

# Healthcare Business Insights: Social Media Strategy for Healthcare Vendors

Vendors in the healthcare space are using social networking sites to take relationship building to the next level, resulting in increased qualified leads and, ultimately, a greater return on marketing investment.



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*“So much of a sale in our industry is based on referrals and peer impressions, and having those warm fuzzies that make you feel good about a company. That’s the intangible benefit that our social media efforts have had.”*

- Jeff Zinger, Senior Marketing Programs Manager, Corepoint Health

The healthcare industry is in the midst of what seems like a constant state of frenzied change. As the industry digests daily updates on Meaningful Use, healthcare IT, accountable care organizations, mobility, security, staffing issues, etc., many traditional marketing messages are getting lost in the mix.

Purely promotional product pushes via e-mail and print advertising are not finding the traction with prospects and customers they once did. Healthcare vendors are finding that their audiences are hungry for more educational information – content that will help keep them abreast of industry news, and point them in the right direction when it comes to finding a product or solution that will take their organization to the next level.

Marketers are increasingly turning to social media strategies to meet the needs of their industry, creating informative and relevant content to establish their company as a thought leader in their particular healthcare vertical - in turn leading to positive brand impressions, engagement and interest, which generates more qualified leads in their sales pipeline.

The big question no longer deals with the relevancy of social media marketing, but rather, how to define and measure its success. Can a fan, follower or connection be turned into a lead? Can a blog really drive sales? Are webinars capable of being anything more than commercials? These are questions healthcare B2B marketers struggle with.

This paper will provide an overview of how the building blocks of social media – engaging and relevant content; strategically savvy practitioners; and strategic and consistent use of popular platforms like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube – can be used to generate marketing messages that stand out in the midst of today’s information inundation. In addition, real-world examples from such companies as Emdeon, Corepoint Health and Perficient will provide key take-aways for healthcare marketers looking to add social media to their marketing mix.

*“We’ve met at least one vendor via social media, and as a result of that relationship and learning what they do, we actually did engage with them on a project. This particular vendor had a presence on social media to the point where I could tell they were the real deal and knew what they were talking about.*

*“They were one of the few vendors in their field that were regularly contributing to the conversation and bringing fresh, thoughtful ideas. I was impressed by that.”*

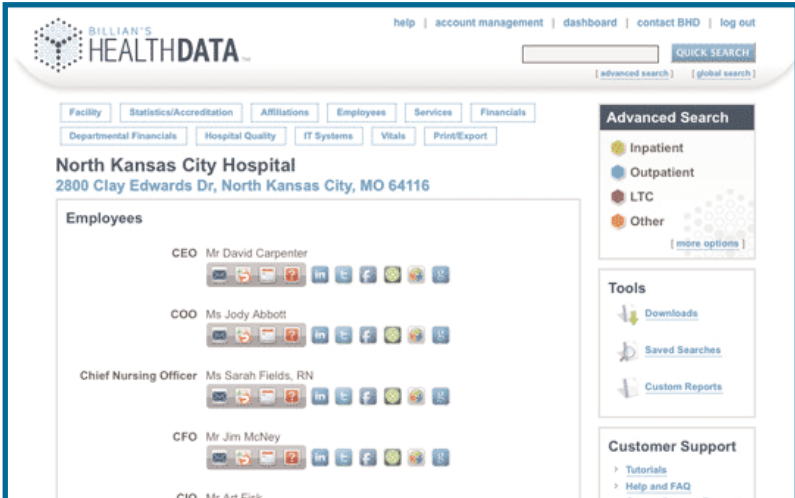
– Melissa Tizon, Communications Director, Swedish Medical Center

## Prospecting to Providers via Social Media Gains Ground

Billian’s HealthDATA and Porter Research have found that social media is an integral part of their marketing strategies. Blogs, in-depth articles, webinars, educational e-newsletters, LinkedIn groups, Twitter followers and even Facebook fans have had a significant impact on the brand awareness of these companies. And, as any marketer knows, brand awareness is the building block of the sales cycle. As the saying goes, “If you build it, they will come.”

