

The Advantages of Social Media Marketing for Mental Health Professionals

By Phyllis Zimble Miller

Participating on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn offers a variety of benefits to individuals as well as businesses.

And yet many people are prevented from participating because of the fear of the unknown as well as the fear of not doing something well.

I admit there is a learning curve to effectively using social media. I also admit it is often difficult to know where to start and what to do.

But what I repeatedly most admit to is this:

If you don't start participating on social media now (and small steps are okay), by January of 2013 your competition will be so far ahead of you that you may never catch up.

Why are mental health professionals uniquely positioned to benefit from social media engagement?

Because mental health professionals are in the business of encouraging people to become comfortable with changed behavior – new ways of looking at the world – new ways of interacting in the world.

And as mentors of others, mental health professionals should be willing to lead the way into uncharted territory.

Yes, uncharted for the individual new to social media, but not uncharted in general. There are numerous resources, many of them free, for gaining comfort and expertise on the top social media sites.

Now, before I go further, let me clarify something about social media:

You share personal but not private information in order to establish connections with others. This means that you may share what city you live in but you don't share your street address.

Or when given the choice on some sites, you may decide to share whether you are married. But you don't share any fights you're having with your spouse.

The different social media sites:

The number of social media sites is probably as large as the grains of sand in the Sahara Desert. But all sites are not created equal – and all sites are not right for everyone.

The truth is that different sites appeal to different people for a variety of reasons. For example, I'm a huge Twitter fan because I love the rapid exchange of information publicly. You may prefer the very controlled atmosphere of LinkedIn.

By definition, all social media sites allow interaction to some degree. All sites also have many features in common and many features that are unique to the site.

Below are some of the top social media sites today for connecting with people who might be interested in what you do. All are free (although there is a premium level of LinkedIn and there are additional features you can pay for on Twitter and Facebook). All require you to register (for free) and then sign in when you enter the site.

In addition, each “looks” different from the other sites, and the way you connect with people on each site often differs. But the opportunity to share information that helps to showcase your expertise exists on all the following social media sites.

For professionals, the number one site to start with is LinkedIn.com:

This is not because LinkedIn is the best social media site (it isn't in my opinion). But because LinkedIn at its basic engagement works closest to the real-life experience you already have.

LinkedIn.com is a social media site that enables you to post your resume and your accomplishments, ask for recommendations, and join groups on subject areas. You then have the opportunity to invite people to connect with you.

LinkedIn gives you numerous choices, such as how often you want to receive email notifications from any groups you join. Be careful to read the choices before you click on any.

The one option I would recommend saying yes to is having your photo seen by everyone on LinkedIn and not just your connections. People respond to people, and a good headshot can encourage people to be interested in connecting with you.

A strong advantage of LinkedIn is that, if you use WordPress for your blog, you can use the LinkedIn WordPress application to automatically pull your blog posts into your profile. And you can use the status update field to link to interesting articles in your specific mental health area.

Facebook has a business advantage that many people do not utilize:

While Facebook offers a variety of social media options, the most important probably is the dual ability to have both a personal profile from which you invite people to be your friends and a Facebook Page for your business on which people can “like” the Page.

One huge advantage of having a Facebook Page is that the title is searchable. For example, if you are a mental health professional in a small town, you can have the town name and mental health professional in your Page title.

Yes, you start with a Facebook personal profile on which you can put strict privacy controls. (But still put nothing on the profile you couldn't live with the world viewing.)

Facebook will ask for your full birth date in order to join. But you can opt out of that information showing on your profile. If you want your month and day visible so you can get birthday greetings (a big activity on Facebook), keep your year off to discourage identity theft.

Security tip: Use a different difficult password for each of your social media accounts. Do NOT use a password such as your birthday, street address, etc. Choose a random password and keep a list somewhere for your own use.

The real advantage of Facebook is the ability to set up a Facebook Page for your business or profession:

This option was formerly called a Fan Page, and it offers the opportunity of a keyword-rich Page title searchable inside and outside Facebook. While formerly people would “fan” your Page, they now “like” your Page.

