

**Aligning Forces
for Quality** | Improving Health & Health Care
in Communities Across America



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



Engaging Healthcare Consumers through Social Media: Maine Alliance Case Study

Health Information Technology Resource Center

Engaging Healthcare Consumers through Social Media: Maine Alliance Case Study

Authors

David K. Ahern, PhD

Health Information Technology Resource Center (HITRC)
Brigham and Women's Hospital
Harvard Medical School

Judith M. Phalen, MPH

Health Information Technology Resource Center (HITRC)
Brigham and Women's Hospital

Beth L. Austin, MA

Crescendo Consulting Group, LLC

This case study provides lessons from a community involved in Aligning Forces for Quality, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's signature effort to lift the quality of care in America. It focuses on engaging consumers in better understanding their role in ensuring quality care, which is a cornerstone of the Aligning Forces for Quality program.

This case study was prepared by the Health Information Technology Resource Center, which serves as a technical assistance provider to Aligning Forces for Quality.

Acknowledgements

The HITRC would like to acknowledge and thank the following participants for their insight, hard work, thoughtful opinions, and comments: Beth Austin, Scott Caparelli, Jim Kupel, Lisa Letourneau, Trevor Putnoky, and Ted Rooney. In addition, we wish to thank key staff at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Diane Brodalski, Kathleen Carey, and Janice Nall – for the gracious sharing of their expertise, lessons learned, and enthusiasm throughout this process.

For Further Information

Health Information Technology Resource Center
Brigham and Women's Hospital
1249 Boylston Street, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02215
617/525-6167

Copyright © 2011
Health Information Technology Resource Center
All rights reserved.

Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's signature effort to improve the quality of health care in 17 communities across the nation, eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in care, and develop models for national reform.

The initiative advances inter-related reforms that experts believe are essential to improving health care quality:

- *Performance measurement and public reporting*
- *Consumer engagement*
- *Quality improvement*
- *Payment*

For more information about AF4Q, please visit www.forces4quality.org.

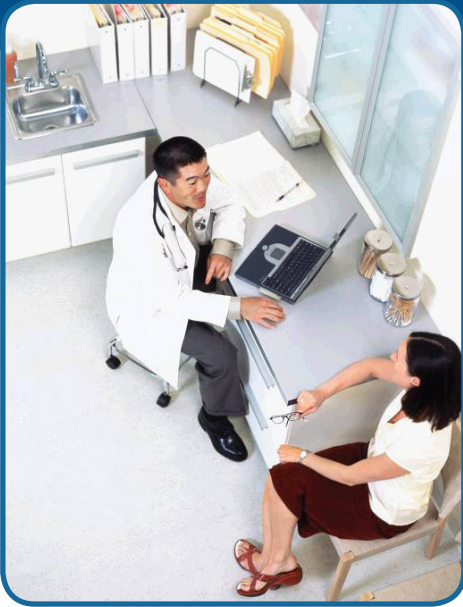


Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Why Social Media?	3
AF4Q-ME Timeline	4
Phase I: Planning & Development	5
Phase I: Outcomes	10
Phase I: Lessons Learned	13
Phase II	16
Resources	19

Executive Summary

The Maine AF4Q Alliance – the **Maine Health Management Coalition** (MHMC), **Quality Counts** (lead agency), and the **Maine Quality Forum** – relies on numerous stakeholder groups to execute its mission effectively. With guidance from one of these groups – the Consumer Engagement Leadership Team (CELT) – the Maine AF4Q Alliance selected three core messages that would shape its consumer outreach:

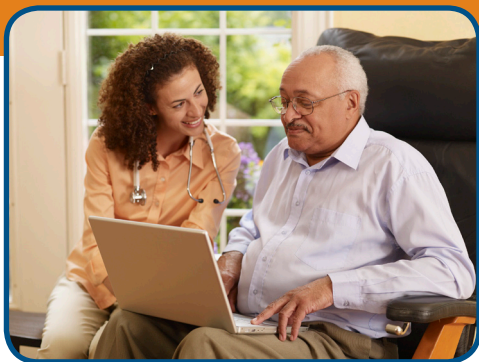
- *Questions are the answer* – Educate consumers about important topics in healthcare quality and equip them with the necessary tools to ask relevant questions of their providers.
- *Care enough to compare* – Disseminate information and resources for making healthcare choices based on quality, such as the MHMC PM/PR website, www.getbettermaine.org (formerly known as www.mhmc.info).
- *Get on the pathway to better health* – Provide consumers with tools and information that will help them better manage their own health and achieve better health outcomes.

