



Why should healthcare marketers use professional social networks to reach physicians?

INTRODUCTION



Back in 2019, up to 79% of physicians were active on professional social networks and this number keeps growing!

In fact, millions of HCPs worldwide engage and communicate daily with their peers on these platforms.

The main reason behind this success is the quality, trust and privacy offered by medical social networks in comparison with mainstream social media. HCPs want to communicate and learn from their peers in a trusted environment... and no platform does it better than these professional social networks.

This allows for stronger engagement and deeper discussions on case studies than on any other platform.

Our point is: as a healthcare marketer, you're definitely missing out if you're not including medical professional networks in your omnichannel marketing plan.

But don't worry, if you haven't used them, or you're new to the industry, this report will give you all the info you need to reach out to HCPs on these platforms (and how to do it properly).

IN THIS WHITEPAPER

■ **What are professional social networks?**

This chapter is an introduction to professional social networks (what they are and their purpose), with a focus on medical professional networks

■ **Main professional social networks**

Discover the main 9 professional social networks, what makes them unique, how active they are and in which geographical area. This chapter will help you decide which platform is best for your marketing strategy and to reach your targeted audience.

■ **Why should healthcare marketers include medical social networks in their omnichannel strategy?**

As a healthcare and medtech marketer, medical social networks can be a powerful marketing tool to promote your services or products. This chapter highlights the 6 reasons why these medical professional networks are a must-have in your omnichannel marketing strategy as well as some drawbacks you should consider.

■ **Advertising on professional social networks**

Advertising best practices are not the same on professional social networks and mainstream social networks. This chapter gives an overview of the main advertising formats offered by professional social networks (traditional ones but also more specific ones) as well as our take on what kind of campaigns make sense on professional social networks, with examples.

WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS?

Whereas general social networks are mostly open to everyone, professional social networks were created to be niche specific, focused on specific professions.

Their main purpose is to allow industry professionals to network, discuss professional topics with their peers, gather information and exchange personal experiences with like-minded people - all this in a social media environment with real-time engagement.

Professionals can use these networks to connect and engage in real-time with other peers at a global level. This global connectivity is a powerful digital channel for healthcare marketers to target physicians and reach large audiences.



Examples include Behance as the world's largest creative network, StackOverflow a community-based platform for tech developers, Researchgate for scientists to connect, and Architizer designed to inspire and provide tools for architects.

Medical professional networks

Healthcare professionals need to be very careful and mindful when using mainstream social networks. A lot of misleading information gets spread, they risk damaging their reputation and they have to be extra careful about respecting the patient's privacy.

That's why more and more physicians are moving away from mainstream social networks and are joining professional social networks instead.

These networks are platforms designed to empower physicians and other healthcare professionals to connect with other like-minded professionals, quickly find relevant medical information, share and discuss patient cases in a secure environment that is compliant with local patient data protection regulations such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) in the US.

Physicians join these networks to stay updated with the latest medical research and learn from other peers and specialists, without needing to spend huge amounts of time screening through multiple different medical journals. Also, these platforms enable physicians to learn from certified Continued Medical Education (CME) materials which will help them to improve the treatments they offer to their patients.

“

Social networking is about collegiality, information gathering, providing information to large groups, sharing opinions and venting. All of these are critical to a balanced existence in the field of medicine. What better platform to do it in than industry specific sites like Sermo? The ability to share thoughts and concerns about work, family and life with those that are most likely to understand is incredibly helpful.

-Sermo user Dr. Maureen Welihan of Elite GYN Care of the Palm Beaches in West Palm Beach, FL

The number of physicians joining and using these medical platforms is growing, meaning physicians trust these platforms and see value in the way they facilitate their professional networking, information sharing and medical education.