The companies have been on the social media scene for nearly two years - on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube; as well as creating blogs, editorial e-newsletters and educational webinars. By creating original content to disseminate via these channels, relationships have been formed and strengthened with providers, vendors and current customers that have in turn helped to educate the marketer about what’s going on in this fast-paced, ever-changing industry. It has been a very organic marketing effort that has yielded tremendous results in terms of increased search engine optimization and website traffic.

Billian’s HealthDATA believed in the value of social media so much so that it incorporated several different platforms into its flagship Portal product – an online database of healthcare facilities across the United States. Marketers looking to reach out to healthcare employees at any of the more than 47,000 healthcare facilities in the database now have the added layer of that employee’s social networking activity to dive into.



The screenshot displays the Billian's HealthDATA website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'help', 'account management', 'dashboard', 'contact BHD', and 'log out'. A search bar is located on the right side. Below the navigation, there are several tabs for different categories: 'Facility', 'Statistics/Accreditation', 'Affiliations', 'Employees', 'Services', and 'Financials'. Under the 'Employees' tab, there are sub-tabs for 'Departmental Financials', 'Hospital Quality', 'IT Systems', 'Vitals', and 'Print/Export'. The main content area shows the profile for 'North Kansas City Hospital' at '2800 Clay Edwards Dr, North Kansas City, MO 64116'. Under the 'Employees' section, there are profiles for: CEO Mr David Carpenter, COO Ms Jody Abbott, Chief Nursing Officer Ms Sarah Fields, RN, CFO Mr Jim McNey, and CIO Mr Art Fisk. Each profile includes social media icons for LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. On the right side, there is an 'Advanced Search' section with filters for 'Inpatient', 'Outpatient', 'LTC', and 'Other'. Below that is a 'Tools' section with links for 'Downloads', 'Saved Searches', and 'Custom Reports'. At the bottom right, there is a 'Customer Support' section with links for 'Tutorials' and 'Help and FAQ'.

Umberto Milletti, CEO of Inside View, has coined this layer “social intelligence.” As he writes in his popular “Social Selling Throughout the B2B Sales Cycle” blog series, “Engaging today’s socially-savvy customer involves far more than a grasp of the basic facts and figures about their companies, and requires a broader view that incorporates recent business events, social conversations and social relationships – in other words, social intelligence.” He adds, “... social media adds an insider’s perspective that helps sales professionals get ahead of the curve.”

By learning more about a prospect via their activity on such social media platforms as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and the more business-oriented Spoke and Jigsaw, healthcare vendors can tap into this social intelligence and “access more personalized prospect information, in less time,” according to Milletti. “Through social selling techniques, sales teams tap highly relevant information to quickly qualify and rank inbound leads, driving a more efficient sales cycle, thanks to real-time business information.”

Diving into a prospect’s social media activity can help illuminate company information like employee count, location and revenue. It can also highlight ideal times to reach out with a company introduction, product information, or industry-related content that may lead to further engagement. These events include change in leadership, product launches, cost-cutting initiatives, company growth, and mergers and acquisitions.

*“Healthcare has taken off as a case study internally [at Perficient] as one of the most successful ways to drive leads using social media.”*

– Erin Eschen, Online & Social Media Marketing Manager, Perficient Inc.

## Diving into Popular Social Media Platforms

Many in healthcare have heard the comparison made between accountable care organizations and unicorns – much talked about, rarely seen. Many who have yet to adopt social media as part of their marketing mix might assume that actual sales leads from social media marketing efforts must be as mythical. Not necessarily so. Following is a brief breakdown of how Billian’s HealthDATA and Porter Research have defined goals and measured success for their blogs; and LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and, to a lesser extent, YouTube accounts.

Success comes through measurement and growth of:

- fan/follower/member/subscriber growth on a monthly basis;
- referral site performance via Google Analytics; and
- tracking leads and sales by social media platform via dedicated channel web forms and specialized URLs.