Prior to the inception of the Maine AF4Q Alliance, the three founding organizations each recognized the importance of the consumer's role in the healthcare equation. With several years of experience and lessons learned through its robust consumer engagement (CE) program, the Maine AF4Q Alliance partners were well positioned to continue their consumer outreach efforts under the AF4Q banner, and sought new and innovative ways of doing so.

Outlined within are the planning, activities, lessons learned, and future efforts in which the Maine AF4Q Alliance has engaged to implement a social media campaign as a part of its overall CE strategy. Key findings include the need for:

- *Stakeholder buy-in to engage in a social media campaign.* More than any other technology, social media platforms hold the potential to engage consumers and patients in personalized and scalable ways never before envisioned. However, many stakeholder groups are uncertain and cautious about launching a social media campaign. Alliance stakeholders will need to support its use in order to expand the promotion and use of these tools.
- *Detailed planning.* Because of its interactive and up-to-the-minute nature, social media efforts require a well-considered plan of action and flexible process to provide the most value to consumers.





- *Dedicated personnel and resources.* Maintaining a social media presence requires committed time and effort. Having at least one person be “responsible” for overseeing the endeavor will increase the likelihood of success.

It is our hope that this case study can serve other AF4Q Alliances as they embark on their own pursuit to integrate social media platforms into their broader CE efforts.

Social Media by the Numbers

Number of staff & consultant hours through Phase I	~ 200
Number of subcommittee meetings	4
Cost to develop & launch program	\$ 11,440
Number of hours spent/week maintaining program	1-2
Number of hours spent/week on promotion & expansion	2-3
Cost for site maintenance & expansion during Phase I	\$ 6,500
Number of Twitter followers at the end of Phase I	100
Number of Facebook fans at the end of Phase I	180

Why Social Media?

Given the vast geographic and demographic differences of Maine citizens, the Maine AF4Q Alliance consumer messages needed to reach a very disparate group. Within this broad audience, the Maine AF4Q Alliance wished to specifically target individuals with chronic health conditions, which is an important, but challenging, population to reach.

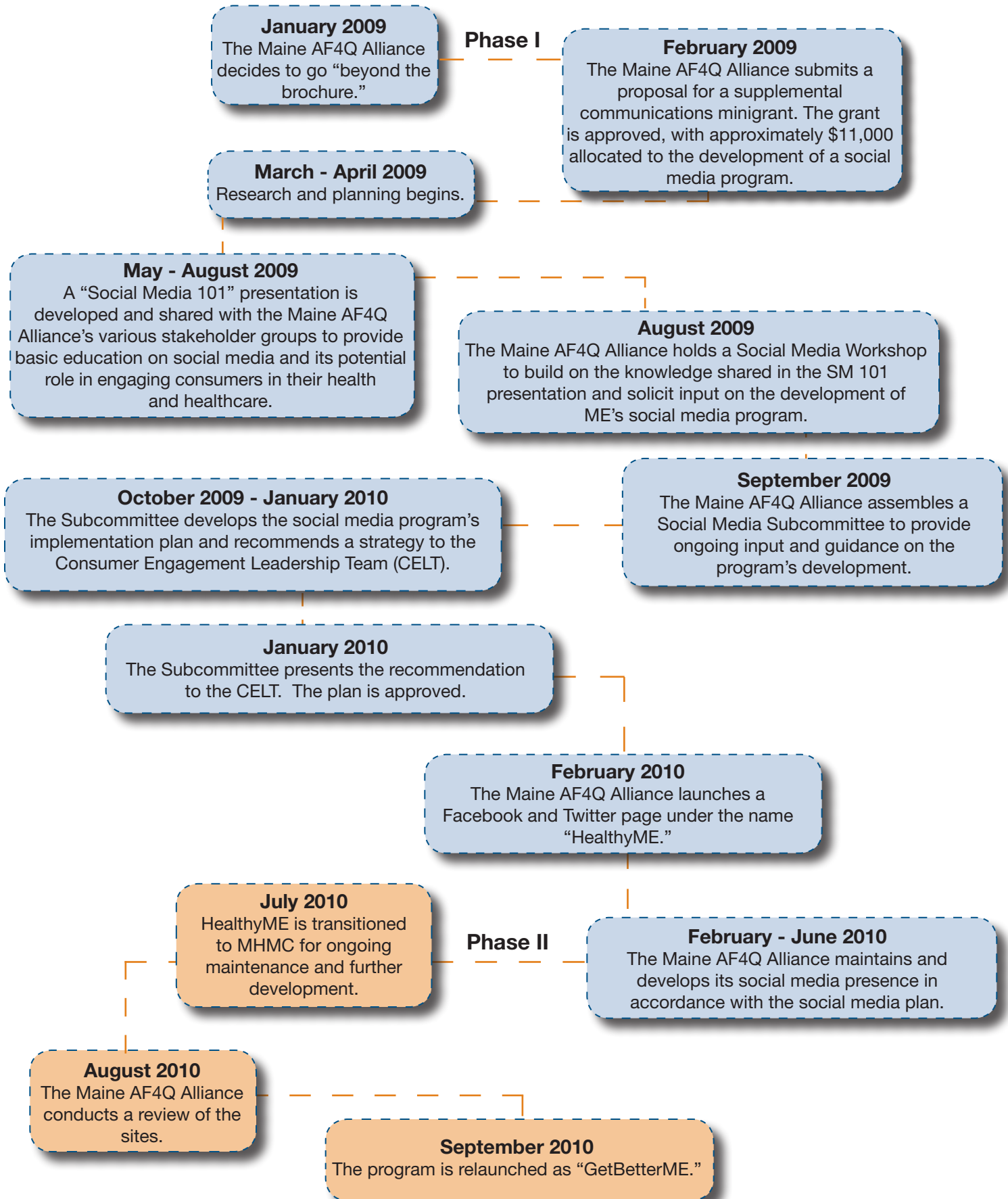
In Year 2 of the Maine AF4Q Alliance grant, key personnel met to discuss the CE strategy for the upcoming year. At that time, the use of social media platforms for improving health was burgeoning. Sites such as CaringBridge and QuitNet had already begun to demonstrate success, and a body of research was suggesting that consumers were increasingly going online to obtain health information, including through the use of social media. Further, the nature of social media and the rapidly changing demographics of its users suggested that it could be an effective way to reach Maine's diverse and hard-to-reach target audience.

