

SOCIAL MEDIA GETS SPECIALIZED

In the last two years, a bevy of online niche social networks have taken root alongside the larger MD communities. As sites catch on, providing new ways to engage with PCPs and specialists, pharma has quickly tapped in to reach these segments. **Paul Wynn** reports

Physicians are increasingly collaborating online thanks to the unstoppable boom of online communities. With more MDs discussing clinical and non-clinical topics online, specialized sites have emerged in the past two years for cardiologists, gastroenterologists, ophthalmologists, pediatricians and surgeons. Companies like Abbott, AstraZeneca and Sanofi-Aventis are already diverting their marketing budgets to reach their customers through these niche online social networks.

Physician-only communities have generated much attention as doctors demand private environments to exchange information without patients looking over their shoulders. Manhattan Research reported that 60% of US physicians are either actively using social media networks or are interested in doing so, and more than half of doctors say they are influenced by user-generated content they consider reputable.

Social networking for doctors is still in an evolutionary phase, says Dr. Jason Bhan, co-founder of Ozmosis, a social media site for MDs. "Doctors wanted trusted information in the beginning, but are now building professional networks to help filter the overflow of information and prioritize their learning activities."

Sermo's CEO Daniel Palestrant adds that healthcare marketers wondered at first if social media was just going to be social for doctors. "What we're seeing now is that it is actually starting to impact the care and quality of medicine so physicians are actually turning to these mediums to better diagnose their patients and provide better care."

Within just a few years, online communities like Sermo and Med-



ASCRS's EyeSpaceMD has drawn more than 6,000 members to discuss eyecare research

scape Physician Connect have evolved into education portals with CME courses and webinars on new medical developments. Despite new online features, industry insiders predict that some of the smaller sites will fade away, and unique communities for specialists will emerge. "There is definitely a place for large, general physician communities, but we also are seeing more and more sites for different specialties," says Monique Levy, a senior director with Manhattan Research. "Online behavior among doctors is mimicking their offline habits, where they tend to seek out information within their own specialty area."

Dr. Samir Shah exemplifies this online trend. Dr. Shah, a gastroenterologist based in Providence, RI, signed up with Sermo a few years ago and followed the conversations for a while. "There were many great questions

from PCPs about GI disorders, but I found it time consuming and not very helpful for my practice," he says. "I think the network serves a role, but it's not for me because it tries to be everything to everybody." Instead of using Sermo, Dr. Shah is excited about a new community strictly for gastroenterologists, called ACG GI Circle. The social network was created by the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) in partnership with Within3.com, which builds private online communities for medical associations, companies and hospitals.

Members' interest in the network has exceeded ACG's goals with an estimated 2,000 GI doctors already signed up. The network allows members to upload and share breaking research, articles and presentations and start or add discussions about medical and practice management topics. "The community is going to be good for the GI specialty because it will be so specialty specific," says Dr.

Social Network Club

The number of online communities for physicians has tripled in the past two years, with significant growth among niche sites targeting specialists.

Community	Membership	Description	Marketing Opportunities
<p>AAO Community (www.aao.org/community)</p> 	<p>Estimated 7,000 eye MDs; open to American Academy of Ophthalmology members only</p>	<p>Launched in February 2010, My AAO provides ophthalmologists with groups on various topics that include discussion boards, blogs, photos and video galleries. A feed provides the most recent online activity, and a leader board shows the top point earners based on community contributions.</p>	<p>Corporate sponsorship opportunities are available, but product advertising is not permitted.</p>
<p>CardioSource Communities (www.cardiosource.org)</p> 	<p>N/A; open to American College of Cardiology members only</p>	<p>ACC launched CardioSource Communities in June 2010. The community will allow cardiologists to create individual profiles, groups and provide commentary on timely topics. Eventually the site will allow members to interact online through blogs, photos and other features.</p>	<p>Product advertisements will be permitted on the site, just as they are now.</p>
<p>CTSNet (www.ctsnet.org)</p> 	<p>Estimated 31,000 cardiothoracic surgeons</p>	<p>CTSNet is a not-for-profit corporation jointly created by the Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), the American Association for Thoracic Surgery (AATS) and the European Association for Cardio-thoracic Surgery (EACTS). CTSNet.org garners over 5 million page views per month.</p>	<p>Corporate and product advertising is permitted.</p> <p>Examples: Advertisers include Boston Scientific, CryoLife, Edwards Lifesciences, Maquet, Medtronic, Siemens, Sorin Group and St. Jude Medical</p>
<p>EyeSpaceMD (www.eyespacemd.org)</p> 	<p>Estimated 6,000 ophthalmologists; open to American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery members only</p>	<p>EyeSpaceMD offers educational content derived from ophthalmic meetings along with expert commentary, online discussion groups, archives, videos, images, articles, news reporting, podcasting, and industry-supported information.</p>	<p>Currently no advertising or research opportunities are available.</p>
<p>Medscape Physician Connect (www.medscape.com/connect)</p> 	<p>Estimated 125,000 physicians across many specialties</p>	<p>Launched in late 2008, this physician-only site includes personalized profiles and discussion posts on clinical and non-clinical topics. Members can poll other doctors and start "watchlists" to follow various topics. Doctors can participate in special discussion CME cases and earn credits. Articles on Medscape's main site are often discussed in the community.</p>	<p>Medscape Physician Connect does not permit product advertising, but it allows healthcare companies to monitor and start discussions, survey doctors and create online ad boards.</p> <p>Example: Medical directors from certain pharmaceutical companies are blogging on the site</p>