In fact, Kantar research shows that:

- 86%** of physicians across France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK actively use online sites for professional reasons.
- 54-79%** of physician say they have also used professional social networks in the last six months.

i *Examples of these HCPs networks are Sermo or MedShr for physicians, Student Doctor Network or DoctorsHangout for medical students, and AllNurses or NurseZone for nurse practitioners.*



MAIN MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

Platform	Users	Main geo areas	Speciality	Ad services & formats
Sermo <i>"The most trusted global social platform for physicians"</i>	1.3MM HCPs and 1.1M physicians-only (86k physicians logged in at least once in the last 90 days)	US, Europe and Asia (150+ countries covered)	Medical crowdsourcing - Like Quora but on a physicians-only platform. Physicians can anonymously ask real-life medical questions and discuss them with hundreds of other medical experts	Formats: Promoted social posts, image & video ads, polls, dedicated emails, newsletter ads)
MedShr <i>"Share Knowledge. Save Lives"</i>	1.7MM healthcare professionals (50% of members use the platform 2-4 times a month)	EU5 / Commonwealth and US (190+ countries covered)	Probably the most mobile-friendly medical professional platform. Plus, 90% of the content shared on the platform is crowdsourced from its members	Services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Content Posts • MedShr Educational Posts • Banner & Email Advertising (mobile) Formats: image, videos or polls

Platform	Users	Main geo areas	Speciality	Ad services & formats
<p>DocCheck</p> <p><i>“The European Social Medwork”</i></p>	900k HCPs	Mostly Germany, but Switzerland, UK, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and US also covered	Quick access to HCPs-only websites of pharmaceutical companies, medical databases and medical publishers. Also offers a comprehensive users-made medical wiki.	<p>Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community marketing • Display advertising • Standalone mailings • Advertorials • Pre-roll ads • Sponsored posts • Media Planning <p>Formats: Standalone e-Mailing , advertorial in DocCheck News, landing page, banner placement</p>
<p>Doctors.net.uk</p> <p><i>“The UK’s largest professional network of doctors”</i></p>	243,000+ doctors (50,000 UK registered doctors every day)	UK	High daily volume of UK physician users who trust the platform to find reliable medical information. Also offers multiple online features to increase engagement (forums, podcasts, e-learning,...)	Targeted educational campaigns (sponsor an expert on a specific clinical topic to write about it and share knowledge to its peers)
<p>Doximity</p> <p><i>“The professional medical network for physicians where care comes together”</i></p>	Over 80% of U.S. doctors and 50% of all NPs and physician assistants as verified members	US	US Physician-first platform that offers a suite of cloud-based tools for on-the-go telemedicine and making it easy to connect with other professional peers	

Platform	Users	Main geo areas	Speciality	Ad services & formats
<p>DailyRounds</p> <p><i>“India's largest academic network of doctors”</i></p>	<p>1.3MM registered doctors</p>	<p>US, EU5, India, China Japan and South Korea (16+ countries covered)</p>	<p>Largest academic network of doctors with a deep focus on being a knowledge-sharing platform. Clinical cases (curated by a team of 120 physicians) are shared and presented in a journal-like manner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data insights (from records of clinical cases and drug related data) • Sponsored content
<p>Figure1</p> <p><i>“Expanding the boundaries of healthcare professionals through real-time knowledge-sharing”</i></p>	<p>1 million HCPs around the world (hundreds of thousands of monthly active users)</p>	<p>US, Brazil, UK and Australia (100+ countries covered)</p>	<p>Visual learning experience: medical network focused on being a photo sharing-knowledge platform with discussions around cases</p>	<p>Services: Peer-to-peer sponsored content that allows pharmaceutical companies to sponsor programs where physicians can engage with each other.</p> <p>Formats: Grand rounds (topic discussion), 1 on 1's (questions and votes on a topic), Insights (polls)</p>