Via the application and eventual award of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation communications mini-grant, the Maine AF4Q Alliance began to explore various online options to engage consumers, including the launch of a social media presence. Through this grant, the Maine AF4Q Alliance employed a local communications consulting firm to conduct and participate in the social media planning and development efforts.

"We'd been working hard on our consumer engagement program for years and we all believed that we were in a position to build on our core success and take the program to the next level. Launching a social media campaign was a really interesting way to expand the program and reach more consumers in the state."

*Ted Rooney, RN, MPH
Program Director,
The Maine AF4Q Alliance*

AF4Q-ME Timeline



Phase I: Planning & Development

The Maine AF4Q Alliance engaged in a multi-step process to develop a strategy for creating its social media presence. Each of the steps outlined in this section can be replicated to create a similar program.

Environmental Assessment

The Maine AF4Q Alliance identified a key first step to developing a successful social media program as acquiring more knowledge about similar work being done both locally and nationally. The Maine AF4Q Alliance utilized three primary activities to accomplish this.

Enlisting the Health Information Technology Resource Center (HITRC) for technical assistance. The HITRC, who serves as the health information technology (HIT) technical assistance provider to AF4Q and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, had the expertise to provide the Alliance with insight that would be helpful to the development process.

Connecting with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Maine AF4Q Alliance was connected with staff at the CDC's National Center for Health Marketing, which was actively focused on developing innovative eHealth initiatives and employing emerging technologies to promote and support public health activities. The CDC had recently developed a number of social media tools (see www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/) for disseminating health information and engaging consumers, which had been piloted during the nation's H1N1 response. This relationship not only offered the benefit of working with subject matter experts from the CDC, but also provided the opportunity to utilize three of the CDC's tools in a statewide setting: disease specific content syndication, mobile messaging, and social media measurement metrics.

Researching and compiling examples of healthcare organizations utilizing social media, both nationally and locally. With a goal of building on successful practices without "recreating the wheel," the Maine AF4Q Alliance cultivated a compendium of healthcare social media examples. While the list was not intended to be exhaustive, it achieved its objective of identifying various ways in which healthcare entities were using online and social media channels to disseminate health information and/or elicit healthy behaviors.

"Utilizing technology provides a unique and powerful opportunity for AF4Q Alliances to facilitate interactive communication and increase the dissemination and impact of key messaging. Engaging and activating the e-Patient audience is an important priority for the Maine AF4Q Alliance, and developing and successfully implementing a social media program is a very appropriate way to achieve this goal."