Facebook has recently made major changes to Facebook Pages, and it would take a short book to go over all of these. A very good person to learn about this from is Mari Smith, whose personal profile and Facebook Page are both under the name Mari Smith.

Twitter is easy to start on although it requires strategy for effective use:

Twitter is known as a micro-blogging platform because the updates, known as tweets, are public and have a maximum length of 140 characters.

If I were a mental health professional, I might tweet:

Excellent article on the main causes of depression [link to the article]

Twitter takes only a few minutes for you to set up your account. First, though, put some thought into your strategy of sharing information and not selling your services.

And I recommend you put a couple of interesting tweets (NOT “I just started on Twitter”) on your account before you start following people with the hope they'll follow you back. (See the Miller Mosaic free report on setting up an effective Twitter profile at www.MillerMosaicPowerof3.com)

Tip: Do not start on Twitter until you are ready to tweet at least a couple of times a day and at least five days a week. Anything less and you won't be considered a committed Twitter community participant.

Photo tip: Use the same headshot photo for all your social media profiles to help the recognition factor across sites. (Same photo as on your blog if you have one.) For a Facebook Page you can use art that pertains to your specialty or you can also use your photo. (Note how Mari Smith integrates her Facebook profile photo with the art on her Facebook Page.)

To blog or not to blog?

The word blog comes from the combination of website log because blogs started out as online diaries. Now blogs have morphed into more information online sites. Each new update is a post, and many blogs allow blog readers to leave comments on a specific post.

Sharing information on social media is very important. If you blog, you have more info to share than if you always have to find info to share (although you shouldn't only share your own info.)

A bare minimum of commitment is one post a week. But you don't have to write the post. You can record a 1-2 minute video that you upload on YouTube and then bring into your blog.

Or you can have guest bloggers. One such site on which to list your guest blogger request for free is BloggerLinkUp.com

The big advantage to participating on social media sites?

Staying top of mind with your clients and colleagues as well as potential clients and colleagues. You want these groups to remember you rather than remembering your competition.

For a free report on this topic, see www.millermosaicllc.com/los-angeles-social-media-consultant

In conclusion, start with one site and only progress to the next site when you are ready for a new challenge.

Of course, there are other social media sites that may be directly connected to your mental health arena. You can add these to your social media portfolio as you go along.

But it's wise to be on the top social media sites as discussed above. I admit that, whenever I meet a new person, I immediately check out this person on these sites. What I find – or don't find – does influence my opinion of that person and his/her business.

Take the advantage you have of being a mental health professional and leap into the breach of a new online experience. If you fully commit to learning and experiencing this new world, I believe you'll come to love its communication and relationship possibilities.

Recommended resources:

While I have read very good books on social media, many of these books are almost out-of-date before they are published thanks to the rapid changes in social media sites.

Therefore, what I'm going to suggest are two books that have wider appeal:

“Mindset: The New Psychology of Success” by Carol Dweck is an excellent source of encouragement for trying new things, which social media sites definitely are for many people.

“The Thank You Economy” by Gary Vaynerchuk is a fast and easy read as to why social media is so important for businesses today.

In terms of blogs:

My company blog at www.MillerMosaicPowerMarketing.com has a great deal of useful information, and I also recommend www.Mashable.com/social-media for general information as well as how-to information. I also really enjoy the information shared by Joan Stewart at <http://publicityhound.net/>

And as you start to read blog posts, you'll find yourself clicking through on links provided in the posts. This is an excellent way to find new sources of information.

Good luck enjoying participation in this brave new world!

About the Author

Phyllis Zimble Miller (@ZimbleMiller on Twitter) has an M.B.A. from The Wharton School and is the co-founder of the social media marketing company www.MillerMosaicLLC.com

The company offers a range of social media services to help professionals and businesses get set up effectively on social media with a customized strategy for connecting with their target markets. You can read more about these services at <http://www.millermosaicllc.com/services/>