

# Make social media work for your practice

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Whatever our feelings about social media, and our preferences for some platforms over others, one thing is certain; social media is here to stay. Some physios might already find Facebook or LinkedIn a great way to stay in contact with patients or may have built a profile on Twitter or Instagram to promote their physiotherapy services. Others, however, might be finding it hard to understand how social media works and even harder to get traction on it. This article explains, through the experiences of physio colleagues, how to harness social media in such a way that it becomes an effective promotional tool for your business.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

#### TO SUPPORT PHYSIO FIRST QAP

- 1 Understand the benefits of an online presence in the promotion of your business.
- 2 Identify what can work best for you when engaging existing and potential patients via social media.
- 3 Learn how to manage a social media account to take advantage of the benefits and mitigate the pitfalls.

### The benefits of social media

For physios not yet engaged with social media, the big question is “why use it in the first place?”.

The answer is that, particularly for promoting your practice, social media offers several large benefits over other forms of marketing.

#### COST

Using social media is **free**. You can post as much content as you like, both on your own social media platform and where it can be seen by other groups, completely free of charge. There are options to pay to “boost” your profile, and it is something worth looking at once a social media strategy for your practice is in place, and particularly for practices looking to promote a niche service.

### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

When you have a presence on social media, people who are interested in, or are specifically looking for, the service you offer can make direct contact with you, which allows for open and immediate **engagement** with your target market. Social media is social by its nature and increasingly it is the more natural way for potential patients, particularly in certain demographics, to make contact and ask questions, in preference to doing so via a website, email or by phone.

You can also use social media to **show who you are**. Videos are popular ways in which to engage an audience, and can include demonstrating a treatment method or discussing certain conditions. Clinics who do this open a window to potential patients, which builds trust in a way that a static marketing message cannot. Once you are established on your chosen social media platform(s), and your followers increase in number, you can **build reputation and authority**, perhaps even as an expert in your area, or chosen field. In turn, this will grow your network and build referrals. You

will also **build a community** of like-minded people or those who identify you as someone who can help them, further increasing your exposure to the potential patients who are perfect for you.

Beyond marketing and growing your clinic, perhaps the most rewarding part of social media engagement is the possibility to **make a real difference**. This is highlighted in the case studies section, where some of our contributors have shared personal journeys that have allowed others who might be going through similar situations to directly connect with their story and obtain invaluable insight into both the personal and medical aspects involved.

### Social media pitfalls

Whilst there are many benefits to engaging with social media, we must also recognise that there are some downsides.

Having an active social media presence is very time consuming and there is the risk of putting in a lot of hard work and not managing to find people to connect

“USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO GET PEOPLE TO CONNECT WITH YOU ON A PERSONAL LEVEL”

with. Whilst it is necessary to experiment to establish the right strategy for you and your business, it is also tricky to know how long to persevere with a strategy before rethinking it.

For this reason, social media often works better for larger clinics with more resources to put into managing a social media presence, than it does for smaller practices. However, using social media is a choice, and a sole practitioner who is already active on platforms in a personal capacity might enjoy experimenting with it as a way to grow their clinic.

There are no hard and fast rules for marketing your clinic through social media and, as with everything to do with promotion and connection, it is often trial and error before you discover that one thing that works for you.

## Case studies

For anyone who is already working on their social media profile, or contemplating how to start, the following case studies are from three central London-based physiotherapy clinics that have found social media to be an effective tool for their business, and which are happy to share how they approach social media, what works and doesn't, and how they each use social media in their own way to boost their business and help their patients.

### CASE 1: COMPLETE PHYSIO



#### DAVE BAKER

Complete Physio is a chain of five clinics, offering a wide range of services that include typical musculoskeletal (MSK) therapies, shockwave treatments, and men and women's healthcare. Dave Baker, Clinical Director, explains that Complete Physio for many years has been active on a range of social media channels, and that each platform has a

