

Social Media for Clinical Trial Patient Recruitment: The Comprehensive Guide

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A clinical trial is the sole way that new medicines come to market. Mastering the process of finding, engaging, and activating patients for enrollment into a clinical trial is a key success factor for all biopharmaceutical companies developing new treatments, yet many companies often struggle to find the required clinical trial participants within a given timeline. These delays result not only in additional development costs, but also—more importantly—in the actual delay of innovation and treatments.

On any given day, there are more than 6000 clinical trials involving more than 1 million patients running just in the United States.¹ The total cost of a clinical trial is \$13 million for Phase 2 and \$20 million for Phase 3. The industry spends more than \$5.9 billion in annual expenses on patient recruitment services.² In fact, roughly 80% of clinical trials fail to meet enrollment timelines,² and approximately one-third (30%) of Phase 3 study terminations are due to enrollment difficulties. In addition, 15% to 20% of sites never enroll a single patient.¹

So how does a company reach prospective study participants in a meaningful and compliant way that spurs real action?

Online. And, in particular, via social media channels.

The average person checks social media 17 times a day—that's nearly once every hour.³ During this time, they check their messages on Facebook, read news on Twitter, and share photos on Instagram. They also sometimes seek information about and support for their disease.

What if we could use just one of those 17 daily check-ins to reach them with clear and actionable information about a relevant clinical trial?

At Seeker Health, we've been designing and deploying institutional review board (IRB)-compliant clinical trial campaigns for serious and even rare diseases centered on social media marketing. Our process begins with a social media

campaign, which takes potential participants to a powerful prescreener built specifically for that trial and then ingests the submissions into a patient-led management system called the Seeker Portal. Via this purely digital process, we've accelerated recruitment for dozens of clinical trials investigating new medicines for serious diseases.

Why Social Media Marketing is So Important To Clinical Trials

Efficient Targeting

Social media provide a level of efficient targeting that would rarely be accomplished by any other media. An advertisement on television, a bench advertisement, or the bus stop poster can never guarantee targeting to a certain demographic, yet a Facebook advertisement can be targeted with precision. For example, when we are recruiting for a clinical trial for women of childbearing age who suffer from uterine fibroids, as we deploy a campaign on Facebook, we can ensure the demographic is targeted to women of childbearing age. Even more precisely, we can hyper-target to the group of women of childbearing age who have behaved on the platform in a manner that demonstrates an interest in this condition.

Measurability

With social media advertising, we can measure the number of users who view an advertisement, click on it, and take an action on the website we use for prescreening. Then, via the Seeker Portal, we can follow the progress of that potential participant, all the way to screening and enrollment.

Actionable Education

In our research with patients, we often hear how frustrating it is to find a clinical trial but, when that trial is found, to be unable to press a button to self-identify for participation. At

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Seeker Health, we focus on capitalizing on patients' desire for easy access to the right information, as well as the ability for potential participants to take action. Upon seeing an advertisement that has a prescreener, the potential participant can take a definitive step toward being considered for participation in the clinical study.

Correct Demographic

The demographic in social media networks, like Facebook, is usually in the sweet spot of what biopharmaceutical companies and researchers are looking for in trial participants. Eighty-four percent of people who check Facebook are between 30 and 49 years of age, and 72% are between the ages of 50 and 64.⁴ For a clinical trial for breast cancer with a genetic modifier, we have found the highest degree of engagement on Facebook in women 50 years of age and higher.

User Disposition

A user on Facebook need not be looking for a clinical trial to see our advertising for a study. Instead, the user may be looking at his or her friends' posts when our targeted advertisement appears on his or her news feed. We think these targeted advertisements are critical to the success that we are seeing in these campaigns. If we wait for potential participants to search for a clinical trial, we diminish our chances of finding them. In addition, if we wait for them to log in to a specific disease/patient community, we also diminish our chances of finding them. Instead, targeted advertisements allow us to intersect with potential participants on Facebook or Instagram, where they are already logged on and active most days.

How To Use Social Media For Clinical Trials

Like any worthwhile effort, an effective campaign requires a solid strategy and great execution. Message and creative development are important, as is having multiple options to test for optimization of the campaign. The following are some key considerations:

Promote the Trial Opportunity

The language of the advertisement for a clinical trial should focus on the opportunity to participate in the study of an investigational medicine (Figure). The advertisement should not make any efficacy or tolerability claims about the investi-

gational medicine. In addition, the advertisement should not contain pointed language that could make the viewer feel targeted or identified. A great advertisement simply lets the user know that a clinical trial for an investigational treatment for a specific condition is taking place and to click on it to learn more.

Use Patient-Friendly Language

Clinical trials are full of technical language, which the average person generally does not understand. In our market research with patients, we often test language to describe clinical trials and learned that, ideally, we should be striving for a sixth-grade reading level. Technical words, such as "subject" to refer to a participant or "double-blind," should be avoided and instead replaced with common words or definitions.

Obtain Institutional Approval

All of our campaigns to promote clinical trials receive IRB approval prior to being launched to patients. This is mandatory. Institutional review boards like to see the complete marketing package, including the controls that will be enacted for any social media campaigns.

