Commentary on: Social Media in Plastic Surgery Practices: Emerging Trends in North America

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There is little question that the Internet has forever changed the way we live our lives, both socially and professionally. Web presence, like advertising, is ubiquitous throughout plastic surgery. Based on responses to a survey e-mailed to over 4800 American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS)-certified or ABPS-eligible plastic surgeons, with 1000 responses, Dr. Mathes and his coauthors have provided us with some interesting data about the pervasiveness of marketing in general and the use of social media in particular. Their results showed that 88% of respondents advertised in some manner and over 90% had a website. Almost half the respondents reported using social media in their personal life, and over a quarter also use it in their practice, with the most common site, by far, being Facebook. Even after considering the obvious sources of bias in this nonscientific survey (which the authors appropriately identify), it would appear that social media is here to stay and growing at an almost exponential pace. To think: It was just two years ago that I asked a group of “twenty-somethings” at a family Thanksgiving dinner if they had heard of something called “Twitter”—and I got a collective group of blank stares in return!

There are obvious questions that will arise for each plastic surgeon reading the Mathes et al article: If I don’t use Facebook or its equivalent, should I? Should it be personal and/or business use? If I do use it personally now, should I expand its use to business as well? Is it worth the effort? Some of these questions were addressed in the survey, and the thoughts of your peers can be enlightening as you consider these issues on your own. Two-thirds felt that social media could does play a role in practice development, but over half felt that this type of marketing accounted for less than 20% of their new patients. Extrapolating these figures, it would seem that most of your colleagues believe that a social media presence would not (or does not) necessarily have a significant impact on clinical practice. So why would you want to do it?

I asked this same question about telephone “texting” a few years ago. Though resistant initially, I succumbed to the insistence of my children to communicate via text message. Much to my surprise, it opened a whole new world of unique communication with my kids, friends, and even my wife! Since then, I have paid increasing attention to my children’s advice when it comes to electronic communication.

About 18 months ago, thinking that I was simply responding to a query by a friend, I “accidentally” acquired a Facebook account. Rather than simply being able to respond to my friend, I started getting “friend requests.” Initially, I just ignored them, but eventually I asked my son, Jeff (who has written an accompanying commentary for this article), whether I should fully activate my Facebook account. He was emphatic in cautioning me not to get involved, as it would “not be appropriate for someone of my age and position.” I then asked if he could help me remove my name from Facebook; after significant effort, this proved to be a fruitless task. At this point, I still have not responded to the scores of “friend requests” that have now accumulated. However, I’m intrigued by the fact that many of these requests are from plastic surgery peers for whom I have great respect. I remain interested and still question: If they are on Facebook, should I be as well? Based on the data shown in the article from Dr. Mathes and his coauthors, it seems that many of my colleagues are moving in that direction. I plan to revisit his question soon with my son!

Disclosures

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