*“There’s a lot of empirical evidence that points to our social media footprint. It all goes back to one of the reasons we wanted to get so involved in social media – because of the success of our blog and what that did for us as far as reputation as thought leaders and the trust we have with our customers.”*

– Jeff Zinger, Senior Marketing Programs Manager, Corepoint Health

## Blogs, Articles and Reports

<http://www.BilliansHealthDATA.com/Knowledge/>  
[http://www.PorterResearch.com/Resource\\_Center/](http://www.PorterResearch.com/Resource_Center/)

Content is king, as another popular saying goes, and it is the fundamental building block of the Billian’s HealthDATA and Porter Research social media strategy. Fresh, relevant, insightful and most importantly, timely content gives customers and prospects a reason to keep coming back to websites, and to spend more time once there. Since creating a dedicated space on their websites in early 2010 for industry-related articles, blogs and reports, the companies have seen website traffic increase an average of 21% month to month. Disseminating this educational content to customers and prospects via their Healthcare Intelligence Hub e-newsletter also further extends the marketing reach, and helps to establish authors as thought leaders in the healthcare industry. Embedding Facebook and Twitter share buttons on each website page also adds to the influence of the content, potentially exposing each editorial effort to those platforms’ millions of users.



## YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/user/billianpub>

YouTube has proved to be a great way for Billian’s HealthDATA to showcase its Portal product. Brief Portal tutorial videos are housed on the site, in addition to video interviews with healthcare vendors and providers, often taken at industry events like HIMSS and the Healthcare IT Summit. YouTube provides yet another avenue with which to increase exposure of both companies, and is an easily accessible way for customers to stay abreast of Billian’s HealthDATA product developments, as well as the relationships Porter Research has developed with providers and vendors in the industry.



## LinkedIn

<http://linkd.in/fp46dQ>

LinkedIn groups are an invaluable tool for a number of reasons – networking and recruitment opportunities, industry education, and yes, even search engine optimization (SEO). Becoming a member of healthcare-related groups is just the first step in realizing LinkedIn's marketing potential. Creating a complete company profile page and listing products there provides additional opportunity for prospects to learn more about a company's culture and services.

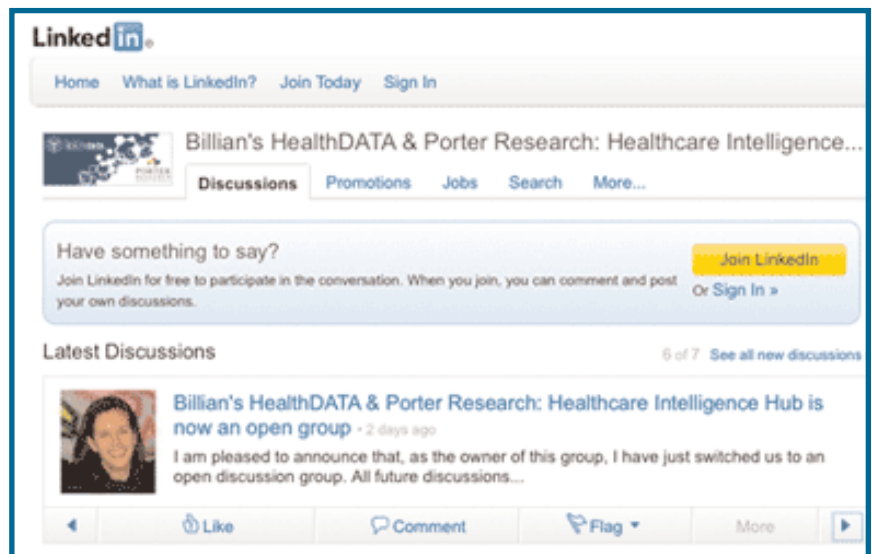
*"One scenario is for a healthcare vendor to participate in appropriate LinkedIn group discussions, which often reveal trends and expose weaknesses in products/services. I recall one very long discussion thread and a rep for an EHR vendor argued her product's case; however, seasoned HIT professionals gauged large holes in her argument. The positive was that the vendor received exposure. The negative was that serious doubts were cast about the product."*

– Healthcare IT Professional Julie Sykora

Creating a group is a second step that can yield new relationships, which can potentially turn into leads down the road. Billian's HealthDATA and Porter Research created the Healthcare Intelligence Hub group in order to engage with current customers, prospects and industry influencers on an educational level. It also provides a venue in which to disseminate original content, such as the aforementioned

editorial. Discussions revolve around current healthcare news, trends and research, and have served as great introductions to others in the industry. Members have in turn become guest bloggers for the companies' co-branded e-newsletter of the same name. Product promotion does occur, but is relegated to the appropriate section. As anyone active on LinkedIn knows, blatant product pitches are discouraged.