Platform	Users	Main geo areas	Speciality	Ad services & formats
<p>Coliquio</p> <p><i>“The largest German-speaking network of doctors”</i></p>	<p>190.000 doctors (+525% Increase in usage activity in 2015-2019)</p>	<p>German speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)</p>	<p>Coliquio use data insights and physician engagement with the platform to provide the community with the best content/ medical knowledge possible</p>	<p>Services: Collaboration model: Gain insights about your target audience and communicate convincingly via an insights-based communications</p> <p>Formats: Medscape Professional Network engagement formats)</p>
<p>TonicApp</p> <p><i>“The mobile platform designed by doctors for doctors”</i></p>	<p>83.000 HCPs</p>	<p>Spain, Portugal, France and Italy</p>	<p>Multifunctional medical app used by physicians of all specialties for video consultation, e-prescription, case discussion, educational and clinical content, medical jobs, healthcare news,...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsored content for doctors (medical or educational) • Sponsored content for patients • Patient support programs • In-app messaging (with doctors)
<p>G-Med</p> <p><i>“The largest online global physicians community”</i></p>	<p>1.5MM verified physicians</p>	<p>Europe, USA, LATAM (160+ countries covered)</p>	<p>Restricted online community where physicians collaborate, talk real-world medicine, do networking and educate themselves</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic drivers: banners, email marketing • Engagement: hosted content • Deep Dive: microsite, sponsored discussion groups • Conferences (on G-Med)

WHY SHOULD HEALTHCARE MARKETERS INCLUDE MEDICAL SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THEIR OMNICHANNEL STRATEGY?

As a healthcare marketer, you know how important it is to understand your target audience. You need to know where they are, what their needs are, what content they are looking for and where they go to find the medical information they need.

Having a deep understanding of these different levels of customer profiling is crucial to designing an efficient strategy that caters to all the possible offline and online touchpoints to promote your product or services.



Next, we're going to highlight the main 6 reasons why these medical professional networks are a must-have in your omnichannel marketing strategy.

Be where the HCPs are

Physicians are very busy professionals and they appreciate having tools that can help them to save time and turn the experience of finding information online into a stress-free experience. Physicians are becoming less available to meet with sales representatives, read multiple medical journals or attend medical congresses.

They want to have reliable information quickly and on-demand.

These are some of the underlying reasons why physicians are joining and actively using professional networks.

Traditional marketing and sales tactics are becoming less prevalent amongst physicians, hence as a healthcare marketer, it's important for you to be where physicians are. Plus, you know that when physicians use these networks, they have their professional mindset “switched on” which increases the chances of your message being perceived as relevant and contextualized.

Active engagement

Another advantage of these networks is that physicians are not only passively consuming the content, but actively interacting with it, commenting, sharing. This is a powerful indicator that physicians trust these platforms and find the content professionally credible.

Highly targeted campaigns

All of these professional networks verify their members' medical credentials during the registration process. This is a mandatory onboarding step for members to have access to the content and to the medical community.

This validation is crucial to ensure the community is only constituted by certified medical professionals. Also, by having this validation, the platform gathers valuable information about the qualifications and expertise of its members (e.g., medical school/university or area of speciality). On top of this data, all user interactions and engagements within the platform are tracked in real-time and used to enhance the profile of each member.

All of this data makes professional social networks a powerful marketing tool available to pharmaceutical marketers to run their ad campaigns. Audiences can be very niche and accurate or broad depending on the campaign objectives. For example: a pharmaceutical company can run a campaign that is specific to oncologists in the UK, or they can run a broad campaign to every physician based in the US.

There's probably no other digital channel that could offer such granular data on physicians which minimizes the waste of ad budget. Marketers can be as hyper-targeted as they want and be confident their campaigns are only seen by physicians.

Increase trust & credibility

In the medical and scientific world, trust and credibility is everything. The Internet has democratized access to medical and health information, however, some of that information is misleading and not backed with proper research and medical evidence.

That's why it's important for healthcare professionals to cut through the noise and find relevant and credible medical information.

That is exactly what medical journals, medical media sites or medical professional networks offer to the community of physicians and other healthcare professionals. They ensure the content created and information shared in those platforms is trustworthy, credible and, above all, reviewed by other peers.

That collaborative peer-to-peer engagement creates the perfect trust environment for pharmaceutical companies to promote their content. It creates a place where physicians are open and more likely to trust what they see and read. When there's a trusted environment, physicians' ad recall is significantly higher compared to when those same ads or sponsored articles are shared in an open/unregulated platform.

Reach potential

Most of these professional social networks have a global scale, allowing physicians to connect with other peers regardless of where they are in the world. Physicians benefit from this global connectivity as they have real-time access to a large international community of experts to share their own research or to get “second opinions” from experts across the world.