(Table continued on the next page)

Social Network Club (continued)

Community	Membership	Description	Marketing Opportunities
<p>Ozmosis (www.ozmosis.com)</p> 	Under 10,000 members across all specialties	Ozmosis offers several features for physicians, including specific communities around clinical issues. The company does not run surveys or panels for industry use. Later this year, Ozmosis plans to launch new offerings such as speaker events, web meetings with more peer-to-peer interaction, and a new group to provide better customer service.	Creates private physician communities on behalf of pharmaceutical companies and hospital systems; product advertising is not permitted.
<p>Sermo (www.sermo.com)</p> 	Estimated 115,000 physicians across many specialties	Started in 2006, Sermo allows members to communicate in discussion groups and blogs and earn CME credit, as well as earn money through panel moderation and "learn/earn hotspots" when they answer survey questions or engage in education.	<p>No product ads, but clients can monitor/start discussions, poll doctors and create online ad boards</p> <p>Examples: Clients include 10 of the top 12 pharmas, including Pfizer, which allows medical directors to communicate with doctors, and Sanofi-Aventis, which provides CME on practice management.</p>
<p>YPCconnection (http://ypn.aap.org)</p> 	Estimated 900 pediatricians; 80% are medical students/residents; American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) members only	Started in 2009, YPCconnection was developed for young pediatricians who are members of AAP and its section on young physicians. YPCconnection offers forums, groups, blogs, profiles, pictures and more.	<p>Corporate sponsorship opportunities are available, but product advertising is not permitted.</p> <p>Example: Abbott Nutrition sponsored a prize for the young pediatrician who entered the most posts. Abbott is recognized on the landing page with its corporate logo that links to its web page.</p>
<p>VuMedi (www.vumedi.com)</p> 	Estimated 16,000 orthopedic surgeons; half are US based.	VuMedi is a surgeon-only video sharing site where doctors view, upload and discuss surgical videos. VuMedi offers live webinar events to educate surgeons on new techniques with CME credit available.	<p>Device manufacturers can provide educational videos about their products.</p> <p>Examples: Angiotech, ArthroCare, Auxilium, DePuy Mitek, Salient Surgical Technologies, Sonoma Orthopedic Products, Tornier</p>
<p>Within3 (www.within3.com)</p> 	N/A; site develops private, closed communities	Within3 develops online communities and advisory boards for medical associations, pharmaceutical manufacturers and hospital systems. The company does not provide market research.	<p>Corporate sponsorship opportunities are available, but product advertising is not permitted.</p> <p>Example: AstraZeneca supported ACG GI Circle, an exclusive online portal launched in October 2009 with the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG)</p>

Shah. “If I know a colleague is in the network who is an expert in an area that I have less expertise in, I can reach out to him and get information quite easily.” He adds that, “it will allow much easier communication within the society for members to reach out to the leadership and allow our board to get input from members.”

The community is sponsored by AstraZeneca, makers of top-selling GI products Prilosec and Nexium. AstraZeneca has signed a two-year exclusive sponsorship of the site and is acknowledged on the site with its logo linking to its corporate webpage.

“By sponsoring this community, it allows AstraZeneca to not only enhance its brand awareness, but be seen as a leader in this space among ACG’s members,” says Kathy Ruggeri, director of marketing at Within3.com.

Medical societies building communities

Within the past two years, several other specialty associations have taken the plunge and created online communities. One of the first was EyeSpaceMD, started by The American Society of Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS). The site has drawn more than 6,000 members to talk about the latest eye care research. Company advertising is not allowed on the site, but that may change this year, says an ASCRS spokesman.