Joining other industry-related groups also provides additional exposure on a corporate and personal level.



## Facebook

<http://www.Facebook.com/BilliansHealthDATA>

<http://on.fb.me/iireGC>

Though some may doubt the validity or necessity of a B2B company's presence on Facebook, it's important to create and maintain a business page, if only for reasons having to do with SEO. Who knows what percentage of the website's 500 million-plus users may be in need of a healthcare-related product – or know someone who is? It's an opportunity that shouldn't be missed. While Billian's HealthDATA and Porter Research haven't found it to be as conducive as LinkedIn or Twitter to starting conversations, it has offered an intuitive platform on which to promote the companies' presences at industry events via photos and video – content that can then be disseminated via other social media platforms. And as noted before, including the Facebook "Like" button on a company's website pages exponentially increases opportunity for viral exposure.

*"We can view the retweets in Twitter, which tell us what kind of information resonates with our followers and receives the most traction."*

– Amanda Woodhead, Corporate Communications Manager, Emdeon

## Twitter

<http://www.twitter.com/billians>

<http://www.twitter.com/PorterResearch>

Twitter continues to grow in popularity and marketing effectiveness, and while some may not want to pay it much attention, there is a lot to be gained from this popular platform and its global user base. Billian's HealthDATA and Porter Research value Twitter especially for its brevity – 140 characters offer a quick way to publicize company news, start conversations with customers and prospects, and share original content. And as any marketer pressed for time will relate, it's nice to catch up on industry news and trends in small doses.

Twitter's search function offers an easy way to monitor competing brands, company reputations, employee transitions and yes, even industry gossip – all key to building social intelligence around a prospect. The ability to share tweets via Twitter's retweet function, or "Tweet" buttons on a company's website page, also increase opportunity for exposure.

*"Twitter is the best platform we've come across so far for the healthcare IT space. It's a very easy platform for [people] to jump in and out of."*

– Erica Virginia Olenski, Marketing Communications Specialist, Corepoint Health

## Case Studies

Billian's HealthDATA and Porter Research spoke with marketing professionals at three healthcare companies who are active in social media marketing. The strategies behind their social media marketing efforts present unique insight into how social networking is helping to improve their bottom lines.

### Emdeon



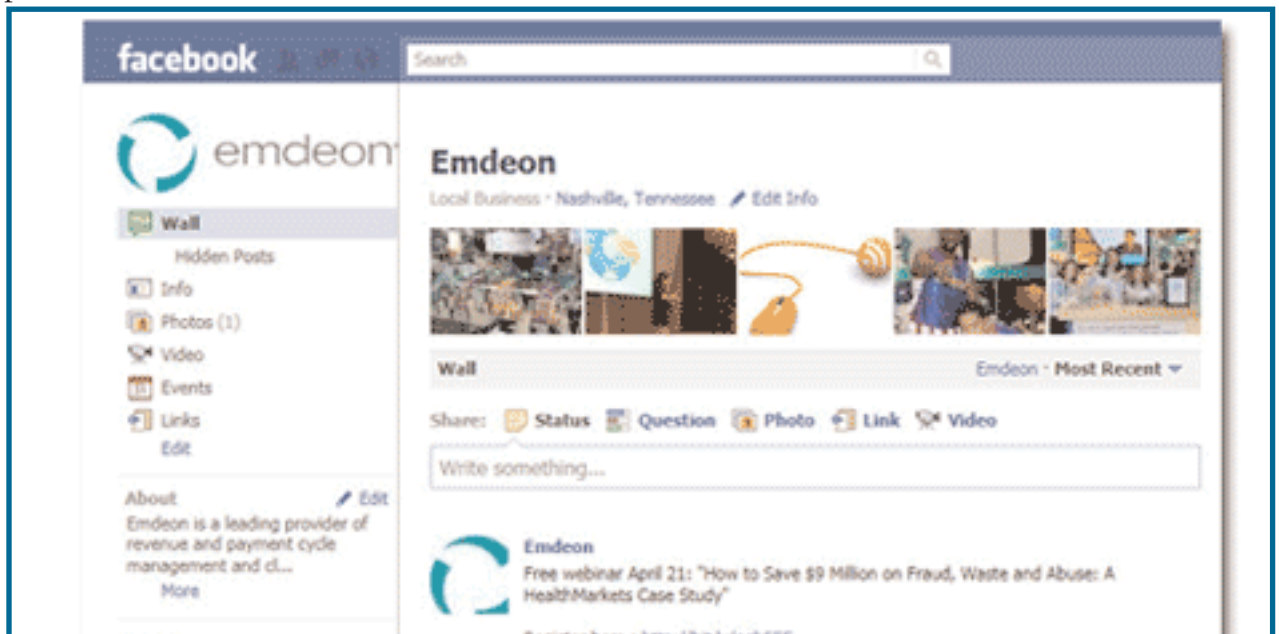
A leading provider of revenue and payment cycle management solutions that connect payers, providers and patients throughout the patient encounter, Emdeon's products enable its customers to improve efficiency, reduce costs, increase cash flow and more efficiently manage the complex revenue and payment cycle process.

