



Clifford R Olson creating one of the 1100 videos on his YouTube channel.

The use of social media to drive practice growth

BY CLIFFORD R OLSON

Cliff Olson is the most successful user of social media in the hearing care industry as of the date of this publication. His videos have been viewed worldwide, and he has more YouTube followers than all the major hearing aid manufacturers combined. While not everyone can achieve his level of online influence, in this article, he shares highlights from his journey, and valuable lessons regarding the benefits and pitfalls of creating online content to market your practice.

Background

After completing four years of active service in the United States Marine Corps in 2006, social media platforms like Myspace, Facebook, and YouTube were just getting started. It didn't take long for my friends and family to start asking when I was going to create a profile and if I had seen certain viral videos. Honestly, I didn't understand the appeal.

The popularity of social media grew exponentially when smartphones became available in 2007, giving people access to these platforms at all times. It's funny looking back and thinking how resistant I was to even getting a smartphone, which didn't happen until I opened my clinic, Applied Hearing Solutions (Phoenix, Arizona), in May of 2017. However, I soon realised that establishing a presence on social media was going to be a good idea when it came to marketing my clinic and the services I offered.

After following some YouTube influencers outside the hearing care industry who created content that I found engaging, I realised that using social media wasn't just a 'good idea' but it was possibly the best form of marketing that anyone could do to grow a brand and

create awareness around their products and services. Very soon after starting my private practice, I created and published my first YouTube video in July 2017. My YouTube channel now consists of over 1100 videos, 300,000+ subscribers, and 1,000,000 monthly video views. Not only did this lead to the rapid growth of my own clinic, but it also led to the development of my HearingUp provider network that refers individuals with hearing loss to clinics around the United States and Canada. The HearingUp provider network is an extension of my social media campaign to promote best practices in hearing care, and serves to educate patients to be better consumers of hearing care.

Lessons learned

So now that you have an understanding of how beneficial social media can be, let me share some lessons about my journey so you can start using social media to benefit your clinic and the patients that you serve.

Lesson #1 – Don't expect your social media content to take off immediately

Social media is a marathon, not a sprint. It took nearly nine months, creating two videos per week, before I saw my first

patient who came to me because of my content on social media. If you expect to post one or two pieces of content on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or any other social media platform, and have patients start to seek you out right away, you will be disappointed. You have to be consistent with content creation if you want to see results from it in your clinic. Make a commitment to yourself to make a specific amount of content every week for one year. Along the way, you will learn more about what to do and, more importantly, what not to do. If you are consistent enough, social media could be the most significant driver of patients in your clinic for years to come.

Lesson #2 – Stop trying to use social media to sell what you have to offer

The 21st century consumer knows when you are trying to sell them something. Creating an excellent piece of educational content that builds trust in you and your clinic can go to waste if you tell them to contact you to schedule an appointment. For social media to be effective, you have to create content for your followers without the expectation of anything in return. Once you add a 'call to action', you have lost their

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trust. The magic of social media is that people will find you if they trust you.

Lesson #3 – You need a creative space

One thing I learned really quickly about creating content is that if you don't have a specific time and place to be creative, it will not happen. Whether this is at your office, your living room, your local coffee shop, or your basement, it needs to be dedicated time and physical space without interruption. Do not think for one second that you will be able to consistently create posts on Facebook or videos on YouTube in between patients. Successful content creators treat social media as a side hustle that takes up a portion of their free time, not their clinic time, to complete. Once you get comfortable making content creation a part of your normal daily or weekly routine, it will become much easier to do.

Lesson #4 – You cannot outsource content creation

Let me be clear. You can outsource content creation, but not if you want it to actually work. Early on, I thought that I could give a topic to a writer who lacks any knowledge of audiology, and just say on camera what he or she wrote. Not only was the content not accurate, but consumers could tell that it wasn't written by me. I think a lot of us try

to find shortcuts when it comes to content creation, but there is no shortcut when it comes to creating content that will actually generate a following or lead to new patients in our clinics.

Lesson #5 – You have to offer something of value

Let's be honest with each other: hearing care is not inherently interesting or entertaining, unless of course, you are blasting earwax out of someone's ear or testing your cat's hearing. It's not enough to explain how important it is to treat hearing loss, or how awesome a new hearing aid is. This means that you have to offer something else that is unique and novel, especially if you want people to follow you and seek out your services. Find your niche within the small world of hearing care that provides value that they can't get from anywhere else, and drive that message on all your social media platforms. It's reasonable to reiterate now, regarding offering something of value, that you must be consistent with your content creation.

Final thoughts

The irony of me being a social media influencer, after wanting nothing to do with social media or smartphones, is not lost on me. Honestly, as soon as I am done

with my professional career, I will likely delete all of my social media accounts and ditch my Samsung Galaxy and Apple iPhones. However, because social media is so powerful, it will continue to be just as important as being the best audiologist I can be to grow my clinic. The public is eager for valid information, and the vast majority cannot decipher a peer-reviewed publication or an industry-sponsored white paper. A true healthcare provider teaches their patient/audience, first and foremost, and reaps the financial and reputation benefits as a result.

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Declaration of competing interests: CO owns and operates the HearingUp provider network.