

How 'social' is your CAM practice?

It's difficult to ignore social media, with everyone Facebooking and Tweeting all over the place. NLP CAM Coach **Mark Shields**, director of the Life Practice Group, explains how to take advantage.

Consumers spend 25% of their online time on social media sites. So what is so special about social media? It has created opportunities for practitioners to reach out to potential clients in a more direct way, create new professional networks and build relationships with existing clients (should they wish to be public).

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are the more popular choices, however there are numerous other social media networks and blogging sites such as Wordpress, Tumblr, Pinterest and Google+.

All CAM practitioners should take advantage of the different types of social media marketing opportunities because first and foremost they are FREE. Secondly, they can increase your brand awareness by directly reaching your target market and demographic. It is also a great way to increase traffic to your website and finally it gives you the chance to educate your audience (for those willing to listen), which may result in them using your services.

Everyone has their preferred type of social media platform, however it is sensible to use several in connection with each other to produce a more powerful message. For example, if you can produce an educational video on an aspect of your work and post it on YouTube, you can then tweet a link to the video on Twitter or post to Facebook. Your followers will then be able to "comment", "like" or "re-tweet" to all of their followers, which starts the "viral" spread of your message.

Get started

First you need to decide what your goals are. Perhaps your targets are to increase your follower numbers, gain referrals through social media, direct more traffic through to your website, keep track of the latest research and industry leaders in your field and what is being said. You can do all this quickly and easily using Twitter, which allows you to post short updates or "tweets" of up to 140 characters and follow the updates of anyone that interests you.

You can target your tweets direct to your chosen market, for example to schools, gyms, or corporate markets in your particular area of the country. This puts the word out about what you are doing in your practice which may help

you build up a following in a certain territory/area.

You need to ensure that every tweet reinforces your goal, but you don't want to look desperate – so make sure you offer a variety of interesting facts, figures, pictures, links, videos etc. Don't make it always all about you.

Watch what other people in your industry "tweet" (the ones with lots of followers) and model their technique, as it takes some practice to fit all your information about your services into only 140 characters.

There are many tools within Twitter that can be used to target your audience

Hashtags

Putting a hashtag # before a word helps you to create a particular subject, news story, research or event that interests an audience. For example, during the opening ceremony of the London Olympics, the topic #openingceremony was used. By posting a tweet with #openingceremony in it, your tweet would be seen under that topic group. If it was relevant to your business, the topic and interesting, other Tweeters would look at your profile and see who you are and perhaps they may even click on the link to your website, thus driving more traffic to your website.

Be careful though, as you do not want to annoy other tweeters with a blatant marketing post that has nothing to do with the topic. Equally, you need to gauge carefully how "witty and entertaining" you are, as this can affect your business image.

Increase your followers

This can be done in a couple of ways, but it is really more about quality of followers rather than quantity.

Focus on your locality and search for people using the "Discover" tab. Type #Brighton to find tweets on the topic of Brighton, for instance. They will usually be other businesses in that area. If you want to gain referrals from a gym in Brighton, look out for a gym under #Brighton tweets by reading their profile. You can also go one further and see who follows the gym in Brighton, as it may be some of their



members, in which case you can follow them too.

Who to follow or follow-back

Keep an eye on who follows you back. My rule of thumb is that if you follow someone and they do not follow you back then a week later you can "unfollow" them. Try to follow ten new people a week in order to keep on top of it.

If you want quantity then follow as many people as you like, but make sure they are relevant to your target market. Ideally what you are aiming for is a solid base of followers who are interested in what you have to say and want to share it with their followers.

Don't spam

Twitter is about relationship-building and building some rapport with like-minded parties. If you have never interacted with them before it is best not to ask for re-tweets or referrals. Try to build up some dialogue with individuals first.

Think before you post

Think before you post and ask yourself these questions:

- Does this reinforce my business goals?
- Is this interesting or relevant?
- Am I violating client confidentiality?

I hope this brief explanation of using Twitter as a marketing tool for your CAM business is useful and for those of you who would like to see an example of how it is done, go to www.twitter.com/LifePracticeUK. 



About the author

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