*David K. Ahern, PhD
Director, HITRC*



Expand Knowledge

It was critical to educate the diverse group of stakeholders providing guidance on the minigrant's execution regarding the benefits and opportunities associated with deploying a social media program. A *Social Media Marketing 101* presentation was developed and conducted in a number of venues in the spring and early summer of 2009 that effectively provided the various stakeholders with foundational information. In August of 2009, a social media workshop was conducted for the stakeholders, including a presentation entitled *Leveraging Social Media for Consumer Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges*, which achieved the following:

- Reinforced and built upon the group's knowledge of HIT and social media.
- Reviewed specific examples of effective use of HIT for CE.
- Provided a forum for stakeholders to discuss possible platforms or strategies that might be effective to engage consumers in Maine.

The Maine AF4Q Alliance was able to glean further knowledge from the CDC, which served as an excellent resource throughout by providing assistance and overarching consultation. In the early stages, the CDC team provided input on development and, in later stages, reviewed and commented on the products themselves. The knowledge captured from the experience working with these national experts was reflected in the subsequent *Maine AF4Q - Social Media Overview & Plan*.

Convene a Workgroup

The Maine AF4Q Alliance developed a Social Media Subcommittee to help guide the development of the social media presence in Maine. The purpose of this group was two-fold:

- Review and discuss how to best utilize social media in a sustainable way to engage consumers in health and healthcare.
- Develop, recommend, and endorse a social media strategy to the CELT as well as other Maine AF4Q Alliance stakeholders.

The Subcommittee was comprised of representatives from the communications consulting firm, the Maine AF4Q Alliance leadership, and employees from various stakeholder and CELT member organizations. By design, the group was quite diverse and provided representation from various constituencies. The members of the Subcommittee had varying levels of experience with social media, which offered a rich variety of input.

The group met four times (with additional research and conversations between meetings as necessary) beginning in October 2009, creating the recommendations described herein.

Goals & Messaging

Given that the Maine AF4Q Alliance wished to target those with chronic health conditions, the Social Media Subcommittee agreed that creating a presence that focused on this population would be desirable, especially for individuals with diabetes, depression, asthma, or cardiovascular disease (CVD). The group discussed the pros and cons of limiting efforts to these four conditions – versus providing information targeted to a larger population – but ultimately agreed that:

- The social media network would be relevant to many, since diabetes, depression, asthma, and CVD affect not only those who have the conditions, but also their family members.
- Individuals with these conditions are likely to need/want and, therefore, seek out this information.
- The inclusion of disease prevention tips and quality information in the messaging mix would also help attract a broader audience.

As previously mentioned, the Alliance did not want to “recreate the wheel.” While the environmental analysis identified other organizations that provided information on chronic health conditions, the committee felt that the Maine AF4Q Alliance had two distinct and important differences: first, as a multi-stakeholder collaborative organization, it is perceived to be unbiased, and secondly – and perhaps more importantly – it would serve as a local resource. Offering users the ability to receive information from local providers, interact with local people, and become familiar with area resources was a primary selling proposition

Platforms & Branding

The Subcommittee considered the best social media platforms to employ. It was agreed that the plan should be launched in stages, including only Facebook and Twitter in the first round. The selection of these two channels was based primarily on the sites’ popularity and the team’s general familiarity with the operations of those two platforms. There was significant discussion about including a blog in the first phase, but the group feared that the time commitment might be overwhelming initially. The platform recommendation evolved as follows:

“Research clearly shows that consumers are increasingly going online to obtain health information. As a physician, I applaud patients wanting to get more involved in their care but am concerned with the lack of credibility in what they may be finding online. Developing this resource for people in Maine with chronic health conditions was a great opportunity to connect people with reliable, accessible, and local information for the patients who most need it.”

*Lisa Letourneau, MD, MPH
Executive Director,
Quality Counts*

Phase I

- Twitter
- Facebook

Phase II

- Blog (likely to include a syndication feed about diabetes from the National CDC)
- Delicious
- Mobile text messaging (through the National CDC and other partners)
- You Tube
- Podcasting

The biggest challenge of a successful social media program is sustainability. From my experience utilizing social media in public health programs, I've learned the necessity of having a person who is dedicated to maintaining and developing the social media sites. That person needs to have clear set of responsibilities and expectations and must be informed enough about the program's goals to be able to be responsive to trending topics and conversation.

