

# How Healthcare Professionals Can Leverage Social Media

## An Interview with Paul Furiga, WordWrite Communications President

By Daniel Casciato

Social media has drastically altered the public relations and communications landscape for many healthcare organizations. Using a social media platform, whether it's Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn, has allowed healthcare professionals to establish a closer relationship to the media in their market; instantly issue critical news stories to the public; reach a wider patient audience; and interact with healthcare leaders across the country.

Over the next few months, *Western PA Hospital News* will bring you various Q&As and case studies from healthcare and communications experts on their social media experience and what best practices we can learn from them. For this issue, we spoke with Paul Furiga, president of Wexford, PA-based WordWrite Communications, LLC, to get his thoughts on how social media is changing the way we communicate.

**WPHN:** Tell us about WordWrite.

**Furiga:** Our clients call us corporate storytellers, because we are in the business of helping them create, develop and share their great, untold stories with everyone who needs to see, hear or experience them. We use every tool in the PR toolbox — including social media — to make our clients the heroes in their own stories.

**WPHN:** How does your organization currently use social media platforms?

**Furiga:** It's important to us that we model the social media behavior we recommend to our clients, so WordWrite's team members are all fluent storytellers in social media. For example, every WordWriter has a personal Twitter (mine is @paulfuriga) and we also run two for our company, @wordwritepr and @healthcarebuzz, which is a Twitter identity we use to participate in the healthcare conversation, sharing news and items of interest.

We also have a YouTube channel, are active on Linked In, as a company and individually, and we have a nice Facebook presence. It's important to us that when clients and prospects evaluate whether we can help them in social media that we can point to ourselves as an example.

**WPHN:** How do you help your healthcare clients better engage in social media?

**Furiga:** Especially with hospital organizations, there is a fear that HIPAA considerations prevent them from engaging in social media. While HIPAA is always an important consideration in any healthcare communications involving patients, there are many, many examples of social media success in healthcare and hospital organizations. The Cleveland Clinic, the Mayo Clinic, and many institutions locally, including UPMC and West Penn Allegheny Health System, are active in social media.

We help our healthcare clients through a five-step process to evaluate what social media platform is best for them, review the nature of the existing conversation on say, Facebook or Twitter, help them get started and then guide them along the way as they take on social media as an internal function.

**WPHN:** What role do social media sites play in healthcare organizations?

**Furiga:** Social media can play many roles in healthcare organizations. In the competition for talent, Facebook and Linked In are particularly useful tools. Recently, a fairly large local community hospital organization saved hundreds of thousands a year by moving the majority of its recruiting online, to these kinds of platforms.

Facebook is also a great place to build online community, especially for community relations efforts and to build communities of patients and families. The personal stories that can be shared this way are great credibility-builders for a hospital organization and great information when a potential patient is searching for information.

Twitter is also a vibrant resource for information on a hospital organization's capabilities and successes. The guideline on Twitter is that about one-third each of all hospital organization tweets should be promotional (this could be programs, press releases, system news, etc.), about a third should be shared healthcare news, and a third should be conversation — having a dialogue with others who engaged in the conversation, retweeting, replying, etc.

All of these activities are especially important as Google and other search engines are now tracking social media activity. This means that the more that a healthcare organization is active in social media, the more good it does for its natural search rankings.

**WPHN:** How can you measure your social media efforts?

**Furiga:** There are many ways to measure social media. Those measurements that are easiest to track are not necessarily the best. The number of Twitter followers or "likes" you have on your healthcare organization's Facebook page mean nothing without context and meaning. It's important to track the depth of those relationships and the quality of the dialogue. Because you can search any content on social media, you can develop metrics to determine quality and the depth of the relationships. And because you can measure practically every click on the Internet, you can also put strong quantitative measurements to your activity.

At WordWrite, we look at everything on the Internet, including social media, as a highway leading to the healthcare organization's digital home, which is its web site. It's there that a good web site design, with great content and lots of opportunities for engagement, should create the ultimate social media payoff. There are many

simple and great tools to create engagement and measure it, such as RSS feeds, permission e-mail marketing, etc., that are all driven from the organization's web site.

**WPHN:** What is the biggest misconception about social media?

**Furiga:** For healthcare organizations, the biggest misconception is that engaging in social media can only produce bad results because of the random HIPAA horror stories or crisis communication examples that are tossed around like urban legends. Those are actually far less frequent than it seems when you put a group of hospital lawyers in a room. I'm not saying those things don't happen — and you do need to respond to them appropriately. What I am saying is that you do not improve the conversation (or your reputation) by refusing to participate in it. You improve it by participating appropriately.

There is a second, broader misconception, and that is that social media takes a lot of time. It can take a lot of time, and certainly, it will take some time. This leads to the third misconception, that social media is "free." It's not free because it does require smart people with good thinking to create social media strategy and content. This is what our clients hire us to help them figure out.

**WPHN:** What are some of the biggest mistakes healthcare organizations make when using social media?

**Furiga:** The biggest mistakes are directly related to the biggest misconceptions. So they are: First, not to do it. Second, to mistakenly assume that you can engage in social media without dedicating resources to do it, Third, to engage in social media without having a plan and strategies to create the kind of rich content required to engage your stakeholders and deliver success.

**WPHN:** What words of wisdom can you share with our readers on how to get started with social media?

**Furiga:** We always counsel our clients to do their due diligence before jumping in. Then pick one social media platform to try first, until the organization is comfortable conversing in that space. After that, the organization can try others. By the way, as I mentioned earlier, not every social media platform is right for every organization. So don't feel bad if you are not active in every single social media platform. Pick what is right for you and the audiences you want to reach.

**WPHN:** If you could only follow one person on Twitter, who would it be and why?

**Furiga:** Wow. This is a tough question. My answer would be: "On what topic?" In my own case, I follow people in PR because that is my business, I follow people in the media because that is related to my business, but I also follow a few people in the music business because I play music and I also follow eclectic choices such as the university where my daughter goes to college and even a stand-up comedian in Minneapolis. I even follow the morning team on KISS-FM in Pittsburgh because our senior account executive, Deanna Ferrari, turned me on to them. They are great practitioners of social media.

**WPHN:** Is there anything else our readers should know about social media?

**Furiga:** C'mon in, the water's fine! Don't be afraid to give social media a try. Or should I say, a Tweet!

For more information about WordWrite, visit [www.wordwritepr.com](http://www.wordwritepr.com). †



Paul Furiga

## Need Total Destruction?

When you need to destroy confidential information — from documents to hard drives — look to Allegheny for secure, cost-effective destruction.

Our bonded and insured professionals will provide solutions to meet your needs and your budget — with convenient pickups offered weekly, monthly or as needed.

So eliminate the hassles of in-house shredding!

You could try using a sledgehammer... but we guarantee you'll get better results with Allegheny Records Destruction.

Call us today! 800-245-2497

**Allegheny**  
RECORDS DESTRUCTION

Old William Penn Hwy East • Delmont, PA 15626  
800-245-2497 • 724-468-4300  
[www.alleghenyshredding.com](http://www.alleghenyshredding.com)