From a healthcare marketing point of view, this global reach is a phenomenal opportunity to reach out to large, highly qualified audiences with one single campaign. Marketers can be a lot more productive by not having to liaise with different publishers/partners (eg, multiple medical journals) to reach those same audiences.

Advertising formats

These networks are one of the most versatile channels available, providing various ways for physicians to consume advertising content

As we discuss later, advertising formats include standard options such as display banner ads or email newsletters, but also specific formats such as shared patient cases or promoted social posts.

Pricing

We all know as marketers that the more quality data and more targeted audiences you can get, the more expensive that product/service is. That's exactly what happens with professional social networks.

There are three dimensions that make the advertising pricing in these networks comparatively high. Firstly, **the quality of the data and the audience is amazing**. The fact they have only verified members in their membership base and know a lot of their preferences and behavioural profile puts them in a great position to charge higher advertising fees.

Secondly, **the medical industry is highly regulated** which means patient-related information cannot be shared on digital channels that don't comply with patient privacy and confidentiality laws (e.g. HIPAA). This regulatory limitation means that there are not many compliant platforms available for physicians to securely connect and share patient cases.

And thirdly, **there are not many digital advertising alternatives** available for healthcare marketers. Other channels like medical journals or medical media sites are very limited with their advertising products and are not as engaging as these professional social platforms.

This lack of alternatives also makes the pricing modules very rigid. Professional networks usually negotiate their advertising products on a **Cost per Thousand of Impressions (CPM)** model regardless of the campaign objective.

All these factors combined make advertising on these platforms appear expensive.

Traffic stays on platform

These platforms were designed for physicians to interact with each other and to engage with peer-generated content, not to be targeted by an ad campaign and be redirected to another site. The advertisement opportunities are optimized to keep the user on the platform. As such they are not good traffic drivers.

ADVERTISING ON PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

Advertising on medical professional social networks isn't the same as on general social networks. On top of standard ad formats, there are more specific advertising formats to know about. Also, campaigns need to be more subtle as physicians are there to engage with like-minded people and educate themselves, not for sales communication.

Advertising formats of medical professional social networks



■ **Promoted social posts:**

These interactive posts are probably the most common format used in these platforms. They can include video, slides, images, polls, publications or other documents, or can be a combination of these content formats. These social posts deliver a similar experience to the general social networks as they can have a comments section or poll below to entice the community to engage and trigger a discussion on that topic.

■ **Sharing patient cases:**

Similar to what physicians do at an individual level, healthcare marketers can share anonymized patient cases to promote new treatment procedures, usually for learning purposes. Some networks offer “Real World Evidence”, allowing pharma companies to use aggregated real-life data to show evidence of successful patient cases, and promote their brand or product.



Info centers:

these are microsites within the platform, in other words, it allows advertisers to have their own dedicated “space” inside the platform, where they can publish content the same way as they would on their own website. This format is tailored for long-term content strategies where physicians can find information about treatment options, therapies, diffusion of study results, expert opinions, congress and symposium appointments and much more. It’s perfect for pharma companies that want to gain authority on a specific medical area of expertise (eg, this format is offered by the physician digital community Esanum and the medical social network doctors.net.uk.).

On top of these more specific advertising formats, most professional social networks also offer standard ad formats like:



Dedicated email newsletter:

These emails are sent to the professional network email subscriber list and are usually topic-focused, allowing for a banner ad to be served in the email or providing a link to a sponsored article.

Display banner ads:

These display banners can have different sizes and can be displayed across the different sections of the platform or the mobile app. These platforms have the capability to make these ads very contextualized.

Sponsored articles/blogs:

These articles are written by independent experts, respected medical journalists and doctors, and they are tailored to physicians with topic-specific interests.