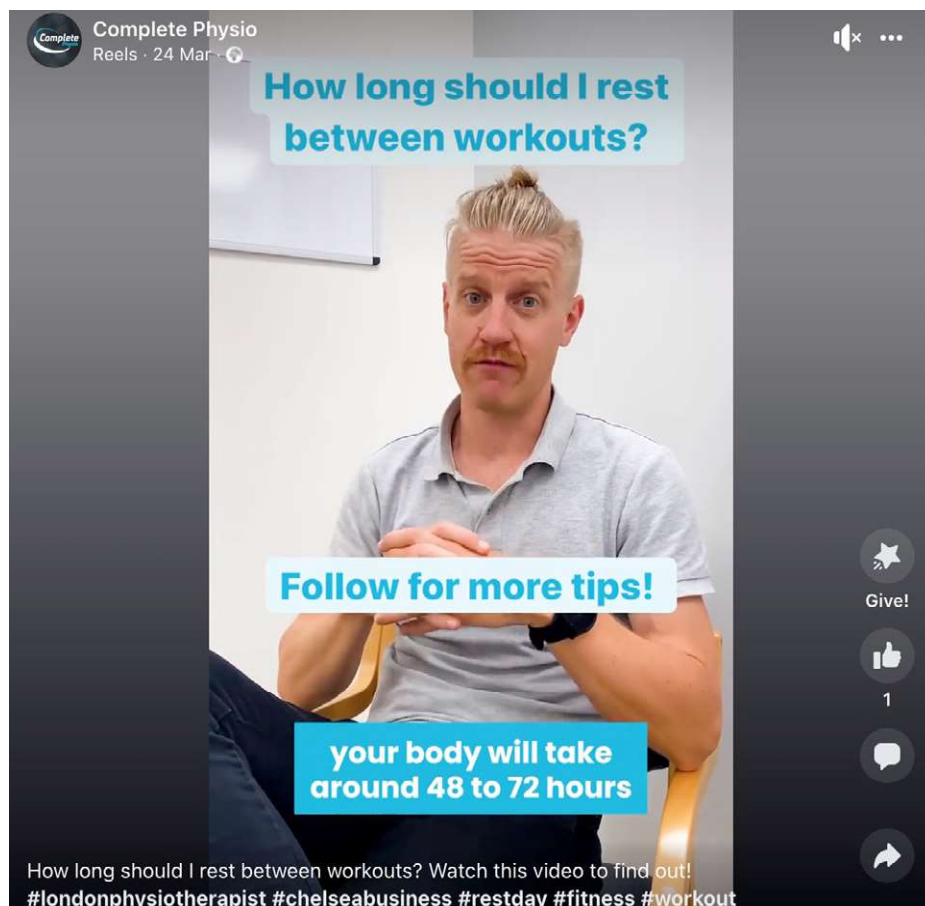


IMAGE 1: Screenshot of a Complete Physio Facebook post

unique audience, a unique benefit, and are used in different ways.

#### Preferred platforms

**Facebook** appeals to the slightly older patient, and whilst some direct enquiries are generated, the channel exists more to build awareness of the Complete Physio brand than as a direct marketing tool.

**LinkedIn** and **Instagram** have been found to be more useful for locating and connecting with referring clinicians rather than reaching out to patients directly, particularly since individual consultants and other clinicians might move between clinics. It is useful to connect with them directly on a professional platform such as LinkedIn, as well as building relationships with organisations.

Social media is constantly evolving, so you always need to look at the growing trends. An example is the reports that around 30% of 18-24-year-olds would refer to **TikTok** for a restaurant recommendation rather than Google, Complete Physio has also started

engaging with this channel, creating MSK and sports injury-related content for the younger user. Whilst their following is increasing, it is too early to see whether this will really be an effective tool. Dave further explains that content choice is very important for the clinic. Complete Physio has had bad experiences with generic social media companies putting out material that could come across as unprofessional, for example with overly sales-like material or outlandish treatment claims. They now prefer to focus on authority-building information, such as interviews with consultants about a particular treatment or condition. Dave acknowledges that the balance between giving useful clinical information and selling your service is difficult to achieve in one strike, and he advises that any clinical content posted might well be reviewed in the public domain by the public or even by peers. So, it is important to keep your marketing content evidence-based and treatment claims realistic and balanced, or run the risk that your posts might end up receiving unwanted negative feedback. ➡

### Social media aims

Complete Physio's overall goal from social media is to build brand awareness and reputation rather than to directly generate new patients. Dave believes that their social media channels are essential for maintaining credibility and for continuing to grow the practice, and for clinics of a certain size it would be difficult to maintain and develop their standing without this presence.

However, as Dave points out, there are many smaller practices that are extremely successful despite not using social media at all. It is hard to imagine a larger company not using social channels, but there are many different routes to obtaining success.

