

Online Social Networking for Radiologists



There are several reasons why online social networking has become an important part of being a successful physician. Social networking is an important aspect of networking for employment and allows radiologists to network with other physicians for clinical- and research-related interests. It may also be useful for radiologists to network with patients. As radiologists have less face-to-face contact with patients than physicians of many other specialties, online social networking platforms offer the potential for radiologists to present a virtual "Face of Radiology" for patients.

Online social networking has become a cultural phenomenon in recent years. Although people have socially networked since prehistoric times, its practice as mediated by computers and the Internet is relatively new. Social networking services have been defined as "a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections". Social networking is the process of using such services to build and/or maintain social networks.

A recently published article aims to examine the role of online social networking and why it matters or should matter to radiologists. The latest advances in online social networking are reviewed, and areas where radiologists and clinicians may benefit from these new tools are discussed.

Online Social Networking: Why It Matters (or Should Matter) to Radiologists

Online social networking has become an increasingly common means by which people interact. Online social networks (OSNs) such as Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook have been rapidly adopted by people of all ages, enabling the unprecedented ease of communication of ideas to a mass audience. Online social networking is just one of many consumer technologies such as blogs, SMS, and Wikis that have become common in the corporate world. The presence of medically related topics in these spaces is becoming more prevalent with up to 46 percent of physicians reporting interactions through blogging or other social media on a weekly basis.

Although Internet tools and most online social networking data are not specific to radiologists, most radiologists use the Internet with regularity. For example, in a 2007 survey, 97 percent of radiologists reported using the Internet for education with 42 percent using it daily. In particular, 84 percent of survey respondents claimed that their usage of the Internet for gathering radiology information had increased in the past three years.

Education and Continuing Medical Education

Many new educational and professional resources are now available online and not in a traditional paper format. For example, Radiopaedia.org is a radiology-specific Web-based reference tool that contains both cases and articles contributed by a community of members. Educational opportunities have even migrated to sites such as Facebook with case presentations presented in contest format such as the Society of Abdominal Radiology's "Gettable Case of the Week."

A recent article in *Journal of the American College of Radiology* (JACR) highlighted the use of the Twitter microblogging platform, which increased by at least 30 percent between the 2011 and 2012 RSNA annual meetings by all identifiable meaningful metrics. Microblogging has been shown to improve engagement and collaborative thinking among meeting attendees. Such a platform may be useful for online or Internet conferences, to facilitate engagement and learning. Online communities, such as Radiopolis and RadRounds, are being used more frequently in radiology clinical practice.

Professional Networking

Connections made with other trainees or potential mentors at regional and national meetings can more easily be extended after the meeting with a simple follow or connection. Several academic radiology training programmes have started alumni groups on sites like Facebook or LinkedIn to share important program updates, facilitate connections between current and past trainees, and share leads on potential job openings.

Professional networks could also prove useful during the training years themselves. A resident could query their network when searching for alternative solutions to common issues in areas such as resident education or clinical quality improvement. For instance, a group of residents who may have never physically met could compare their residency programs' strategies for preparing for the new ABR competency examination.

Social Networking Between Radiologists and Clinicians

Online social networking can facilitate communication and interaction between the radiologist and the referring clinician by allowing a forum for inquiries, answers, and elaboration of the material contained within a group or departmental Web site. For example, general practitioners may

wish to consult the radiologist to determine the optimal imaging examination or to inquire about the patient's preparation or contraindications for an examination.

With the transition from hard copy film to PACS (picture archiving and communication systems), clinicians come to the radiology department and reading room less frequently. Online social networking may help radiologists become reintegrated into the clinical team and workflow. In addition to optimising relationships with local referring physicians, the file-sharing capabilities of online social networking allow for remote consultations on imaging performed at an outside facility. The use of online social networking may allow the radiologist to add value to a remote patient's care.

Patient Education

Online social networking sites provide a portal through which patients can have access to radiologists for questions and advice. Dr. Garry Choy, a radiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, established a message forum that encouraged patients to ask imaging-related questions in an open and interactive environment. He and his research associates found that 45 percent of questions patients asked were related to clarifying terminology used in radiology reports, whereas 15 percent were questions related to radiation and another 15 percent were asked for imaging recommendations.

Social networking sites can also provide mutual benefit for radiologists and patients in the field of research by helping inform the public about opportunities presented by clinical trials while increasing recruitment of study subjects.

Social Networking for Research

There are currently many online resources available for researchers in science and medicine, such as ResearchGate. Founded in 2008 by two physicians and a computer scientist to facilitate exchange of information and collaboration, it has gained over 3 million members, over 600,000 of whom work in a medical-related field.

Online social networking offers unique opportunities for both intra- and inter-departmental research collaboration. For radiologists in training and medical students interested in imaging research, networking provides a forum for recruiting motivated trainees with similar interests. Many universities already have online resources for medical trainees interested in being matched with a suitable mentor and/or project. A similar mechanism could be used within a hospital system to search for subspecialty clinicians who could provide their clinical expertise in producing a well-rounded article.

Protection of Personal and Patient Privacy

By the very nature of online social networking, the benefits afforded by an open and accessible online profile can threaten the privacy of user. Fortunately, there are many approaches to minimising the intrusion into one's personal life. One such approach is to limit one's involvement to sites that are secure (LinkedIn), physician-only (Sermo, Doximity), or even limited to radiologists (RadRounds). These particular Web sites offer a multitude of privacy settings that allow users to specify exactly who may or may not view their profiles. Often, the user can even tailor the parts of the online profile, which are visible to different groups of viewers.

Maintaining patient confidentiality must be a priority in the medical use of online social networking, yet Prasanna et al. note that ensuring privacy for patients is an open issue in medical social networking. Sharing personal data should be guided by appropriate caution, and permission settings should be reviewed before using online social networks. Such risks may also be reduced establishing and following departmental policies on appropriate content for Web pages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, online social networking has become a common and important means for communication in our society. Although many online social networking platforms are of a recreational nature, there are several services which now cater to radiologists and offer tools for radiologists to stay at the top of their profession. Online social networking platforms coupled with mobile devices make it possible to stay connected while on the move and away from one's desktop computer.

A goal of this article was to illustrate that even a busy radiologist needs to make time for social networking. The alternative is that a radiologist becomes less connected compared to their colleagues, a dangerous situation in the current competitive healthcare environment. Consequently, online social networking services are a vital aspect of a radiologist's career and may be readily incorporated into one's daily practice.

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