

A Beginner's Guide to Generating Referrals for HealthCare Practices from Social Networking Sites

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Joe and Rufus

Everyone is talking about Social Networking sites these days, and especially the Big Three: Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. This a complex topic, and you can look online for a great deal of (often contradictory) information about how to best use them. **But in this report I will cut to the chase: what are some very concrete, practical ways to use these sites to generate referrals for your practice?**

First of all, what is a Social Networking site? It simply means a site that invites user input, and connects users with one another in a variety of ways, so you can see (or hear and watch) each other's content, and comment on it if you feel so moved.

To make the most of these sites as a source of referrals, you should have a website or blog. If you don't have either, go to www.wordpress.com and get a free blog or www.godaddy.com and find their Website Tonight service to create a website for \$4.99 a month. Fortunately, price is simply no longer an issue when creating an online presence!

What To Do: I'll talk about each one separately, but one general starting point is this: create a free profile on each of the sites:

www.facebook.com

www.twitter.com

www.linkedin.com

If you have a website or blog, be sure to put your site URL in the profile. If nothing else, **this gives you three great inbound links** from very high traffic sites. Be sure to load up your profile with as many top keywords as you can, that relate to your areas of specialization and services.

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Facebook

Facebook is the big Kahuna: it has More than 200 million active users, and more than 100 million users log on to Facebook at least once each day. Although it started as a service for college students, the fastest growing demographic is those 35 years old and older. Over 30 million people access their Facebook account via a mobile device such as a cell phone.

Although there are more complex ways to promote a business that are beyond the scope of this report, think of **Facebook as a social club**. Imagine making small talk at a giant outdoor party on a nice day, with everyone you've ever liked from your entire life. That's the promise of Facebook. You invite people to be on your **Friends** list and the list grows. Many people initially use it to re-connect with old friends and stay up to date with current friends and colleagues. The top of the page invites you to post something current by asking "What's on your mind?" The answers range from the trivial to the profound, with mostly the former. Posts include such revelations as "I have a headache" and "I just took a nap" to short quizzes (*Who were you in a past life?* and *What kind of eyes do you have?*) that mean little but are fun to share with friends.

Ok, **so what about referrals?** There's good and bad news here. The good news is that most of your ideal client types are probably on Facebook. The bad news is that most of them are not there looking for help. So **the best way to use Facebook for rapid referrals is to use their pay per click ad service**. In the lower right corner in blue you will see the word [Advertising](#). Click on it to set up a ad for your services. 25 characters in the Headline; 135 characters in the body of your ad; and then link to a page on your website or blog. You can also put a photo or logo with your ad. But the best part of these ads is the targeting you can do: you can choose the age range; the gender; the geographical area and even the educational level of people who will see your ad.

TIP: Choose a location within 25 miles of your office, and choose an age range that tend to use your services, such as 30 – 60 years old, and gender if appropriate – and Facebook will tell you how many people are in Facebook who fit that exact profile. If it's greater than 5000 you should be able to generate referrals from your ad. The higher you bid on your ad, the more frequently it will show up on the Home page of people in the profile you chose. I have added an average of 12 additional referrals a month to my group practice using this same method.

WARNING: Be careful what you post on your Facebook status updates. More people will probably see it than you realize. Facebook has a serious lack of boundaries problem that you can get around by changing some of the settings, or just by posting a purely business profile.

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Twitter



The screenshot shows the Twitter homepage with the following elements:

- Twitter logo** in the top left corner.
- Select Language ...** dropdown menu in the top right corner.
- What is Twitter?** section with three tabs: **What?** (selected), **Why?**, and **How?**.
- Watch a video!** button in a red box.
- Please sign in** section with:
 - Input field for **user name or email address:**
 - Input field for **password:**
 - Remember me**
 - Sign In »** button
 - [Forgot password? Click here.](#)
 - Already using Twitter from your phone? Click here.** (highlighted in green)
- Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: **What are you doing?****
- Illustration of a yellow bird on a branch with a scroll, and a list of tweets including:
 - Ev Waited all morning for PG&E, who didn't without power or Internet let me get some over, back at office. 2 minutes ago from txt
 - Maggie just landed in LA. 2 minutes ago
 - mollydotcom wishes she could sleep recovering from trauma. 2 days of dr web

