

## Using Social Media within the NHS

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### Article Title

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### Summary

In this patient & health-led society communicating effectively with your NHS community has never been more important. The public sector has begun to recognise the growing importance of social networking sites and acknowledged that they are able to target a much wider audience through these social mediums.

### Article Body

The growth of social media has presented the NHS with a new method of communicating with their communities on key social and public health issues. With more and more people signing up to social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, NHS community members are now expecting to be able to be contacted in the medium they prefer.

Social networking is growing on a daily basis, yet is still relatively unused within the NHS. It is a new and evolving communication tool and NHS trusts are beginning to learn how they can best utilise it to encourage discussion, debate and information sharing in their communities. Popular social networking sites include Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. These channels, particularly Twitter and Facebook, started out as personal networking sites for people to keep in touch with friends and family, but have evolved into tools of which both public and private sectors can make use of.

There is great scope to use social networking as a way to reach audiences that are sometimes missed by traditional marketing channels. Specifically within the NHS, there may be large numbers of community members affected by issues such as alcohol and drug misuse, smoking, mental health, cancer awareness and sexual health. These are all community members that may benefit from receiving communication through online networking channels.

The private sector has largely accepted social media and many organisations now include it as part of their standard communication strategy. In order to remain relevant and to achieve their targets of becoming more 'customer-centric', NHS trusts and aspiring trusts must replicate this private sector trend and include social media marketing as part of their outreach and communication plans for their own community members.

Social networking is an excellent tool for promoting events, information and announcements. However, another key benefit is the ability for information and messaging to go viral. On the Internet, viral marketing is any marketing technique that induces web sites or users to pass on a marketing message to other sites or users. For NHS trusts this can be huge in terms of reaching a larger audience. Many recent NHS video campaigns have gone 'viral' in recent months – NHS Leicester had a video warning young people about teenage pregnancy, NHS Derbyshire launched two videos warning people about the dangers of binge drinking and in November last year the NHS Blood & Transport launched a campaign calling people to join the Organ Donor Register, which also went viral.



With all marketing communications, it is best to utilise all communication channels available; a 'one size fits all' approach will not work and will undoubtedly miss some community members. Combining social media communication with direct mail, email, SMS (text messaging) and communication through the press and websites will ensure a well rounded message is portrayed, yet opens the door for two way communication between the NHS trust and their community.

Managing all these communication platforms can be made easier by using a comprehensive NHS community membership management solution. These solutions built specifically for NHS trusts and aspiring trusts, enables those managing their NHS community to control all these marketing channels from within one software platform. Quality community management solutions should also be integrated into CRM and other back end office systems, meaning that all data relating to specific community members can be maintained at all times. These NHS community involvement solutions also include email marketing, event management, forums, surveys and analysis tools.

## Resource Box

Silverbear's Community Involvement Solution for the NHS is part of the portfolio of solutions from [Silverbear Ltd](#). Employed within NHS trust and aspiring trusts throughout the UK, Silverbear's Community Involvement Solution for the NHS helps to build, define, examine, inform and communicate with existing and potential community members.

Silverbear is helping NHS trusts on a daily basis. For more information on Silverbear's Community Involvement Solution for the NHS and the benefits of membership management software, visit their website: <http://www.silverbearhealth.co.uk/>