### Social Media Platforms



Emdeon began implementing its social media marketing strategy in late 2009. The company increasingly integrated it into its campaigns and initiatives in direct correlation to mainstream users' adoption patterns.

"As a private company, our first experience with social media came from a need to announce and recruit for our highly technical positions from a wider candidate base," explains Amanda Woodhead, Corporate Communications Manager. "We began posting job announcements and positions on LinkedIn and Twitter. When we transitioned to a publicly traded company [in August, 2009], we enhanced the use of those outlets and also began a Facebook group page to further connect with our B2B audience. We also created a YouTube channel to house our corporate videos and share those promotional items."



## Strategy

“We integrate the use of social media [based on] the specific needs of our marketing campaigns,” Woodhead says. “As the campaigns are developed, we incorporate social media posts or updates that create awareness of the product or solutions being promoted.

“We spend an average of five hours per week on social media. We try to update Facebook and Twitter daily. Trends in healthcare IT also influence the frequency with which we post relevant and timely topics.”

Emdeon typically posts the following types of content to its social media accounts:

- industry tradeshow
- press releases and news approved for corporate distribution
- job postings
- articles from online customer newsletters
- upcoming speaking engagements
- videos with company or product information suitable for a large audience
- industry articles with statistics, trends or studies related to things that demonstrate a need for the company’s products or changes for the industry

## Metrics

“We have greater followings on Twitter and Facebook,” Woodhead explains. “We track the number of followers on each platform and define success by the increase of those relationships. We can view the retweets in Twitter, which tells us what kind of information resonates with our followers, and receives the most attention. Also, Facebook now has some numerical statistics per post to show the popularity of the content.



## Case Studies

### Corepoint Health / HL7 Standards



Corepoint Health provides software solutions that deliver a simplified approach to internal and external data integration and health information exchange for hospitals, radiology centers, laboratories and clinics. HL7 Standards is a website offshoot of Corepoint, whose purpose is to facilitate engaging conversation and offer useful industry resources.

### Social Media Platforms



Corepoint began focusing on social media marketing in June 2010 with the hire of Marketing Communications Specialist Erica Virginia Olenski. The company had dabbled in social media previously; Olenski's expertise helped the company focus and ramp up efforts on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

“There were a lot of efforts in terms of employment, recruiting and other company-based things that were done on LinkedIn,” explains Olenski. “Twitter and Facebook originally started out as more extended RSS feeds of the content we were publishing. After doing that for some time, we angled it more towards the conversation side ... really promoting conversation around that content. We've also dipped into Foursquare for tradeshow, and Quora.”

The company's social media efforts focused on the Corepoint and HL7 brands simultaneously. “The whole purpose of HL7 Standards was to be more education- and industry-focused, whereas our Corepoint messaging is more about our product,” says Jeff Zinger, Senior Marketing Programs Manager. “We've been big players in the educational and thought-leadership side of our industry, and so we have two pretty big audiences. We didn't want to have mixed messages for them. All of our blogging, and educational and thought leadership efforts went over to HL7 Standards. They started simultaneously, but it was clear pretty quickly that more volume was happening on the HL7 Standards side.”



