. If you don't have specific figures, emphasise your point more generally, such as "In my clinic, I have seen a 25% increase in men coming in for fillers in the past three years..."

Perhaps the worst thing you can do is to get angry, defensive, dismissive or spew negative comments about colleagues or competitors. If you don't like a question, give a brief answer only, and try to shift the focus to turn it into an opportunity to deliver your message the way you want to. For example, "I would rather talk about solutions instead of problems..." Do not say 'no comment' ever, as that can be misconstrued in myriad ways, and come back to bite you.

No member of the media is going to let you read the story before it goes to print, so it is better not to even ask them. At best, you may have an opportunity to check your comments or quotes. Far fewer long lead publications have a staff of researchers and fact checkers to confirm the validity of features. In fact, many do not even have sub editors or assistants on board due to budget cuts. Television programmes may have researchers to vet a story idea before it gets developed and ultimately filmed, but the local news producer is probably going to be working solo to get a story on air. The sad truth is that most media outlets today are operating on a skeleton crew, which is all the more reason to make their job easier if you want them to work with you.

Lastly, keep in mind that anything you say can show up in print, or be blogged about or tweeted, so never say anything that may not be in your best interest to share. I have spent countless sleepless nights rethinking comments I have made and wishing I hadn't said something. Even if you state up front that your comments are "off the record," real reporters are not bound to abide by that request, even if you think you have a good relationship with the reporter. If you are in the position of being a source, media is not necessarily going to be your ally forever, so avoid getting too friendly—it can lead to missteps you may regret down the road.

If you are serious about getting your name out there through consumer print and online media, and seeing your face on TV, consider hiring a professional, beauty-savvy, well connected publicist to guide you and help you stay out of trouble. They may just be worth their weight in gold.

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