Scott Caparelli
Social Media Subcommittee

A number of possibilities were considered for the “branding” or naming of the Maine AF4Q Alliance social media network. Making sure the name provided immediate insight into the intent and purpose of the network was a priority to the group, and it was consequently decided that “Health” needed to be included in the name. The group liked the use of “ME” since it played off the state's name and emphasized the individual, so the group agreed upon the name “HealthyME” for the social media endeavor.

Content Development & Site Maintenance

A fundamental concern of the Subcommittee members was sustainability and determining a process for both performing the day-to-day maintenance of the program and for ensuring its ongoing evolution. Two recommendations resulted from these discussions.

Identify a “social media coordinator.” Although not feasible (or necessary) to create a new position to manage the network, the person(s) assuming the responsibility as part of his/her job function needed a clear and detailed summary of the tasks involved. To address this, a job description for a “social media coordinator” was created, which was included in the *Maine AF4Q - Social Media Overview & Plan*.

Create social media topic calendars. Ultimately, to be successful with any social media endeavor, the social media coordinator would need to engage with the audience, respond to emerging trends, and have the latitude to interact in and initiate timely and relevant discussions. However, to help ensure that the sites did not languish, the Subcommittee recommended the development of topic calendars to backstop the social media coordinator with an arsenal of appropriate posts. In addition to information on managing and preventing diabetes, asthma, depression, and CVD, the team established

two other message categories, including cost/quality information, and relevant news or information about the Maine AF4Q Alliance or its partner organizations.

From this list of general categories, a post for each day of the upcoming month would be created on a “social media calendar.” While the social media coordinator would be given the autonomy to deviate from this calendar as relevant, using the calendar would introduce efficiency by minimizing the need to find relevant topics on a daily basis.

Launch Plan

In tandem with the Subcommittee conversations, the *Maine AF4Q - Social Media & Plan* was created and included the following information:

- Overview and objectives
- Implementation roadmap
- Launch protocols for Facebook & Twitter
- Topic list
- Marketing activities
- Topic calendar
- Overall timeline
- Sample pages

The plan was presented to the CELT in late January 2010 for approval. The CELT and the AF4Q partner organizations endorsed the plan and approved the adoption of the “HealthyME” brand. Utilizing the roadmap set forth in the plan, a Twitter profile and Facebook page were constructed in preparation for the launch.



Phase I: Outcomes

The Maine AF4Q Alliance launched the Twitter and Facebook sites as planned in February 2010. At the time of the launch, the Twitter profile included:

- A profile photo (a stock photo of a physician-patient interaction, which was deemed more personal than a logo)
- A description of the site's purpose in the bio section

The Facebook page included:

- The same site description and photo used on Twitter
- Contact information, mission, and company overview under the “info” tab
- Upcoming public events being planned/promoted by the Maine AF4Q Alliance under the “events” tab
- Relevant videos and photos under those respective tabs
- A more detailed description of the Maine AF4Q Alliance under a custom tab entitled “Quality Counts for ME”

As part of the initial launch plan, two months of topic calendars were created. Although not necessarily followed to the letter, the calendars were enormously beneficial in the early stages, as it allowed more time to be dedicated to building out and promoting the sites rather than doing content searches.

During Phase I (February through June 2010), approximately four hours per week was spent developing and maintaining the sites post-launch, creating the monthly calendars, uploading other relevant content, addressing inquiries, promoting the sites, and ensuring an overall smooth operation of the program. Additional time was spent planning for subsequent phases.

Promotion & Building an Audience

Since word of mouth marketing is the most effective channel for generating interest in social media sites, the Subcommittee discussed how to boost and complement this effort to promote “HealthyME.” A more detailed plan was included in the *Maine Social Media Overview & Plan*, but the group agreed that the overarching promotional activities of HealthyME would include the following:

“In the beginning, it's important not to underestimate the amount of time it will take to promote your new social media presence. Word-of-mouth will be your biggest driver and building your initial follower base will be one of your biggest challenges. Being interactive and engaging and facilitating two-way dialogue on your sites will help generate interest, but other methods might also be necessary, such as web postings, newsletter articles, contests, or other communications. As time goes on and followership grows, the word-of-mouth will build exponentially.”

*Beth Austin, MA
Principal,
Crescendo Consulting Group*

- Facilitating/fostering word-of-mouth promotion
- Postings on partner organization websites and social media sites
- Press releases and other media outreach
- Physician and provider outreach
- Newsletter articles in various partner newsletters or other communication channels
- Recruiting through personal and professional networks
- Online promotion



The post-launch promotion contained many of these elements, with the majority of the focus being on promotion through partner channels and leveraging stakeholder and partner influence to bolster word of mouth efforts.

