



## **Preventing Chronic Diseases: An Investment in New York State**

### **Social Media 101**

#### **What is social media?**

Social media refers to interaction among people in which they create, share, or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Examples of social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, text messaging, and blogs.

#### **Why is social media important to health communication?**

Social media can improve health communication by expanding reach, fostering engagement, and increasing access to credible evidence-based health messages. Social media reaches people when, where, and how they want to receive health information. Social media can help organizations to:

- Disseminate health and safety information in a more timely manner
- Increase responsiveness to emerging issues
- Increase the potential impact of important messages
- Reach people not engaged with traditional media
- Leverage networks of people to make information sharing easier
- Create different messages to reach diverse audiences
- Engage with the public

Social media also influences health decision making. Not only do people look to social media for health information, but many individuals use social media to connect with other patients or caregivers dealing with similar health issues. In fact, the Pew Research Center's latest national survey on health information found that one out of every four adult internet users say they have read or watched someone else's experience about health or medical issues in the past 12 months.

## How do I get started?

Developing communication for social media platforms can be challenging. Active readers of social media are inundated with information. They often skim topics and browse sites to determine where to focus their attention. The keys to effective social media outreach are identifying target audiences and the social media sites they use, determining objectives, and deciding on the amount of resources (time and effort) to invest.

- **Identify the target audience(s):** One benefit of using social media is audience segmentation. You can develop messages that are specific to the concerns and needs of a particular demographic. Not only will understanding your audience increase the effectiveness of your social media efforts, it will help you select the best channels for reaching specific audiences.
- **Determine objective:** As with any effective health communication, you need to have a strong key message. Readers should be able to quickly identify the public health issue and the call to action. Engage the reader with messages that are accurate, short, consistent, science-based, and use familiar language terms (avoid acronyms and slang).
- **Decide on your resources:** Social media is not a standalone effort, and it should be integrated into your current communication plan. Knowing how much time and expertise your program has to devote to social media will help you develop clear social media strategies. In general, social media channels that are primarily for dissemination of information require less set-up and maintenance than outlets that allow greater audience participation and feedback. To determine your resources, answer the following questions:
  - ✓ Who will generate content?
  - ✓ Where will the content come from?
  - ✓ What is the approval process?
  - ✓ Who will post and monitor?
  - ✓ Who is the backup point person?

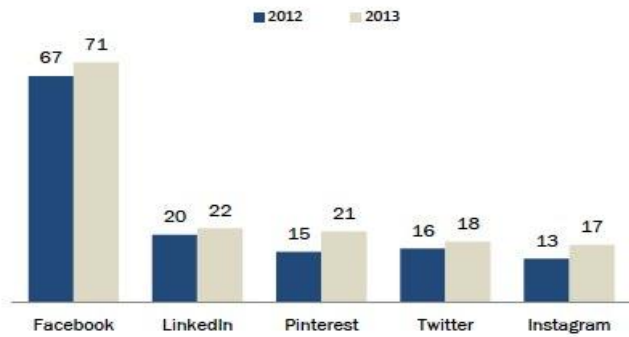
## How do I know which is the right social media platform to use?

People access information in different ways, at different times, and for different reasons. Therefore, knowing your target audience, objective, and available resources should influence which social media platform(s) are used. In addition, the rapidly changing popularity of existing and emerging social media sites requires using current market research, performance metrics, and other data to determine the most appropriate channels. The figure on the next page shows social media use among adults, although it should be noted that there are sub-populations within these groups that are not reflected.

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## Social media sites, 2012-2013

*% of online adults who use the following social media websites, by year*



Pew Research Center's Internet Project Tracking Surveys, 2012-2013. 2013 data collected August 07 - September 16, 2013. N=1,445 internet users ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on all internet users is +/- 2.9 percentage points.

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## What should I know about writing content for social media?

Because social media moves and evolves quickly, here are some recommended best practices for a few popular platforms.