Twitter is the latest shiny new object that everyone is talking about. Yet compared to Facebook, Twitter is tiny – only about 5 million active users, but with phenomenal growth right now. Twitter is a micro-blogging site: micro because **each of your posts can only be 140 text characters long**. Twitter is also hard to describe because there are so many different ways to use it. You can use it as a Facebook-type social system; as a live news source; as a more sophisticated version of text messaging; to announce a new blog post or article you wrote (*with links created by URL shrinking services such as [tinyurl.com](#)*); or as a research tool. In Twitter, you don't have Friends like Facebook; instead you choose to **Follow** people. You can Follow famous people you don't know as well as your friends. So if there's a person you respect in your field, whether you know them or not, you can follow their Tweets (the noun form of a Twitter post).

Most people's first reaction to Twitter is some version of *Huh? I don't get it*. That's because they don't Find People to Follow, and/or they don't use Search. **Search is the secret weapon of Twitter – and the key to enjoying it and getting referrals from it.** People are now searching on Twitter the same way they search on Google. And more and more people are using Twitter from their phones, using programs such as Tweetie for the iPhone. For under-30s used to sending thousands of text messages a month, Twitter is a natural fit.

So here's what to do:

- 1) **Register as many Twitter account names as you can**, that relate to your area of specialization. They are free! They may someday end up as valuable as website domain names are, so get in now and register some names, even if you don't play to use Twitter right away. Twitter account names can only be up to 15 characters. Here are some sample ideas of account names to create:

AnxietyNewYork
 CouplesDenver
 EatingDisorder

- 2) Write a Twitter post – even if you have few followers – such as this:
 Couples marriage relationship counseling psychotherapy Denver CO
<http://tinyurl.com/4t5agMc>
 (the link is a link to the services page of your website or blog, shrunk down to keep under the 140 character limit).
- 3) Submit keyword-rich posts like this 2-3 times a week, with slight variations.
- 4) People in your area will Search by city and service just like they do on Google.

This method will not work in a small rural area, but works well in medium to large metro areas as well as smaller college towns who have a high % of Twitterers.

LinkedIn



Already a LinkedIn user? [Sign in.](#)

[Language](#) ▾

Whereas Facebook is a social club, LinkedIn is a Business Conferencing service. Instead of the outdoor party metaphor, imagine you're at a fairly serious Business Conference at a nice hotel, chatting with colleagues between sessions in the lobby. They have 35 million active users.

LinkedIn helps you...



Re-connect

Connect and **stay in touch** with colleagues, classmates, & clients.



Power your career

Discover **inside connections** when you're looking for a job or new business opportunity.



Get Answers

Your network is full of industry experts willing to **share advice**. Have a question? Just ask.

So LinkedIn can be a great resource for connecting with people who work on similar issues as you, and to post questions and get answers to clinical questions you might have. You can invite Contacts to join your network, which also can give you contact with people in your colleagues' network that you can begin to interact with.

In keeping with its business focus, the main question box in LinkedIn that you post to asks "What are you working on now?"

You can join any number of interesting topic groups that relate to your practice.

So What About Referrals? LinkedIn is not as good for direct referrals to your practice as Facebook and Twitter can be, **unless** you have a program or service you offer nationally, or a training for other healthcare providers. **It can be an excellent way to provide supervision** or other forms of training via the Internet, using phone, email, and/or free video conferencing using program such as Skype.

If you do have a training for other providers, LinkedIn can be a great place to post intelligent comments on Group discussions, to establish a good reputation among others in your field and build up your expert status. LinkedIn also has pay per click ads which like Facebook, can be targeted to different professions; age groups; and geographical locations.

SUMMARY

This report just scratches the surface, but is a good beginner's guide to diving into Social Networking sites. As you can see, when used skillfully – and with some patience - there are numerous ways these type of sites can be used to generate referrals for your practice.

As LinkedIn might ask you soon, *What Are You Working on Now?* Hopefully the answer is to implement what you just read. The key to a successful online presence is to plant seeds everywhere – in the form of websites, blogs, profiles and directory listings - and then use Social Networking sites and search engines to connect the dots. The more the dots are connected, the more ways potential clients can find you. And even mighty Google realizes that the live, social component of these sites is far more compelling to invest time in than a boring list of website links. This is the future of the Internet taking shape before our eyes.