Measurement of Impact

The Subcommittee reviewed possible measures of success and identified the desire for both short- and long-term metrics, as well as both process and outcome measures. The group also agreed that the measures would need review after the initial launch period/Phase I (i.e., February – June 2010) to appraise their continued applicability, as well as a more fulsome discussion and evaluation to reassesses the process, structure, and desired outcomes of the program. For the initial time frame, the group agreed on the following measures to evaluate the program:

- Number of followers on Twitter
- Number of fans on Facebook
- Increased traffic to the www.mainequalitycounts.org or www.mhmc.info websites and relevant pages
- Number of quality interactions with followers or fans, defined as two-way interactions with followers on relevant topics
- Number of “re-tweets” or other redistribution of the Maine AF4Q Alliance information or messages (to the extent that this can be measured)
- Site-specific analysis, including “tweetstats,” “bit.ly,” and Facebook analytics tools
- Number of track backs from blog entries
- Positive word of mouth/anecdotal feedback



At the end of Phase I, HealthyME had approximately 100 followers on Twitter and the Facebook page had approximately 180 fans. By far, the biggest driver of fans and followers was word of mouth recommendation and personal requests to fan/follow. The word-of-mouth communication took a variety of formats, but the most successful efforts were seen when individuals promoted the sites to select individuals in their own personal or professional networks.

Website hits to both the Quality Counts and MHMC webpages were measured, which indicated that the websites had received a few visitors as a result of a post or tweet. Re-tweets were moderate (13) and interaction with followers and fans was limited. Overall, the reception of the pages was quite positive and did not indicate any major changes to the approach or content. The initial measures suggested that the effort was being well received, but continuing to promote the sites and fostering more interaction with and among followers would be a priority for the next phase.

Phase I: Lessons Learned

The development process and launch of HealthyME were generally free of major setbacks or obstacles. Throughout the program's development, there were some important lessons learned, from which other Alliances might benefit.

1. Educate yourself – as well as those around you.

Before launching a social media presence, it's critical to do your homework. Understand what others in the field have done and be aware of current best practices. Remember also that information can come from a variety of sources, so soliciting input from the broadest group possible (as demonstrated with the Social Media Subcommittee) is beneficial.

Know your audience and how they interact in social media environments. Maine's audience is quite diverse, which is not in and of itself a negative, but it is necessary to understand the nuances of the desired geographic and demographic groups and craft the strategy and messaging appropriately.

It is also imperative to communicate this knowledge broadly and articulate a clear vision for what the social media program might accomplish. Without the buy-in from stakeholders and project leaders, the program will struggle to succeed.

Social media efforts should be only one part of a broader, integrated CE plan.

Lastly, remember that learning in a quickly changing environment such as this is an iterative process. Keep abreast of changes and new ideas.

2. Create - and use - a process.

Armed with a knowledge of the target audience and channels, consider the best way to implement your social media process and document it. Social media platforms are, by design, user-centered and you will not have control over the ensuing communications that result from its implementation in the way that you might via more traditional marketing/outreach efforts. As a result, it will be important to contemplate possible pitfalls or obstacles and have a procedure for dealing with them. While it will never be possible to anticipate every scenario, coming up with as many as probable will allow you to be more proactive and less reactive.

3. Plan ahead.

The daily content calendars were enormously helpful in the launch of the Maine program, as advance planning minimized the impact of the vagaries in time demands. By creating the calendars at your leisure, you can avoid the necessity of looking for content when other issues require your time.

Know your audience.

While it's true that you can reach a broad demographic group within a single social media platform such as Facebook, it is important to remember that individual demographic groups may interact differently in a social media environment. For example, younger Facebook users are more likely to use - and read - posts containing certain types of words than older users are. Consider how the demographics of your target audience might affect your messaging strategy.



4. Name yourself wisely.

Before selecting a “brand” or name for a Twitter profile or Facebook page, search your potential names on those sites to ensure that they are not being used or may be confused with others who may have similar brands.

5. Be flexible.

While this lesson may initially seem contradictory to planning ahead, the key is finding the right balance between being prepared and responding to the environment. Being nimble and reacting to trending topics and timely conversations is imperative to success, but having a foundation from which to draw content will help give your program more depth and consistency.