### Facebook (and other social networking sites):

Facebook and other social networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn) are online communities where people can interact with friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances, and businesses with similar interests. In addition to Facebook and LinkedIn, there are niche social networking sites that target specific audiences, such as physicians or moms, or that address a particular topic, such as travel or health issues. Most social networking sites provide multiple ways for their users to interact. When writing posts for Facebook or a similar social networking site, note the following best practices:

- The average length of a post should be between 140-250 characters or approximately three lines of copy when posted on Facebook; the shorter the post, the better.
- Posts should contain engaging content that encourages a follower to like, share, or comment on the post.
- When asking for a post to be liked, use upper and lowercase along with quotation marks, for example, “‘Like’ this post if you plan on eating more fruits and vegetables!”.
- When posting content, include a link to your site or another credible organization or a digital asset, such as a photo or video.
- Facebook links do not need to be shortened.

## Twitter:

Twitter is an information-based network made up of 140-character messages called “Tweets.” Twitter users “follow” various people, businesses, and organizations to receive Tweets. Used by millions of individuals and groups who are providing frequent, daily updates, Twitter can be a powerful, real-time way of communicating.

- Tweets must be 140 characters or less
  - ✓ Be creative in how you cut down your copy
  - ✓ Twitter will automatically shorten links when a Tweet is posted
  - ✓ When including a link, your Tweet must be 120 characters or less
- Make your Tweets engaging:
  - ✓ Include links
  - ✓ Ask questions
  - ✓ Encourage followers to Retweet content (the practice of posting another user’s Tweet)
- Mention other users by their Twitter username (preceded by “@”, e.g., @HealthNYGov); users are notified when mentioned, which can draw more attention to your Tweets or start a new conversation.
- Use hashtags (#) before keywords or topics (e.g., #asthma) to help your Tweets gain more visibility; a hashtag is a search tool that allows others to find your Tweets, based on trending topics. You can also click on a hashtag to see all the Tweets that mention the topic in real time (even from people you don’t follow).
- Common abbreviations to shorten Tweets:
  - ✓ To – 2
  - ✓ For – 4
  - ✓ Be – B
  - ✓ And – &
- Abbreviations NOT to use:
  - ✓ Your – UR
  - ✓ At – @
  - ✓ & – do not use ampersands in hashtags

## Pinterest:

Pinterest is a social bookmarking site where users collect and share images of their favorite events, interests and hobbies. One of the fastest growing social media platforms, Pinterest is currently the third-largest network (behind Facebook and Twitter). People using Pinterest create and share collections of visual bookmarks that help them to plan projects, organize events, or save articles. Although not used frequently for health communication, Pinterest is included here due its growing influence and reach, and potential as a health communication tool. Pinterest currently is being used in the field successfully for nutrition, physical activity, and parenting related topics, as women are the top users of this site. If you are thinking of using Pinterest, here are some common Pinterest terms:

- Pins: Pins are the bookmarks; when individuals find images on the internet they want to keep, they can “pin” it to their Pinterest account – Pins link back to their original sites.

- Boards: Pins are collected on boards, which are where Pins are organized. When users pin an image, it is added to one of their boards to keep Pins organized by topic (similar to how folders are used for organizing project materials). Boards are created, managed, and named by each user (e.g., a user may have a board named “healthy dinner recipes”). Group boards can also be set up to share ideas among multiple users.
- Follow: Pinterest users follow boards they like, which can be viewed in their Pin feed. Users can follow all of someone’s boards or just the ones they like best.

## What is an example of a Department of Health use of social media?

The NYS Department of Health created a menu labeling campaign, iChoose600, to promote healthier ordering habits at fast food restaurants for mothers, ages 25-44 years. In addition to promoting the campaign through traditional out-of-home media (billboards, transit, radio and mall advertising), the Department placed internet banner ads on “mommy” social networking sites and Facebook. These were used to drive the target audience to the Department’s Facebook page, which prompted users to ‘Like’ the page. Daily content consisted of engaging tips on using menu labeling, how to make healthier choices when ordering, and healthier eating and physical activity habits.



## What are some additional resources for social media?

- CDC: The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit  
<http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/socialmediatoolkit.html>
- CDC’s Guide to Writing for Social Media  
<http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/guideforwriting.html>
- U.S. General Services Administration: Social Media Navigator  
<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/101299>
- Mashable: The Beginner’s Guide to Social Media  
<http://mashable.com/2012/06/12/social-media-beginners-guide/>
- CDC’s Gateway to Health Communication and Social Marketing Practice  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/>