For those planning on using social media for their practice, Dave's advice is to be very certain about what you hope to achieve and who you hope to reach. Concentrate on one platform at a time and experiment until you find the approach that works for you.

### CASE 2: NELL MEAD



#### NELL MEAD

Nell has an established sole practitioner clinic which she promotes by posting similar content on **YouTube, Facebook** and **LinkedIn**, but with a focus on Facebook and YouTube mainly for potential patients, and LinkedIn for potential referrers.

### Social media aims

Nell feels very strongly that it is extremely beneficial for the patient and therapist to have a good connection and for the patient to understand your approach to treatment, so her priority for her social media is for potential patients to find out a bit more about who she is before they decide to book an appointment. Whilst it is necessary for marketing material to maintain a certain professional image, social media can allow for a more open

approach that can demonstrate your own personality and that of your clinic. This acts as a form of triage, in that it identifies the patients who will make an appointment because they have been drawn, via social media, to appreciate you and your working methods.

### Sharing on social media

In addition, Nell has found social media a great way to share her own journey through physiotherapy, particularly in relation to many injuries she has had over the years. Through social media, Nell has shown the treatment she has undergone and explained, for instance, which exercises helped her, and which didn't. Therapists who share their own experiences on social media are always extremely popular with patients as they demonstrate that they understand what their patients are going through, including some of the frustrations, and ultimately how therapy can work and bring the individual out on the other side.

Nell recently underwent knee surgery and was able to document the whole process on social media. This is useful for sharing what is involved in surgery with people who may be facing a similar procedure, and it demonstrates Nell's dedication and an intensely human part of her service to anyone considering similar treatment options.

With a wealth of content created from more than 12 years of private practice, Nell uses this information as a base both for her social media and mailing list content, ensuring that everything is geared towards promoting her clinic, and ends in a strong call to action for

potential patients and referrers. Nell's advice for anyone starting out using social media to promote their practice is to focus on putting out unique content that really shows who you are. Discuss your approach to treatment, explain things the way you would explain them in clinic, and let your genuine self come through. Don't try to please everyone, focus on being yourself and the people who resonate with you will contact you.

### CASE 3: SPRINT PHYSIO



#### ANJ PERIYASAMY

Sprint Physio is another well-established physiotherapy clinic and a big user of social media.

### Preferred social media platforms

Sprint Physio finds that the most useful channels for their approach are **Instagram** and **LinkedIn**. Clinic partner Anj believes that the relevance of **Facebook** is declining, but she is very excited about using **TikTok** as a way to connect with the younger generation.

Anj is aware that different clinics have unique approaches and cultures to how they market their services, also what will suit one patient well will not be ideal for another. For example, the more sporty MSK patient might prefer a clinic in a sports centre, whilst a post-natal patient might prefer a clinic setting that is more wellness- and health-oriented. By giving