6. Get to the point.

Being loquacious is not an asset in the social media realm; in particular, Twitter character restrictions require that the message be short and succinct (maximum of 140 characters). In Maine, the messaging categories included information regarding multiple chronic health conditions as well as other related topics, so being concise became even more important. Research shows that the followers will stay engaged even if messages are occasionally not applicable as long as the intent of a post/link is readily evident.

7. Show your personality!

A benefit of using social media versus a “traditional” media channel is the opportunity for two-way conversation. To take advantage of this benefit, it is necessary to be engaging and give followers the desire to interact with you by showing that you are a “whole person.” Asking interesting questions, initiating discussions, and using a personable tone are good ways to do this.

8. Give people a voice.

Further to the above, encourage two-way dialogue as much as you can, even if the nature of the comment is not wholly positive.

9. Make a negative a positive.

Every organization fears negative comment on a social media site. Having a plan for addressing negative feedback (as mentioned in number 2) is important, but it’s equally important to be patient and avoid overreacting. Although the Maine AF4Q Alliance did not have a circumstance arise in which it needed to deploy its plan, one was in place. If a negative comment did not violate specific boundaries (e.g., vulgar, inflammatory, etc.), the plan’s first-line response was to wait. In an open forum, other followers or members may respond positively. Consumers appreciate honesty and are generally able to evaluate negative feedback fairly, so a dialogue is quite often favorable.

10. Talk about yourself – and ask others to join the conversation.

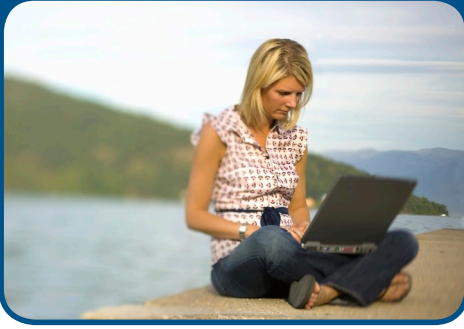
The Maine AF4Q Alliance learned that the singular most effective way to build followership is through a personal request, so it is important to ask people to follow your site, and encourage them to invite others. Word of mouth (direct and indirect) will be critical to building your online following. In the beginning, a great deal of active outreach will be required, but as you continue to build a following and provide valuable content, others will begin to spread the word about you.

11. Evaluate yourself.

The measures that the Maine AF4Q Alliance used to evaluate the first phase included relatively generic measures such as number of followers, retweets, etc. These measures are important to include in an evaluation plan, and were appropriate for the initial phase, but as the Social Media Subcommittee recommended, establishing additional measures that tied in with the organization's strategic goals is equally critical. The long-term measures will vary by organization depending on its objectives, but, for example, might include public health measures (e.g., an increase the number of people with diabetes getting HbA1Cs in a region), or more specific goals (e.g., obtaining consumer testimonial through a Facebook page about using your Alliance's public reporting website to select a highly qualified healthcare professional).

Get to the point.

An effective strategy in Maine was to begin a post with a question or pointed statement. For example, a post might read "Looking for some good asthma resources near you? Then check out this website from XYZ organization," as opposed to "Here's a link to some good local resources."



Phase II

Ongoing Activities & Future Plans

Phase II began in July 2010, at which time the Maine AF4Q Alliance assumed responsibility for maintaining and developing the HealthyME CE efforts. The communications specialist at the MHMC now performs the role of social media coordinator.

Through the social media program evaluation in Summer 2010, changes were made to better align social media efforts with the Maine AF4Q Alliance current CE strategic plan and brand. In September 2010, the Maine AF4Q Alliance made the following changes to its social media program:

- Changed the name to “GetBetterME” to match the new branding on its soon-to-be upgraded PM/PR website¹.
- Narrowed message categories to focus primarily on healthcare quality, but also healthcare improvement efforts (particularly those within the state), healthcare cost issues, AF4Q activities, and other miscellaneous health policy topics to align with the key message areas of the AF4Q grant as a whole.
- Expanded the target audience to include employers and policymakers, which are also key constituencies for the Maine AF4Q Alliance.
- Opted not to implement any new channels in Phase II in order to give the Alliance more time to build a fan and follower base on Twitter and Facebook.

Narrowing message focus to quality and related issues has allowed the Maine AF4Q Alliance more latitude to differentiate itself from other local and national organizations and establish a distinct voice. There are plans to expand the message categories in the future, but at the current time, the Alliance has been able to gain more traction and establish a stronger following with healthcare quality messaging.

Additionally, the Maine AF4Q Alliance social media endeavor is at present in somewhat of a transitional period as they await the launch of their new PM/PR website, www.getbettermaine.org. Once the site launches, messaging that drives traffic to the new site will become a primary focus.

