

Clinical Trial Patient Recruitment Targeting in Facebook Advertising

By Ross Jackson

It is not just Facebook's reach that makes it highly useful for clinical study patient recruitment. It's also the tools that Facebook provides to target the specific people most likely to be interested in your study or who know someone who is.

Facebook is the most widely used social network in the world with 2.9 billion active users each month. On top of that, two other platforms in the Facebook family — Instagram and Facebook Messenger — have more than 1.2 billion and 1.3 billion active users each month. You can target all these audiences for recruitment using Facebook ads.

The following example shows how to target ads for a hypothetical psoriasis study.

Base Targeting

In Facebook, you can target people with the following criteria:

- **Age.** Psoriasis onset peaks in two age ranges: 20 to 30 years and 50 to 60 years. You may want to target those ages or, if you are looking for patients who are already under treatment, later ages.
- **Gender.** Psoriasis is slightly more common in women than in men, so you might want to focus your Facebook advertising on women, who may be a bit easier to find, or men, who may require extra effort to find.
- **Location.** Psoriasis is more of a problem in cold, dry weather, so you may want to work with research sites where the weather is cold and dry. If a research site is in the southwestern suburbs of a city, you can target that area. People with psoriasis are as mobile as anyone, so you can target a relatively large-diameter area.
- **Interests.** Facebook will recommend interests related to psoriasis. People with psoriasis might visit Facebook pages about psoriasis, dermatology, red skin, photodynamic, steroids, Vitamin A, etc. You can target any or all of these interests, plus you can exclude interests if desired. If you want to target people who have expressed an interest in clinical trials, you can select the interest "clinical trial." You may also want to include interests that relate only indirectly to psoriasis (e.g., skin cream). You can use indirect interests to increase the diversity of your audience. For example, immigrants may have an interest in their country of birth or an ethnic cuisine.

High specificity increases the chance that any person in your target audience will respond to your ad. However, the more specific your targeting, the smaller your audience. You may also be surprised which targeting parameters are most effective, so you will probably want to test a variety of combinations and use what you learn to refine your targeting.

Look-Alike Audiences

Facebook can apply artificial intelligence to find patterns of behaviors and characteristics in its enormous database to find people who "look like" the people who have visited your

psoriasis Facebook page or study application page. You can specify how close the matches must be. You can then create an audience and show your ads to this new audience.

Retargeting

There are many reasons why a qualified and interested study candidate might click on your ad and then not go through with the study application. For example, their doorbell might ring, something else might catch their eye or they are just not ready to proceed. With retargeting, you can create an audience of these people and show them the same ad again, one that provides different information or one that reminds them to proceed with your study application.

Ad Sharing

Ad sharing can substantially increase the size of your audience. If someone on Facebook who does not have psoriasis sees your ad, they can share it with a friend or family member who does have the condition through Facebook, telephone, text or email. For some clinical studies and demographics, you may even want to create an ad and a target audience specifically for such people. For example, someone with a mild case of psoriasis may not be interested in learning about your clinical study; but their parent, child or spouse might be.

Conclusion

Facebook provides multiple ways to find patients for your clinical studies. You can efficiently target the right audiences and cast your net as narrowly or broadly as you wish. You can also learn from previous efforts and continuously refine your patient recruitment campaign.

Author

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