The newest physician community was launched in June by the American College of Cardiology (ACC). The 38,000-member organization created CardioSource Communities, which includes advocacy and practice management news, education and clinical content, previously on two separate sites.

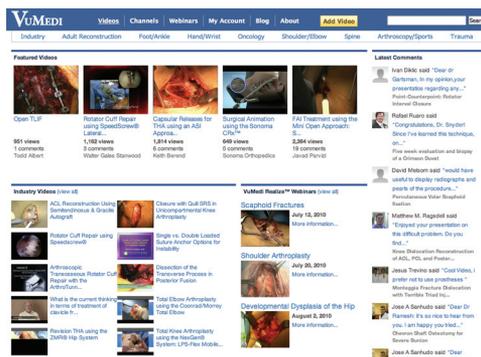
The community began with standard features that allow cardiologists to start forums and discussion groups based on common interests. More features will be added over time as the society collects member feedback, says ACC’s social media specialist Emily Zeigenfuss.

One of the considerations in creating a community is to ensure there are meaningful conversations happening to encourage doctors to return, says Jeremy Tyree with Austin, TX-based Demand Media, which partnered with ACC to create the platform. “ACC recruited key cardiologists to write commentary and start conversations from the very beginning,” he says. “You want to prevent the situation where a first-time user comes into the community and lands in a ghost town.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) created an online community last year called YPConnection for young pediatricians—those who have been in practice for up to five years or are under 40.

“The original idea was to support our youngest physicians because we know they are already online using Facebook, but the academy wanted something more professional so members could discuss things that maybe they don’t want the whole world to see,” says Dr. Christina Vo, chair of AAP’s section of young physicians and a private practitioner in Berkeley, CA.

Relaunched in October 2009, the site was opened up to medical students and residents, as well as board members and chapter leaders who monitor the site and respond to questions on the forums and discussion boards—which include clinical and non-clinical issues. The portal allows members to post profiles with pictures, blog, start groups on nearly any subject and “friend” one another as on Facebook.



YouTube-like site VuMedi provides technique-based videos for orthopedic surgeons

Currently, the site does not allow any product advertising; however, Abbott Nutrition sponsored a prize for the physician who entered the most posts. Abbott is recognized on the landing page with its corporate logo that links to its webpage.

The country’s largest medical society—the American Medical Association (AMA)—is working to develop an online community for its members. By the end of this year, it will be launching an online forum to enable members to provide feedback on AMA advocacy initiatives. Eventually, private online groups for AMA medical students and young physicians will provide a secure place to communicate about topics of interest to them.

The AMA had teamed up with Sermo to be part of its online community, but that partnership soured in 2009 after a two-year agreement expired. Some see the AMA’s entry into social media as a potential threat to Sermo and Medscape, but Sermo’s Palestrant expressed no concern, predicting that AMA’s effort “will fail.”

Gold rush to social media

Healthcare marketers—always looking for the latest way to sell to its customers—have quickly tapped into these new online communities. From AstraZeneca’s support of ACG GI Circle to Abbott’s sponsorship of YPConnection, many companies are exploring new opportunities, despite the absence of an FDA social media policy.

“We’re really in the early stages of what pharma is willing to do,” says Joel Selzer, co-founder and CEO of Ozmosis. “We spend a lot of time helping pharma and health systems understand how they can possibly engage physicians in this social media world in terms of what’s been done before and how they can assess and mitigate their risk.”

At Medscape Physician Connect, some pharmaceutical companies are allowing their medical directors to blog. “Our members tell us that they are interested in information from pharmaceutical companies, so blogging is one way to communicate with them in an informal way,” says Dr. Steve Zatz, Medscape EVP of professional services.

Companies are also using video to engage with and educate physicians. YouTube-like site VuMedi provides technique-based videos for orthopedic surgeons, who “learn through watching videos and they make product decisions based on them,” says VuMedi CEO Robert Winder.

Private online communities have a way of getting doctors to open up. Many companies have developed forums to better understand physicians’ needs and opinions. Within3’s Ruggeri says one manufacturer client found it was interacting with KOLs more frequently through an online forum than when visiting them in the field. “Some doctors who weren’t as outspoken during advisory boards became more active and vocal when they were online.”

Similarly, Sermo has found online feedback from doctors consistently more accurate than at in-person meetings.

“The hypothesis is that when doctors are commenting online they tend to be more honest compared with when they are in ad boards and want to please the person who is interviewing them,” says Palestrant. ■

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