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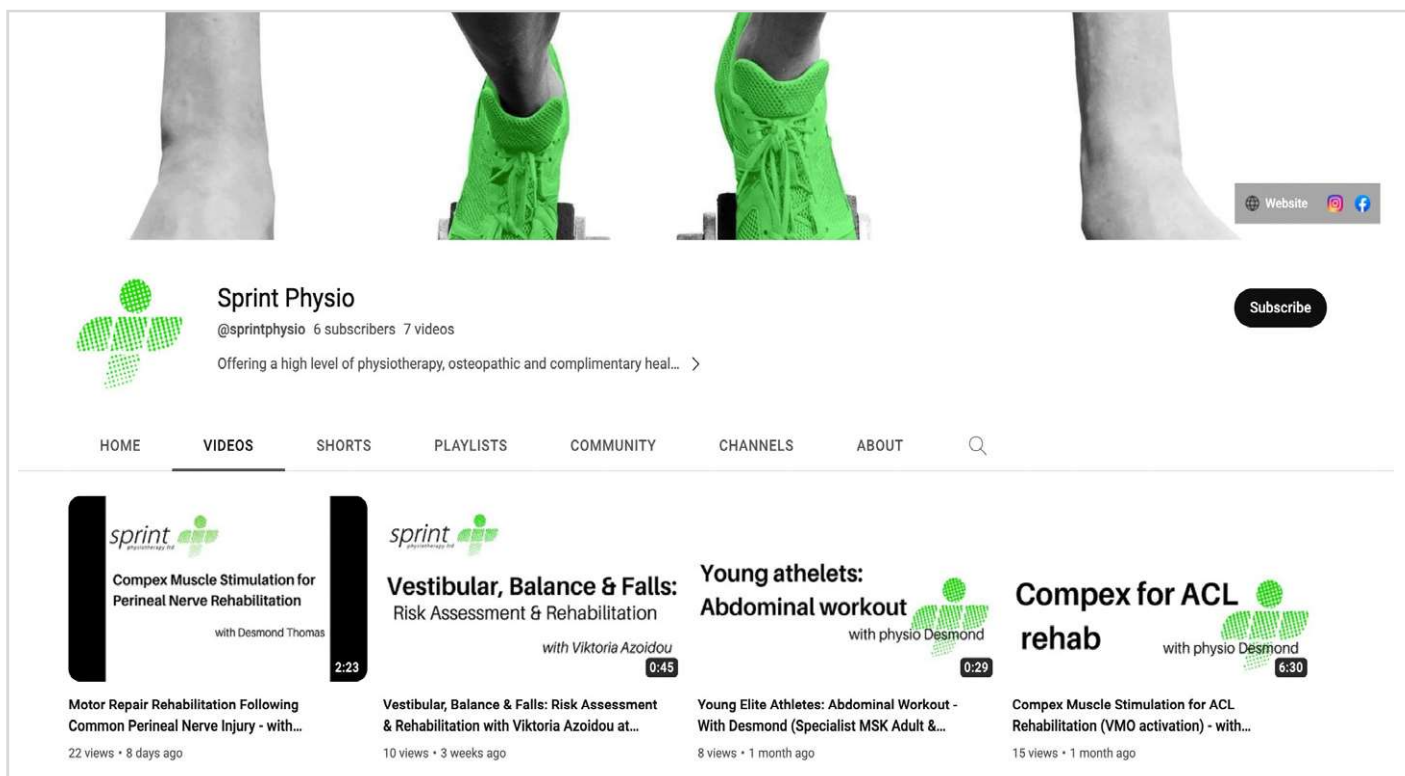
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**nellmeadphysio** As you may have seen, I've recently had to have surgery on my knee – even physios aren't immune from injury! I'll be writing regularly to document my recovery and how to prepare yourself for surgery, but let's start at the beginning. How did I get injured, and why was I more prone to injury than someone else? Find out why here: [click link in bio](#)

**IMAGE 2:** Example of a post on Instagram where Nell shares her journey through knee surgery





**IMAGE 3: Sprint Banner on YouTube**

an honest window to your clinic potential, patients can quickly assess whether you are the right choice for them, which means that, in turn, you will attract the types of patients who are right for you. Anj confirmed that, although some of Sprint Physio's patients came directly from social media contact, their main aim is to use their platforms to raise the clinic's profile and build brand awareness.

### Sharing on social media

Posting information about therapies offered is very useful. For example, a patient researching shockwave treatment is now more likely to search for a video on Instagram that demonstrates the treatment being performed, than they are to read about it in a blog post. In a video on the Sprint Physio social media, a member of their team is filmed treating an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, which allows potential patients to see in advance what this treatment involves. It is, therefore, really worthwhile identifying a niche area or subject for which there is not already a lot of online content available. Anj explains that it is important to post to social media regularly and to strike the right balance between providing useful medical information and being personal

and humorous. This is something that takes time experimenting with to find what works best and is most effective. Clinically, it is important to show honesty, integrity and professionalism; showing your most authentic self on social media is the best way to attract patients who are best suited to you.

Anj also recommends taking a targeted approach, carefully considering goals, and experimenting on one platform at a time to find what works. Anj agrees with Complete Physio that, for small clinics, social media isn't a necessity, but it is something that becomes more important as a clinic grows, and brand awareness and reputation becomes a larger factor.

### The personal approach

When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, Anj found her own unique way to reach people through social media. On her Instagram channel @physiobeatsC, Anj shares her own experiences of cancer treatment and post-op rehabilitation from the point of view of both a physiotherapist and a patient. The channel is primarily to build awareness and share information with others who are going through the same Journey. Many people, including

doctors, are unaware that services such as scar management or postoperative physiotherapy are available and by sharing her own experiences and talking about these therapies on her channel, Anj has been able to raise awareness of what is available and take the fear and mystery out of treatment.