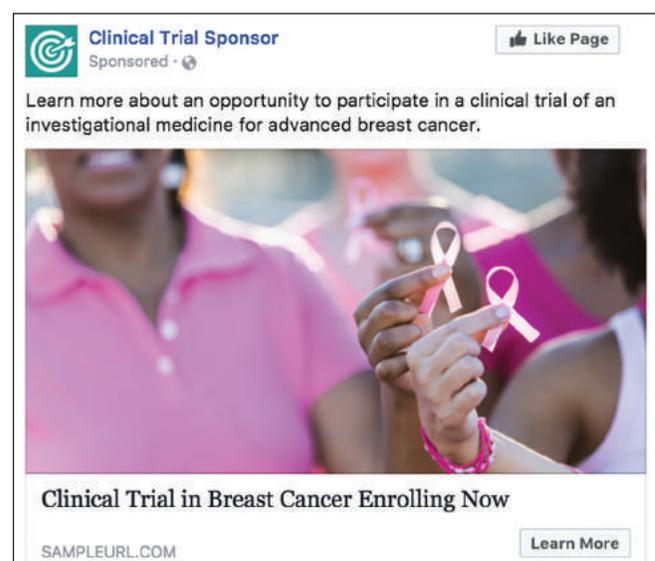


Figure. Example of a Facebook advertisement for a clinical trial. Contents are Copyright 2017 Seeker Health LLC.

Provide a Prescreener

For each clinical study, we design an online prescreener to help qualify patients on the basis of their responses. The prescreener should contain only a handful of well-written questions that provide a first level of screening against the study's inclusion/exclusion criteria. These questions may ask whether the patient has been diagnosed with the condition, has undergone certain types of confirmatory testing and is willing to participate in a clinical trial. In addition, the prescreener should ask the user to legally opt into participating in communications related to considering enrollment in this clinical trial. Once participants sign up, thorough follow-up includes an email, text message, and/or phone call to continue pre-screening or schedule for a screening visit at the closest clinical trial site.

Design Controls and Stay Compliant

Because these advertisement products are deployed via social media channels, users are not only able to share the advertisements but are also able to include comments. From a compliance perspective, comments introduce issues. The comments may include user-generated misinformation, which remains attached to the bottom of the advertisement as it is shown to the next user. At Seeker Health, we resolve this by using a comment-suppression tool on Facebook Newsfeed Ads and by disabling comments on the Instagram advertisements prior to launch. With this approach, we've received 100% IRB approval of our campaigns. Comments should also be monitored for the rare possibility that an adverse event (AE) is reported by a trial participant. In the rare case an AE appears, the sponsor's reporting procedure should be followed to begin an investigation.

Evaluating the Most Effective Platform

For biopharmaceutical companies that want to optimize clinical trial recruitment, the following social networks are the most effective marketing platforms:

Facebook

With more than 2 billion monthly active users, Facebook is the world's biggest social media platform.⁵ It's a great place to promote clinical trials, as there are multiple advertisement services, including videos and pictures. Here at Seeker Health, we help clients select the right demographics on Facebook on the basis of prospective patients' behaviors and interests. We can also suppress user comments on advertisements to mitigate risk and stay compliant.

Instagram

Instagram has 700 million active monthly users and shares targeting capabilities with Facebook.⁶ Companies can advertise their clinical trials on this platform by using pictures with text.

Six in 10 adults between 18 and 28 years of age use Instagram, so companies typically use this medium to advertise clinical trials for episodic conditions like acne or chronic ones like rare genetic disorders.⁴ Targeting demographics on Instagram is refined and efficient.

Twitter

With 328 million users, Twitter is a popular social network for businesses in all niches.⁷ This is an effective way to communicate with patients, post corporate updates, increase the visibility of your medical facility, and attract industry leaders. You can also use hashtags in your Twitter posts to increase referrals and sign-ups.

Snapchat

Snapchat only launched in 2011, but this social network has already garnered a loyal customer base. In fact, 166 million people use this platform every day—and many of them are under the age of 30.⁸ On Snapchat, you can create Stories for advertising purposes and increase patient engagement and enrollment.

Accelerating Clinical Trial Enrollment

Recruitment for clinical trials via social media is on the rise. In one study, 9 out of 14 medical research companies planned to use social media to boost patient enrollment.⁹ And yet, research suggests that 80 percent of clinical trials in the United States are delayed by at least 1 month because of low enrollment.¹⁰ Social media marketing can help accelerate clinical trial enrollment, which ultimately can help bring medicines to patients earlier.

Sandra Shpilberg is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Seeker Health, a digital health company innovating the process of clinical trial recruitment using technology. More information about Seeker Health is available at www.seekerhealth.com.

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CASE STUDY

Clinical Trial Recruitment for Breast Cancer with Genetic Modifier

Genetic Modifier

A large, global pharmaceutical company enrolling a Phase 3 clinical trial in breast cancer with a genetic modifier engaged Seeker Health to create an engaging social media campaign to accelerate genetic testing, participant identification, and clinical trial enrollment.

The Challenge

Our challenge was to educate women with breast cancer about the availability of this clinical trial and the opportunity to receive genetic testing by using social and digital media, with the ultimate goal of accelerating clinical trial enrollment.

The Approach

We developed a compliant Facebook campaign focused on a subset of the Facebook user population that had previously taken actions denoting an interest in breast cancer. To optimize the campaign outcomes, A/B testing of images (comparing two versions to see which one performs better), text, and targeting were implemented. We deployed our tool for complete comment suppression on Facebook Newsfeed Ads to mitigate risk of user-generated misinformation.

The Results

This social media campaign accelerated patient enrollment in this clinical trial by 3 months, a very significant improvement, given that costs per month of trial operation run in the millions of dollars. Specifically, 9419 US patients engaged via Facebook advertising to begin online prescreening, and 866 US patients completed online prescreen and qualified for follow-up by clinical trial sites. The results were so impressive that this company engaged us to replicate this program for a clinical trial in prostate cancer.

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