## Strategy

Olenski posts updates to the brands' Twitter and Facebook accounts daily, blogs to HL7Standards.com twice a week, and starts discussion on LinkedIn typically once a week. The #HITsm LinkedIn group is named after the tweekchat Olenski hosts on a weekly basis under that Twitter hashtag. Olenski created and began using the #HITsm hashtag on Twitter in September of last year, at the same time HL7Standards.com was undergoing a redesign.



“At first traction was fairly low, but it started to pick up towards the end of the year,” she explains. “At the end of 2010, we held an annual contributor awards where I took a look at who were the top influencers on Twitter – who was really a leading voice – and put together a list of 10 individuals and organizations that I thought were doing a really great job.”

The #HITsm Top Contributor Award for 2010 turned out well, according to Olenski, generating further discussion under the hashtag and creating additional blog content. The #HITsm tweekchat started in January 2011, and has been held on a weekly basis ever since.

“I can see the strategic advantage that Erica’s social media efforts have,” says Zinger. “There’s a lot of consensus-building on there. So, for example, if there’s a new poll on HL7 Standards that we would like to get a lot of input on, Erica can promote that via Twitter. We can get a lot of good feedback and activity on that poll, which then can produce a blog post about the findings of the poll. We can then Twitter that back out - start an entirely new conversation around that, so sometimes it can really nurture itself.”

## Metrics

Creating a role specifically devoted to the management of social media marketing has been key to Corepoint’s thought-leadership efforts and the resultant relationships that have been established. Olenski’s focused efforts have generated conversation, increased followers and driven a lot of traffic to the company’s websites. “All those things increase our reputation, and so much of a sale in our industry is based on referrals and peer impressions ... just having those warm fuzzies that make you feel good about a company. That’s the intangible benefit that our social media efforts have had.”



## Case Studies

### Perficient



Healthcare organizations including hospitals and health systems, integrated delivery networks, payers, life sciences and government agencies use Perficient’s consumer-driven technology solutions to gain instant access to patient and clinical information, streamline core business processes including eligibility, referrals and claims; and improve communications between patients/members, doctors, administrators and partners.

### Social Media Platforms



Though Perficient had begun blogging in 2008, it wasn’t until 2010 that the company’s healthcare-related social media marketing efforts truly took off, coinciding, like Corepoint Health, with the hiring of a dedicated Technical Marketing Specialist, Melody Smith Jones, who is now Healthcare Marketing Manager. The company has been tweeting and developing blog content specific to the healthcare IT market for just over a year now.

“In the healthcare space, we have this very specific message of healthcare IT that we need to get out to a very broad audience, nationally,” explains Jones. “So when I’m looking at the channels I have available to me, online and social media make perfect sense. It’s a way to get a very specific message out to a very broad audience, and also is in line with the way that decision-makers in this space gather information.”

### Strategy

“On a corporate level, our goal is three blog posts a week per blog, and we have five blogs,” says Erin Eschen, Online & Social Media Marketing Manager, adding that they try to update each of their eight Twitter accounts – specific to solution areas, industries or locations - at least once a day.

The company is not as active on Facebook due to the fact that Perficient’s target audience – the CIOs of major organizations – is not spending time there engaging with B2B brands. “We simply don’t have a reason to want them on our Facebook page ... when our blogs and Twitter feeds are actually doing just that,” says Eschen. “So why spread them thin? It really hasn’t fit into our strategy in any sort of strong way.” She adds that they mainly use Facebook to automatically feed blog and Twitter updates, as well as to share images and videos.

## Metrics

“Healthcare has taken off as a case study internally as one of the most successful ways to actually drive leads using social media,” says Eschen. “We look at everything because we want to make sure we’re keeping a pulse on how things are growing. We start with what’s generating brand impressions. Obviously, social media is a low-cost to no-cost way to find a target market. You can easily search across profiles and job titles and engage with them, and all of a sudden you’ve got a brand impression. In order to quantify brand impressions, we look at fans and followers. We measure Twitter engagement by looking at mentions and direct messages. We actually quantify and record all of that.