Coming from a South Asian background, Anj also feels that in her culture there is a greater taboo around cancer, and it is less easily discussed. Her channel allows her to reach those from a similar background who may be going through relatable experiences and are more likely to trust someone from their own culture. The global aspect is also crucial. Through her Instagram platform, Anj is able to reach less advantaged areas in the UK and internationally, and connect with people who are less likely to be informed about the range of treatments and support that can help them.

Anj has also found that her channel has been useful for the Sprint Physio clinic, as it has attracted an increasing number of post-oncology patients and grown this element of the business. Her own experiences shared on social media have resulted in Anj becoming a highly

sought after therapist; patients across the world book telehealth appointments with her rather than see a local clinician. Social media has enabled Anj to use her unique position to offer patients specialist support and given her the opportunity to help many people exactly when they need it the most.

## Summary

These three case studies deliver some really excellent points regarding the use of social media in physiotherapy, which can be summed up as follows:

- Have realistic expectations

This is possibly the most important point, and includes being realistic about what your social media can achieve. Expecting it to generate new customers by using sales-like, self-promotional content is not only likely to be completely futile, but is also likely to damage your social media presence. Posting low-quality promotional content turns people off and reduces engagement on your page which, owing to the platform's own algorithms that are finely tuned to notice lack of engagement, results in a further reduction in the exposure of your posts, i.e. fewer people see your content. Eventually this becomes an ever-decreasing circle that can be referred to as "social suicide".

When it comes to social media, focus on being "selfless", not "selfish", and think how you can put the interests of your readers first, rather than your own.

- Focus on authority-building educational content

The key to getting good results from social media is to publish good quality, helpful, authority-building content aimed at educating those who come across your channels, whilst also building trust and strengthening your relationships with your followers.

When Nell Mead documented the experience of knee surgery, it was an excellent example of a genuine, authentic care for her clients, whilst sharing it also helped to educate her social media followers in what to expect in such a situation.

Anj similarly educated her social media audience by sharing her experience about the ways in which physiotherapists can help people dealing with breast cancer. Her authentic aim to educate others is an excellent demonstration of how doing so can indirectly help to generate new customers.

Often, there is a lack of awareness in the public of the wide range of conditions that physiotherapy can help with, so it is a great strategy to focus on education through sharing links to helpful resources such as advice leaflets, blog posts, or condition pages whether on your own, or other websites.

- Dealing with content confrontation  
One downside of having a social media presence is the occasional encounter with critics and trolls who may want to stoke confrontation related to content you post to your platforms. Although the occurrence of such conflict is rare, it can lead to stress that is referred to as "social anxiety". Here are some simple strategies for dealing with any critical or offensive comments that you might come across on your social media platforms.

- To minimise the possibility of confrontation, use good quality, peer-reviewed content wherever possible, and include research references where appropriate.

- Use critical comments as a challenge to expand and strengthen your knowledge base, and broaden your understanding and appreciation of a topic. Not everyone has the same point of view, and everyone is entitled to their own opinion.
- Try not to take comments on your social media personally. It is impossible to know what is going on in other people's lives that might prompt any critical, or even aggressive, comments. Either refuse to engage or try to find a way to respond with kindness and / or empathy; offering support can sometimes lead to a positive outcome.

- Know that you have the option of blocking or muting contributors you prefer not to see on your social media

platforms. Also, most platforms have policies against offensive behaviour that is reported to them.

- If you see a critical comment on your social media, take a deep breath, count to 10, and maybe even step away from that particular post for a few hours, or even days. If you then decide to engage, maintain your dignity and the moral high ground. How you respond may result in you gaining respect and credibility, while the opposite will be true for the other poster (OP).

As the phrase goes, "there's no such thing as bad publicity" and this is definitely true for social media. The more people who engage, for whatever reason, with your content, the more people will see it, i.e. you will achieve greater reach which, in turn, further increases the potential for more engagement, or "social success". This is one reason why confrontational content often does very well on the social networks, but it is probably not the preferred strategy for most.

- Target audiences and platforms  
On the whole, Facebook and Instagram are best suited to targeting potential patients whereas, for attracting clinicians as referrers and for those clinics where corporate business forms part of their prospective clientele, LinkedIn is likely to be much more effective. A really important part of a social media strategy is to decide very specifically who the target audience is, and adjust the relevant content accordingly.

