

# Using Social Media in Healthcare Strategic Assessments

**Meredith Inniger**, Manager, Veralon

**Idette Elizondo**, Manager, Veralon



Social media's most valuable role in strategic planning is in communication of strategic planning initiatives and priorities rather than for research during the planning process. It can be particularly useful for reaching employees and creating momentum for moving forward. Your organization can share information about mission, vision, goals, values and ongoing initiatives from your own social media accounts.

Social media can be a useful source of supplemental information in the assessment stage of a strategic plan and more particularly in service line and other implementation planning. However, it can also be both dangerously misleading and a time sink. Its value depends on knowing how to use it effectively, and with judgment.

**The value of social media is in qualitative, not quantitative, information.** There are now all sorts of websites that provide quantitative information on healthcare providers and patient satisfaction (see sidebar), and planning teams may also do their own confidential patient or staff surveys. Social media can supplement these by adding flavor (patient satisfaction surveys can tell you that patients don't like the nursing care; social media may give you clues as to why). They may also help you identify emerging developments at your competitors.



- **Facebook** pages can give you information on what your competitors are promoting (e.g., three announcements of patient education programs in a specific service line), tell you about new appointments (more effectively than most health system websites), and provide announcements about smaller new units or programs that may not make the local news. Note that health systems may have multiple Facebook pages—not just one for each hospital, but others for special programs within the system, or ambulatory care facilities.

- Relevant **Twitter** comments can come from patients or staff.
- **LinkedIn** can be valuable in implementation planning and is often more reliable than Facebook. It can be helpful, for example, in identifying where a competitor is strengthening a service line—or where they have had to repeatedly replace key staff. You research top managers employed by a competitor and their employment history, and identify recent additions (and departures).
- **Local Blogs and Websites** such as local parenting groups, neighborhood news sites, community activist organizations, and a range of other informal online communities may have a wealth of comments and observations; you need to search for them online in your community of interest.

**Social media is inherently biased.** Patients and staff are more likely to comment on negative than positive experiences. Even taking this into account, it's important to look for patterns of comments rather than putting much weight on individual comments.

**Confirm themes or issues through other sources.** Think of social media as a way to identify threads that may be worth following up. They can flag questions worth asking in interviews, focus groups, or surveys, or through Google Alerts and other online sources.

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Using social media in strategic assessments requires appropriate care and is time consuming. It's quite likely that you'll find little that you couldn't have found by looking at healthcare quality data websites and the competitor's website itself. ●

## A SAMPLE OF QUANTITATIVE HEALTHCARE RATINGS

- [Hospital Compare](#)
- [Consumer Health Ratings](#) (lists ratings for physicians, health plans, nursing homes, clinics, emergency departments, hospitals, and others)
- [Healthgrades](#)
- [Consumer Choice Awards](#)
- [Press Ganey Pinnacle of Excellence Awards](#)