

Social Media in Plastic Surgery: The Future Is Now?

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We don't have a choice on whether we do social media; the question is how well we do it.

—Erik Qualman¹

Of all the medical specialties, plastic surgery is the one most present on social media. This synergy is natural and no surprise to most. Nearly every operation we perform from head to toe has an aesthetic and visual component. More than ever, the public wants access to the operating room. They want to see what we do and how we do it—preferably in real time. Before-and-after photographs on our websites are no longer sufficient to convey the quality of our work. Patients are learning about our specialty and our personal practices of plastic surgery through social media. More so, they are learning about our hobbies, where we travel, family activities, and more. More often than not, patients are seeing us in consultation with a clear perception of who we are and what we can accomplish for them.

It is not just the public that observes plastic surgeons on social media. Frequently at meetings, residents tell me that they learn more about rhinoplasty and aesthetic surgery from my Instagram than they have in residency. On a nearly daily basis, we take the time to highlight the five key aspects of a challenging case (e.g., revision rhinoplasty, secondary face lift). With one video upload, we can spread this knowledge to thousands of viewers internationally. In some ways, this transmission of information is optimal for the growing millennial population. This is because we are bringing the information to a platform they are already on, in a digestible form in terms of length and breadth of information. In my experience, the likelihood of residents watching an educational video on

Instagram is far greater than them logging into this *Journal's* website and reading a peer-reviewed article. This, of course, makes me quite sad as Editor-in-Chief of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* (PRS); however, that is the reality of how the millennials learn and teach each other today. The millennial mind is geared for this transmission of information and we need to consider evolving to meet them halfway, to train the next generation.

Until recently, showing operations and patient care has been considered taboo, particularly at academic institutions. This is in part because of a minority of plastic surgeons and noncore physicians who misrepresent results or present themselves as cavalier surgeons. The key is that we as a specialty keep the standard high and ensure that colleagues are maintaining that standard. Here are some considerations to help us raise the bar and provide quality content that is educational to patients (and each other):

- What is your social media hallmark or trademark? Do you want to show preoperative and postoperative photographs only? Teach techniques and concepts and show results? It is important to establish how you want your social media platform represented early, so that the follower is not confused.
- Avoid photograph manipulation (morphing, filtering, or editing preoperative and postoperative photographs). This only serves to heighten unrealistic expectations of patients. Apps such as FaceTune

Disclosure: Dr. Xue has no financial disclosures to report. Dr. Dayan is a consultant for Inmode and receives book royalties from Thieme. Dr. Rohrich receives instrument royalties from Eriem Surgical, Inc., and book royalties from Thieme Medical Publishing. He is a clinical and research study expert for Allergan, Inc., Galderma, and MTF Biologics, and the owner of Medical Seminars of Texas, LLC. No funding was received for this article.

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Received for publication June 3, 2019; accepted July 17, 2019.

Originally published in *Plast Reconstr Surg*. 144:1509–1510, 2019.

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DOI: 10.1097/01.prs.0000794940.66507.3f

have made photograph editing intuitive and intriguing. We all want the best results possible. However, this has to happen in the operating room, not in postoperative photography.

- Show long-term results. It is good to show the immediate intraoperative before-and-after photographs, but what really matters is the greater than 1-year result, especially in rhinoplasty and face-lift surgery.
- Keep it high class. We all took a Hippocratic oath and must abide by it. We are plastic surgeons, not entertainers. Resist the urge to gain followers by behavior that may be viewed as unprofessional. Make sure you always have written consent that specifically allows for social media.
- Showcase your expertise. Discuss a recent publication or presentation. You can also discuss articles from *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery–Global Open (PRS Global Open)* or other open-access journals to educate the public.
- Always remember, the audience is the public and the consumer! Not just plastic surgeons per se.

Social media have changed the way we as a specialty are perceived by the public. They are a powerful tool to communicate with patients and prospective patients to demonstrate great work and other meaningful messages. Like any powerful tool, they must be used appropriately and when indicated. As in many other areas of medicine, plastic surgeons have the opportunity to pioneer social media in medicine to set the bar high for all.

The sole reason I became involved in social media—from Twitter to Facebook to Instagram—has been to expand the reach of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* and *PRS Global Open* to the public and plastic surgery globally. It was all about getting all the great information about advances in plastic surgery to everyone who seeks medical and plastic surgery advice. This evolved into using social media especially as a teaching tool for

young plastic surgeons to participate in and learn from PRS Grand Rounds, PRS Journal Club Q&A and Podcasts, and our “PRS Resident Chronicles” blog. Personally, I was transformed when I did the first PRS Grand Rounds live lecture and Q&A on Facebook, and had over 5000 people view my lecture and ask me dozens of questions! From that moment, I became a believer in social media as the major conduit to teach plastic surgery and reach consumers globally!

Our major mission is teaching the principles of plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery to all who follow us and educate them about real plastic surgery and real plastic surgeons. We must strive to have a major presence in social media as real plastic surgeons. This needs to start in your residency, but it is essential to adhere to the principles as delineated above. The future is now, and we need to teach these principles not only to our residents and fellows but also to all board-certified plastic surgeons, so the consumer and the public know who we are and what we do each and every day to provide best care and safe outcomes for our patients.

Why use social media? Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell.

—Seth Godin²

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