Audience segmentation is also important. The clearer we are about our ideal prospective customer, the more clearly we can target content towards them. For example, if the target audience is women between the ages of 40 and 60, content can be adapted to include information on subjects such as pelvic floor health and the menopause, and this might be different content if the target was runners between the age of 35 and 55.

Many physios can be reluctant to target certain clinical specialisms or a specific age demographic for fear they will miss out on patients with other issues and in other age

groups, but just because you demonstrate expertise in one area, it doesn't stop you from treating patients with issues outside this area of expertise. It is considered that those who specialise when it comes to marketing will be far more successful than those who generalise.

When considering which platform to focus your efforts on, always go to where, from the understanding of your clearly defined audience, the biggest number of your prospective customers are. Whilst TikTok is currently achieving much higher engagement rates than any of the other social networks (Marketing Dive 2023), its UK audience is mostly female (66%) between the ages of 13 and 24. If this is your target audience, however, it is worth noting that. As 82% of TikTokers are also active on Instagram, prioritising Instagram for your social media content is recommended.

- Business size and social media efforts There are many benefits to having a high-quality, engaging and current social media presence. These range from building authority and reputation, strengthening trust by sharing value-adding content, encouraging customer reviews that can positively influence purchasing decisions, and boosting search engine optimisation (SEO), but consideration on the return from investment also needs to be given.

As was mentioned in the three case studies, social media is not necessarily the best investment for a small business unless the benefits can be achieved quickly and cost-effectively, for example finding a good source of affordable, pre-written, peer-reviewed content. There are many more effective strategies that would be better to invest time on, including building in-person local partnerships and focusing on growing a controlled audience such as through an email list.

The engagement rate, i.e. likes, shares, and comments, across all social networks is incredibly low, and most are unlikely to achieve more than 1-2% in any single post, particularly where

the quality of the content is poor. Additionally, that percentage is likely to be the same people every time. That means that usually less than a handful of people will even see one of your posts. Then take into account how much time it takes to produce social media content and the question becomes whether it is worth the cost / effort to reach such a small number of people.

That said, regardless of business size, it is worth finding a good, reputable platform that offers all the benefits of high-quality, fresh, engaging social media content, without eating up a disproportionate amount of time. This can enable any business to focus routes through which they can actively engage with people both online, through other social media pages and groups, and offline, to build business awareness.

## About the authors

**Chris Dann** is a website developer and SEO expert who specialises in physical therapy clinics and runs the physical therapy marketing agency Market Your Clinic Online. He has written or spoken about physical therapy marketing and SEO for numerous publications and podcasts, and is the author of the *Guide to Physical Therapy SEO* and the *Physical Therapy SEO Keyword Guide*, both of which can be downloaded from [www.marketyourcliniconline.com](http://www.marketyourcliniconline.com). Chris also offers a free review of your website and SEO, available at [www.marketyourcliniconline.com/free-review](http://www.marketyourcliniconline.com/free-review).

**Tor Davies** began her professional life training as a physiotherapist at Addenbrooke's Hospital. She went on to complete a BSc in Sport & Exercise Science at the University of Birmingham while also achieving a WTA international tennis ranking. After graduation she worked in marketing with a London agency and then moved into medical journalism where her passion for publishing was born. At 27, she established sportEX medicine, a quarterly professional education journal for physical and manual therapists, known today as *Co-Kinetic Journal*. Her

love for technology has more recently led to the development of an easy-to-use marketing solution containing a huge library of pre-written, tried and tested, peer-reviewed marketing resources, designed to help physical therapists grow their businesses while staying true to themselves. This includes automated social media, blog posts, and email templates through to complete business growth nurture funnels. Tor's focus is on helping therapists develop their professional authority and brand, while building trust, and working more efficiently and effectively, and is a topic that she speaks regularly on at global conferences, within mastermind groups and in her new series of online training modules, including *Social Success for Physical Therapists*. For more information visit [web.co-kinetic.com/plans/social-media/](http://web.co-kinetic.com/plans/social-media/).

Tor tackles all these topics and in much more detail in her online course, Social Success for Physical Therapists. You can find more details at [web.co-kinetic.com/plans/social-media/](http://web.co-kinetic.com/plans/social-media/)

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