¹To keep their options open, AF4Q-ME decided to create new Facebook and Twitter pages rather than changing the name on the existing accounts. Currently, the HealthyME sites still exist, but there are no immediate plans to incorporate them into their social media strategy.

Although the Maine AF4Q Alliance has expanded its audience to include employers and policymakers, consumers remain of primary importance. The Alliance has found that employers in particular have been helpful in spreading the word about GetBetterME to employees and consumers.

Expanded Measures

Currently, the only measures the Maine AF4Q Alliance actively uses are the number of followers/fans on the sites, but once the new PM/PR site launches they will include other metrics. It is envisioned that metrics will include:

1. Traffic to www.getbettermaine.org – with plans to incorporate a landing page on the site that will help track the number of visitors entering through social media channels.
2. Number of followers on Twitter – with a goal of reaching 500 before the end of 2011.
3. Number of fans on Facebook – with a goal of reaching 200 before the end of 2011.
4. Number of retweets and “@messages” on Twitter
5. Number of people “liking” Facebook posts
6. Quantity and quality of interaction with followers
7. Quantity and quality of anecdotal feedback

Building & Sustaining an Audience

Building and sustaining an audience is an ongoing effort. Fostering interaction continues to be an important tactic in cultivating interest, but the Maine AF4Q Alliance also relies strongly on the quality of its content to generate positive “buzz.” By ensuring that posts are timely, relevant, and informative, followers will continue to find value in the sites, which will, in turn, build word of mouth.

The Maine AF4Q Alliance also employs some basic tactical efforts to attract more followers. The organization has found re-tweeting others’ posts, using hash tags, following others, and exchanging “Follow Fridays” (#FF) can generate dozens of followers very quickly. Employees of the three partner organizations also include links to the social media sites on their e-mail signatures.

Once the new PM/PR website is launched, the organization has a number of more formal promotional activities planned, which include:

Spread the word.

The Maine AF4Q Alliance has found re-tweeting others’ posts, using hash tags, following others, and exchanging “Follow Fridays” (#FF) can generate dozens of followers very quickly.

Employees of the three partner organizations also include links to the social media sites on their e-mail signatures.

- Posting links to the Twitter and Facebook pages prominently on the home page.
- Partnering with pharmacies to print the Maine AF4Q Alliance message and website on pharmacy bags.
- Distributing informational cards with the website information to local optometrist offices.

While the group wishes to expand its following, the Alliance also feels it is important to attract its desired audience to the extent possible, as opposed to achieving growth just for the sake of showing higher numbers. By promoting the sites in appropriate venues (e.g., pharmacy bags) or at times when healthcare quality may be top of mind (e.g., optometrists' office), the Maine AF4Q Alliance is helping to ensure controlled and desirable growth through "just in time" messaging.

Expansion of Social Media Efforts

During Phase II, the Maine AF4Q Alliance determined that limiting the social media platforms to Facebook and Twitter was still appropriate. However, the Alliance does have plans to incorporate additional media into the existing channels - such as videos - and to create a blog after the new website is up and running. Other platforms will be considered and evaluated for their potential to drive traffic to the new PM/PR website.

The Maine AF4Q Alliance is also planning a separate event – a statewide consumer book club – that will have an associated social media component. The Alliance is working with National Public Radio to have a call-in radio show to discuss T.R. Reid's book, "Healing of America." The Maine AF4Q Alliance plans to leverage its social media presence to promote the club and engage people in the program, and is tentatively planning a separate Twitter page to discuss the club and the book.

Social media has a broad applicability in healthcare to help disseminate quality messages, health improvement tips, and engage patients and consumers. Other AF4Q Alliances could consider pivoting their social media programs around primary care/patient centered medical home initiatives, health information technology, or other similar projects within their own communities.

"Interactivity is really the key to building and sustaining an audience in social media. Commenting or replying to others' posts is a good way to do this. Ongoing efforts to engage your own followers in meaningful interactions are also critical. Although it isn't always easy to start a dialogue, don't be afraid to keep trying new things. The more engaging you are, the more followers will want to engage with you."

Trevor Putnoky
Communications Specialist,
MHMC

Resources

The following resources are available in electronic format upon request from the HITRC (contact Judy Phalen at jphalen@partners.org):

Maine AF4Q - Social Media Overview & Plan

Leveraging Social Media for Consumer Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges

Social Media Marketing 101