

# Digital Marketing 101: How to Advertise Your Pharmacy

By **Fred Gebhart**

Pharmacies that haven't added digital marketing and advertising to their mix are missing the target. Digital isn't a trend, it is where most Americans spend their time. "It's important to meet your customers where they are," said Steve Hoffart, PharmD, owner of Magnolia Pharmacy in Magnolia, Texas. "Where you market depends on what resonates with the majority of customers. Our patient population responds well to the interactivity of our digital and social media efforts, so we've been leaning heavily on that approach."

Brittany Sanders, PharmD, owns The Pharmacy at Wellington in Little Rock, Arkansas. She opened the pharmacy with newspaper ads, billboards, flyers, and other conventional approaches in 2015. Today, she focuses on digital channels. "Digital lets us hyper target," she explained. "If somebody is searching for something as simple as 'Band-Aids' or anything related to pharmacy within 3 miles of our store, they get us. We can be so specific that if somebody is in the Walgreen's parking lot across the street, we serve an ad to bring them

over. You can't do that with conventional channels."

Conventional marketing is based largely on a combination of geographical coverage, newspaper circulation, television or radio broadcast range, and best guesses about which demographics are most likely to read a specific paper or tune to a particular channel. Digital marketing is customer centric. And the cost per impression is far lower than conventional channels.

Sanders spends about \$500 for 9000 impressions on over-the-top (OTT) ads on streaming media, such as Sling and YouTubeTV. OTT advertising targets specific demographics, including age, sex, income, health status, education, and specific geographical areas. Anyone in her target demographic within 5 miles of the store sees her ads no matter what they are streaming. And she knows which ad spots in each demographic is most successful.

"Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart, used to say that half of marketing dollars are wasted, you just don't know which half," said Blair Thielemier, PharmD, founder of BT Pharmacy Consulting

in Jonesboro, Arkansas. "Digital tells me what is working and what isn't. So if I want to target people with diabetes who live within 10 miles of my store, I can see precisely what works [and] what doesn't."

As smartphone use grows, a mobile app becomes a key marketing tool, added Kurt Proctor, PhD, RPh, senior vice president of strategic initiatives for the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) and president of the NCPA Innovation Center.

"With a mobile app, your store is effectively open 24/7," he said. "You connect with patients on their time, not yours. Convenience is vital now that we have all come to expect immediate response." ■

## 2019 Smartphone Use by Age Group

54% of Americans age 65 and older

79% of 50- to 60-year-olds

92% of 30- to 49-year-olds

95% of 18- to 29-year-olds

## Do Digital Right

- 1. Highlight what makes your pharmacy special.** Whether it's free delivery, compounding, diabetes care, or something else, promote services patients may not get at chain stores.
- 2. Keep it personal.** Patients want to see faces they recognize, not stock photos.
- 3. Emphasize special promotions and sales.** Nothing brings customers in like a great deal. Promote specials on all your digital channels.
- 4. Keep it fresh.** Show content that is fresh and new, not the same old, same old.
- 5. Make it convenient.** Let patients refill online or on your app.