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POV: FACEBOOK OVERHAULS
SEARCH: HOW RECENT UPDATES
IMPACT PHARMA MARKETERS

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FACEBOOK OVERHAULS SEARCH: HOW RECENT UPDATES IMPACT PHARMA MARKETERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2014, Facebook unveiled three changes to its search functionality to make it easier for users to find content on the social network. The most significant among these changes was Facebook finally fulfilling its 2013 promise of allowing users to search by keyword for posts from people and pages in their network.

These changes may alter the way users experience and consume content on Facebook, so it's important to understand their effects. This POV reviews the updates, addresses several implications and suggests recommendations for pharma marketers.

UPDATES TO FACEBOOK SEARCH

The two main pillars of Facebook historically have been News Feed and Timeline, with what some would say only a cursory nod to search functionality. When [Graph Search](#) was introduced in 2013, Facebook hoped it would be its third pillar and change the way users engage with Facebook. While Graph Search was (and is) effective, the recent updates better position search to be the game changer they were hoping for and may enable Facebook to realize its vision from two years ago.

POST SEARCH FINALLY ARRIVES

In December 2014, Facebook [announced it had updated](#) Facebook Search to allow users to search for specific posts with keywords instead of limiting searches to people and pages. These searches use keywords and auto-complete recommendations from Facebook to make the process more intuitive.

[Graph Search](#) functionality will still exist. However, now users can search Facebook for phrases like "healthy eating tips" and view posts from their friends and pages they've liked with health and lifestyle recommendations. Comments and replies on posts do not yet populate in search results.



All search results are personalized, so users can only view posts from their network. The exception to this functionality comes from hashtags, which are searchable by everyone if the post is public.

This update is similar to the Facebook post search functionality that [Google began rolling out](#) in 2014. Page posts, comments and public updates are now indexed by Google and display in search engine results pages if the query is specific. Since comments are not searchable on Facebook yet, Google is the only way to search for them.

ADVANCED SEARCH COMES TO MOBILE

A related update in December added advanced search to Facebook on mobile devices. Previously, mobile users could only search for pages and people. Now, mobile users can search for individual posts, as well as utilize Graph Search. Since mobile users make up a large portion of Facebook's base, this update has the potential to increase the volume of searches significantly, thereby increasing impressions on page content.

BYE-BYE BING

Over the last few years, Facebook has displayed results from Bing in their search results pages. In late 2014, Facebook quietly dropped Bing from its results pages, so only content on Facebook is returned from queries. This move highlights Facebook's emphasis on social context. Links to third parties will still be included in results pages, but only if the user's network links to those third parties.



IMPLICATIONS FOR PHARMA MARKETERS USING FACEBOOK

All three search updates have some impact on pharmaceutical marketers and communications professionals who use Facebook within their programs.

EASIER ACCESS TO OLDER CONTENT

Posts by friends are more easily discoverable now, so content that shares health stories and medication recommendations and/or that mentions side effects may have larger reach.

Facebook respects privacy settings in the updated search functionality, so the search results will only display content that would appear in a user's News Feed anyway.

For example, searches for "psoriasis treatment" may result in specific product recommendations, increasing possible word-of-mouth impressions. However, easier access to older content also means searches for queries like "treatment side effects" may return adverse events if posted by a person or page in a user's network.

It is important to note that content that has been removed through moderation for compliance will not display in search results. Examples of content typically removed for compliance include brand mentions on an unbranded page, advice from non-HCPs that could be dangerous to patients, and messages from "trolls" that are harmful or concerning, among others.

TIME TO RECONSIDER FACEBOOK HASHTAGS?

Facebook hashtags may now carry more weight since hashtags included in public posts are searchable by all users. Hashtag posts by users that have been limited to friends or specific networks through privacy settings will remain limited and will not be searchable by all users.

All page posts have the potential to be searched by users if they are within a user's network, but these reach limitations don't apply to hashtags. Adding popular hashtags to page posts, when appropriate and relevant, may expand the reach of that post even more than when [hashtags were first introduced](#).

POSSIBLE NEW ADVERTISING FEATURES

When Facebook indexed one trillion posts to enable the post search functionality, they gave themselves the ability to analyze heaps of data. With the amount of information available, they can look for patterns and trends in both posts and keyword searches. This may give marketers the ability to once again serve ads based on user searches, a feature Facebook removed in

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2013. Facebook is within its rights to use that information for marketing purposes, as it clearly outlines in their [Data Use Policy](#), but it remains to be seen how any new ad features would function.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- + **Think like an SEO expert.** Many of the best practices for search engine optimization (SEO) can be applied to Facebook posts. To maximize the new post and keyword search functionality, Intouch Solutions recommends marketers focus on making their content as relevant as possible for users and avoid adding any unnecessary words or phrases to increase post visibility.
- + **Focus on relevance.** Tactics to manipulate visibility in any search engine — Facebook included — are short-sighted and do not bring any long-term benefit to a brand. Search engines are always refining their algorithms to provide the best user experience and reward organizations that are doing the same, so concentrate primarily on relevance to better ensure that a user's search pulls up a post that meets what they're looking for.
- + **Make hashtags a habit.** Similar to the boost provided by hashtag use on Twitter, marketers should consider using Facebook hashtags in page posts when appropriate to increase content visibility.
- + **Monitor and moderate.** This search functionality places renewed importance on the monitoring and moderation process. Marketers with existing or planned Facebook pages should have a workflow in place to monitor and moderate pages for inappropriate, off-label, or otherwise offensive or noncompliant posts to keep them from appearing on search engine results pages.


Intouch will continue to monitor Facebook for additional updates and their impact on pharma. If you have any questions about Facebook or search functionality on the platform, please reach out to your Intouch Solutions representative.

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