“We also look at interest,” she adds. “Obviously, we can engage with people, but how do we know when they’re interested? That would be click-through links from Twitter and Facebook to our blogs, showing that people actually want to read the content. Retweets are another good example of showing interest.”

“Lastly, of course, is the ultimate metric – leads,” Eschen says. “We drive people to unique content that hopefully captures their interest in doing business with us, so we include our contact form across our websites. We look at the number of people who fill out our contact form. We also put out whitepaper and webinar registrations, and webinar replays as incentives to become leads for us. We track all of these things as a measure of actual interest.”

Social Media Marketing Goals and Metrics								
Week beginning:	Week Beginning 1/14	Week Beginning 1/21	Week Beginning 1/28	Week Beginning 2/4	Week Beginning 2/11	Week Beginning 2/18	Week Beginning 2/25	Week Beginning 3/4
<b>Twitter</b>								
# Twitter Accounts	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
<b>Followers (running total)</b>								
Pedficent		1,262	1,271	1,283	1,287	1,310	1,324	1,331
Pedficent_ECM		409	406	414	411	422	420	422
Pedficent_Jobs		382	382	381	377	386	380	393
Pedficent_HC		1,429	1,455	1,508	1,522	1,584	1,611	1,705
Pedficent_IBM		443	446	458	459	469	476	507
PRFTMinneapolis		178	179	181	181	182	179	179
Pedficent_MSFT		696	700	723	729	757	769	807
PRFT_Oracle		149	149	160	153	157	154	158
Pedficent_STL		148	150	151	151	154	159	159
PRFT_Florida		65	67	63	63	65	72	73
Pedficent_DFW		7	7	10	9	10	10	10
<b>Total for All Accounts</b>		<b>5,168</b>	<b>5,212</b>	<b>5,322</b>	<b>5,341</b>	<b>5,506</b>	<b>5,564</b>	<b>5,744</b>
± change from last week		132	44	110	19	165	58	180
<b>Facebook</b>								
Pages		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Fans of fan page		477	482	484	486	490	494	496
Visits		186	174	166	280	299	172	222
<b>YouTube</b>								
Channels		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Videos Uploaded		28	28	29	30	30	30	32
Channel Views		2757	2879	2973	3012	3136	3165	3209
Total Video Views		5008	5446	5692	5802	5946	6034	6245
Subscribers		26	26	27	28	28	28	29
<b>Mobile Applications</b>								
iPhone downloads		250	252	254	254	256	257	260
Android downloads		74	78	79	79	80	81	81
<b>LinkedIn</b>								
Group members		347	354	354	355	356	365	367
<b>SlideShare</b>								

Jones adds that the marketing teams also focus on the cost effectiveness of specific marketing efforts in terms of generating brand impressions, engagement and interest. “Then at the end, we have a per-lead cost across all channels so that we can see what has been most effective for us,” she says.

“Those things that aren’t necessarily leads,” explains Eschen, “like fans, followers, friends, etc., require a lot of different tools. We’ve tested Radian6 and other tools on that level. We’ve also ended up finding a variety of different free or relatively inexpensive tools that generate reports for me. Right now we generate a number of different reports and bring it all together into a dashboard that I create for evaluation on a weekly basis.”

## Conclusion

Social media marketing should be tailored to a healthcare vendor's specific needs, objectives and audience. The strategies employed by the aforementioned companies are tailored specifically to their products, and the needs and interests of their customers and prospects. It is this strategic thinking that has made their efforts successful. And it is this success that keeps them looking towards the next best use of social media marketing.

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## About the Author

As Social Marketing Director for Billian's HealthDATA and Porter Research, Jennifer Dennard manages the companies' social media strategies, which includes the Healthcare Intelligence Hub e-newsletter, covering the latest in healthcare industry trends and news. She is also responsible for developing educational webinars around the companies' products and services, managing editorial partnerships with industry-related websites and publications, and staying abreast of the latest marketing developments these outlets enable.

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Billian's hospital and healthcare databases encompass such vital information as inpatient capacities (number of beds per hospital), admissions and discharge totals, group purchasing organizations, healthcare financial information/statements and vital IT information - providing its clients a wider knowledge base for enhanced and intelligent decision making. For more details, visit [www.BilliansHealthDATA.com](http://www.BilliansHealthDATA.com).

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