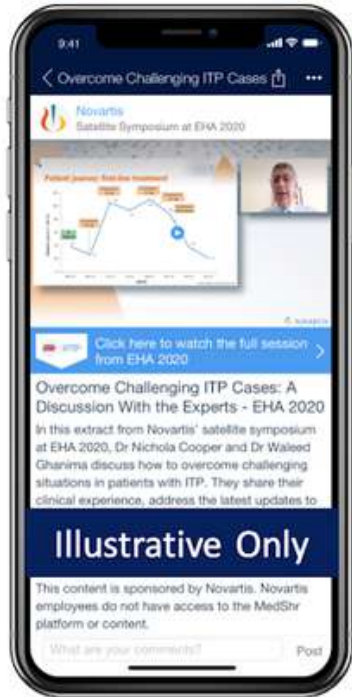
Landing pages:

These are topic-specific pages. Similar to the info centers but with a much narrower focus and usually only accessible via their own traffic drivers (e.g. email newsletter or display banner ad campaign).

What kind of campaigns make sense on professional social networks?

Let's look at a few examples to fully understand the potential of these platforms.

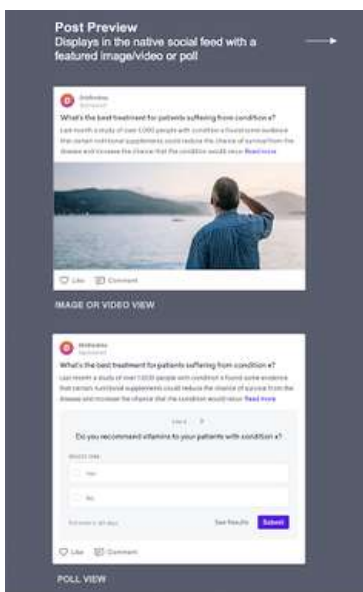
1 Overcome challenging ITP (Immune Thrombocytopenia) cases



In this campaign example, a pharmaceutical company is sponsoring a KOL (Key opinion leader) video talk on the MedShr platform about the topic of how to overcome challenging ITP cases. These types of campaigns are designed to incentivize experts to discuss the topic and share it with other professionals.

The benefit for the advertiser is that they gain authority in that topic and physicians are likely to associate the sponsored brand to the discussion topic.

2 What's the best treatment for patients suffering from condition X?



This illustrative campaign example on Sermo's platform shares the results of a recent study and incentivizes interactions/discussions from the target audience. To achieve it, this campaign uses the social post format with an image to grab physicians' attention. Then if they click on it, physicians will be presented with more information, a poll and a comments section.



This example combines multiple formats to trigger different actions from the physicians (Image or Video to convey the main message and grab attention, expanded text to provide more detailed information about the new treatment, and the poll/comment sections to collect physicians feedback).



In both of these examples, the level of engagement marketers get from running campaigns on a professional social network is significantly higher compared to other Mass Media Digital channels.

Mass Media Digital Channels

Very limited engagement opportunities - all physicians can do is click on the banner



Professional Social Networks

Wider range of engagement opportunities which are rich in data and insights (clicks, video views, polls answers, comments, PDF downloads,...)



Bottom line...

We believe that medical social networks represent a huge marketing opportunity for healthcare marketers, but the success of your campaign lies in your knowledge of these platforms and in understanding how your audience is ready to be reached.

It's all about the longer game; providing relevant and timely content to your audience, in a non-intrusive way.



Use our Whitepaper as a springboard to integrate these powerful tools into your omnichannel healthcare marketing strategy, for significant, impactful and highly measurable results.

About phamax digital

We are a team of digital champions with a passion for the healthcare industry. You focus on relevant tasks from your core business and leave the time-consuming digital tasks to us.

phamax digital was formed after we noticed the increasing challenges healthcare companies have to face on a digital level. Being affiliated to phamax means we use the same success-proven Wingmen Support model but also that our team can leverage the decade of experience phamax accumulated working for many top healthcare companies around the world.

We are headquartered in Switzerland.

For more information, visit
<https://phamax-digital.ch/>

**Our team's goal is to bridge the gap between
your digital potential and performance**



[/company/phamax](#)



behsad.zomorodi@phamax.ch

Address for communication

Corporate Headquarters

phamax digital solutions GmbH
Bahnhofstrasse 29 | 6302 Zug | Switzerland
Phone: +41 - (0) 41 710 2092