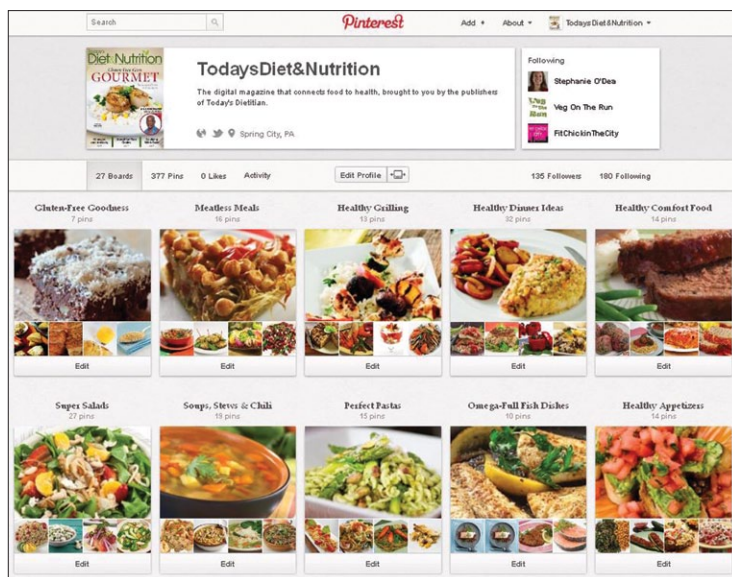


GROWING YOUR BUSINESS



PINTEREST This New Virtual Pinboard Can Help Promote Your Brand and Business

By Lori Zanteson

Nutrition professionals of all types have taken quite well to using Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to promote themselves, their nutrition messages, and their businesses. For the dedicated, there's no being left behind in the social media craze that's become one of the most powerful tools to leverage one's image and business persona.

Pinterest, the newest social media trend, wants people to get the picture—literally—to showcase what they're all about. This virtual bulletin board (or virtual pinboard) works like a scrapbook collection for business and personal interests. To create several personalized or business-specific boards, you simply upload images to pin onto each board and describe them in a caption. Pins are instantly accessible to your followers as well as those you tag, who can then comment on your images and share them with their followers. Choosing images your followers enjoy and find useful generates interest and conversation that can increase traffic and broaden your outreach and business opportunities.

Get Crackin'

The time to get pinning is now! Pinterest is the fastest-growing social media site, with nearly 12 million unique users as of January. It gets more than 11 million visits each week, and it made *Time* magazine's list of the 50 Best Websites of 2011.

When Pinterest debuted in 2010, its first users were moms, food bloggers, and DIY-ers, followed by travelers, fashionistas, and techies. But the media, including *Cooking Light*, *Eating Well*,

the *TODAY* show, and brands such as Southwest Airlines, Whole Foods, and Nordstrom are quickly joining in. Those that have products are driving sales as well. You can pin a product image, link it to an e-commerce page, and make a sale. Etsy, the sales site for hand-made items and other products, has the most pins.

What to Pin?

If you've never visited Pinterest, head over to Pinterest.com and browse the site. You'll soon get the picture—a great deal of pictures. Click on a few that catch your eye, and take note of the comments, the re-pins, and the “likes” they generate. Then enter the search term “dietitian” to find everything RD—including colleagues' boards—to get an idea of the categories they're pinning. You'll quickly see how they're using Pinterest to promote their businesses. Anyone can browse the boards, but to participate, request an invitation from Pinterest or from a user friend to join. Don't worry; it's not a commitment, just the opportunity to test-drive the social medium.

The selection of boards you can create and pin images to are as wide open as your interest spans. Dietitians who are published should have boards categorized for books, articles, and blogs. Attach an image linked to the articles and even a “buy it” link for books. Media, videos, recipes, and nutrition and fitness tips are other great ideas for boards that give immediate access to your work.

Be sure to reach beyond your own images and pin those that are valuable to your community. These may include books, magazines, and organizations you love; new healthful food products; or meal ideas for kids. Just make sure the photos you pin are visually appealing. On Pinterest, your images are the hooks that attract people to your page.

Be Social

As with Facebook and Twitter, you need to let people know you're out there. The best way to spread the word is to follow others. Find friends, clients, businesses, and brands you enjoy and follow them. Many will follow you right back, which means they'll see your pins. Visit their boards regularly and be on the lookout for other boards you may like to follow. When you visit, like or comment on their pins, and if you think your followers would enjoy their pin, re-pin it to one of your boards. The more present you are, the more interaction will come your way.

Events are also a great way to generate visitors, says Janet Helm, MS, RD, Weber Shandwick's chief food and nutrition strategist for North America, who suggests creating a guest pinner gallery where people can pin things they think your followers will enjoy. You also can host a contest in which you ask users to create a special pin to post on your board, perhaps a

healthful seasonal recipe or sugar-free dessert. Something like this will attract new followers, so be sure to spark conversation via comments.

RDs have the opportunity to attend events such as nutrition conferences, food expos, and workshops. Snap pictures and pin directly from the audience (or maybe you're a presenter) to share the experience with your followers. Expert speakers and celebrity chefs are perfect pins. There are Pinterest apps that make this as simple as posting to other social media. In fact, you can allow everything you pin to post on your Facebook and Twitter pages all the time or just for an event.

Why Participate?

For many of you, the thought of adding yet another social media outlet to your agenda may be daunting. But as RDs, this is an opportunity you don't want to miss. Food is one of the fastest-growing topics on Pinterest, and it's the most re-pinned. The potential in that statistic is huge and applies directly to every food-related profession. What you do and what you know is valuable to many people, and Pinterest is the most current, cutting-edge medium with which to reach them.

Promote yourself as an expert on your page. Create boards to showcase all that you've done as well as what you're doing now. Add a Pinterest follow button to your blog and Facebook and Twitter pages and actively re-pin and comment. "People are using it like Google and searching for food, fitness, and information there," Helm says. "Be there when they search."

Be there, as Helm recommends, but at the risk of Pinterest addiction, or perhaps "pindiction," she says, "Be careful; it sucks you in." Time management must be a conscious effort, something Helm recommends including as part of your social media strategy. One way to make the most efficient use of your Pinterest time, Helm says, is to find out what's driving the most traffic to your page and focus your efforts there.

It will take some time to get started and build your board, but the marketing payoff could be well worth it, Helm says. The best strategy to use to ensure it does is to follow the big players. All the organizations RDs connect with, such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the USDA, are must-follows. When you interact with them, you reach all their followers who are your potential clients. And by monitoring their activity, you keep up with cutting-edge information in your field.

So jump in! Whether with gusto or timidity, Pinterest has the potential to become a social media mecca for food and nutrition professionals. Food has been a top pinner from the beginning, and it looks as if it's only getting more popular. By the time it grows to Facebook and Twitter proportions, you'll want to be there.

— Lori Zantesson is a southern California-based food and health writer whose work has appeared in various publications.

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