

Healthcare checks into Foursquare

by Nancy Cawley Jean - powered by Hospital Impact



I have to admit I am NOT a Foursquare user--that is, until today, when I signed up to do some research for this post. For those who don't know about [Foursquare](#), it's a location-based application that allows you to build a network of friends through your email, Facebook and Twitter accounts to see where your friends are, and also "check in" at venues, restaurants, airports, malls, etc. (Here's a great [overview](#).)

Either I'm in the minority--I'm not as tied to my phone as I could be--or I'm just too old, but I never understood the need to continually proclaim my whereabouts or why anyone would care (unless they wanted to rob my house when I announced I was at the airport waiting for a flight). I guess for people who have active social lives or travel a lot it can be fun and helpful, but I don't fit into that category. I also have to admit I get a bit annoyed when Twitter feeds or Facebook walls are crowded with "I'm at Joe Schmo's Bar and Grill with 4 friends."

But when I saw Foursquare posts in Twitter searches that showed people checking in at our hospitals, I became a bit more interested. Now, I'm glad these posts show up in Twitter and Facebook feeds, because I can respond to anyone who's checking in to make sure things are OK, or just send best wishes. It's actually resulted in some nice conversations.

I've also come to understand why businesses care about this particular social network. It's a virtual gold mine when it comes to finding out who your customers are and building loyalty/rewards programs for them. Things like "get a free sandwich after your fifth check-in with us" at your local deli or "get an upgrade to first class after 100 check-ins on our airline" (ha!) can easily build customer loyalty. It can also generate testimonials from devoted customers who are tweeting, Facebooking and Foursquaring the brand name to their network of friends--and we all know the most trusted form of advertising is recommendations from family or friends. From this standpoint, I completely understand the benefit of this unique social network as a marketing tool.

Yet, it still eluded me how Foursquare could benefit the hospital sector. Sure, Facebook and Twitter make sense, but how could a hospital possibly use this tool? Then I saw a post by Ed Bennett on his [Found in Cache](#) blog, where he notes that while not all hospitals have claimed their venue on Foursquare, "almost every U.S. hospital has a Foursquare venue." In Ed's ever-expanding look at hospitals using social media, he has added [a list for Foursquare](#), noting the number of unique individuals who have checked in at a hospital, the total number of check-ins, and whether or not the hospital has claimed its venue.

According to Ed's list, as of January, around 60 hospitals had claimed their venue. That's a very small percentage. But here's what important to note: if you're a hospital and your venue hasn't been claimed, that doesn't stop people from checking in. More importantly, they can leave comments.

I have not yet claimed the venues for the five hospitals for which I manage social media. But when I looked at the venues, to my horror, people had commented--both good and bad--after checking in at some of them. This is something I've totally missed until now, and since I'm committed to responding to all mentions of the hospitals, I'm breaking my own rules by not being involved in this network.

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(continued)

The problem with Foursquare is that unless you check into a venue, you don't know what that particular venue is doing in terms of customer awards; so I still remain stumped as to how this can benefit hospitals. But as I mulled this last week, I saw this tweet from Shawn Wells at Sarasota Memorial in Florida (@SMHCS on Twitter): "Next time you visit #Sarasota Memorial Hospital, check in on #foursquare and have a #Starbucks on us. <http://4sq.com/igFS84> #bradenton."

Brilliant, I thought. Getting people to check in helps you identify people who are coming to your hospital, who may be commenting on your service or treatment, and who may be recommending your hospital to friends and family--or maybe not. It's a way to build yet another relationship with someone in your community. The light bulb over my head finally went on. Thanks, Shawn!

A further search on Twitter for "Foursquare and hospital" found a few tweets, but that was the only one I found coming from a hospital asking users to check in with them. So, that leaves me still wondering how other hospitals are using Foursquare as part of their overall social media strategy.

If you're using Foursquare at your hospital, please let us know what you're doing and how it's working out. Either leave a comment, or feel free to email me at njean@lifespan.org. I'm sure I'm not in the minority of being very inquisitive about this network and how it can help hospitals as we continue to expand our reach into social media.

In the meantime, I will start checking into places I visit to see what happens. And I'll keep my fingers crossed that I'm not checking into a hospital as a patient and no one is robbing my house.

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