

Inside BUSINESS

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Can Businesses Afford to Wait for Affordable Health Care?

By Rod Hirsch

Eight months after it was hailed by supporters as the cure for what ails America's health care system, still unresolved is whether the Affordable Care Act is a panacea or a pariah destined to heap more debt on consumers and business owners paying the bills for those who cannot or choose not to be covered by health insurance.

On March 23 President Barack Obama signed the sweeping legislation, initiating a series of comprehensive health reforms that will unfold annually through 2018, imposing fees on pharmaceutical companies and affecting everything from Medicare reimbursement to tanning salons, paid prescriptions and doctor visits and requiring employers to provide health care insurance for their employees.

The reform package is designed to hold insurance companies more accountable, lower health care costs, guarantee more health care choices and make insurance available and affordable for all Americans, according to its proponents. It is expected to increase coverage for an additional 32 million Americans not covered by insurance plans, according to AmeriHealth, which provides health care insurance for 250,000 New Jersey residents.

Passage of the controversial bill came only after contentious debate between Democrats, who favored the measure, and the Republican minority, which was adamantly opposed. Many lawmakers admitted they had not had adequate time

to read and comprehend the 1,000-plus pages before voting for or against the measure.

Against that tumultuous backdrop, health care providers, employers and consumers are coming to grips with the landmark legislation.

"It's a complicated issue for everyone to understand," according to Mike Munoz, vice president of sales and marketing for AmeriHealth. "I can understand the confusion and lack of clarity. There are so many moving targets and there is a lot that needs to be implemented quickly. What AmeriHealth has done specifically is to try to communicate frequently and make research available."

Ultimately, someone has to pay, whether it's the government, employers, insurance companies or the consumer. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the plan will cost \$1 trillion over the next 10 years.

Last month, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that several large insurance carriers were seeking premium increases between 1 and 9 percent in several states tied directly to the extra benefits that will be required by the health care overhaul.

"The purpose of this was to cover the uninsured, that's the main goal as I understand it," said Tom Tyson, co-founder and owner of Coastal Financial Group, health insurance brokers with 3,000 clients in the tri-state area. "Obviously the



Mike Kaufman, president of Cox Printers in Linden, is concerned about rising health insurance costs and finding ways to maintain current coverage for employees.

public will have to subsidize payments and whenever you subsidize something that raises eyebrows... Who will pay and how much remains to be seen. It's still too early to tell."

Tyson said the landscape for insurers in

New Jersey has been changing for 10 years.

"The market for companies with two to 50 employees, that market has gone from 1.1 million five years ago to 775,000

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It's Nothing Personal – Just Business

By Gina Diorio

"Will you be my friend?"

For grade school children, this line has long been the popular approach to social assimilation. Grown up tech-savvy Generation Y denizens of the social networking cyber-world have changed the phrase to, "Can I friend you?"

Never slow to capitalize on emerging trends, more and more business professionals are employing "friending" – or connecting with others via social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter and more – as a pivotal part of successful growth strategies.

So what makes social media an effective

business tool? Which sites are best? Why do some business professionals already riding the social media bandwagon often find disappointing results?

Business growth consultant Mark Green, founder of Performance Dynamics Group, notes that just as with any tool companies or business groups use, social media is a channel – the spokes of wheel in which the hub is strategy.

"My belief is that the problem most people have with social media has nothing to do with the channel," he said. "Most people have no clue what their business strategy is."

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It's Nothing Personal - Just Business

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Green recommends that businesses not try to incorporate social media into their activities unless they can clearly answer these key questions: (1) Who is my ideal client?; (2) What are the key issues they face every day that I can help them solve; and (3) How do I do that?

Once a strategy is in place, companies must do several things to make social media work for them, according to Green.

"You always want to be providing something of value as defined by your target," he notes. "You have to be compelling (and) you have to do it with some frequency."

Effective site selection is dependent on goals and current trends, according to Matt Mrowicki, president of Impressions Technology.

"Several years ago, MySpace was a big thing," he said. "Now, unless you're in the entertainment field, MySpace has very little value for the typical business...Facebook is very good for getting people communicating and sharing, but it's not necessarily as good as Twitter for pushing out information...A business has to pick which of the different types of media is most effective."

Regardless of channel, a big mistake businesses often make is setting up a social media profile and then forgetting about it, Mrowicki added.

"When a decision is made to pursue any social media ... part of that decision has to be 'what resources am I going to (use) to do it?'" he said.

When backed up by strategy and utilized astutely, social media can yield big results. Derrick Miller, branch manager for Barclay Funding, credits social media for saving his business during the economic meltdown.

"The banks pretty much shut down so I started Facebook internet marketing," he said. "It actually kept me afloat during the mortgage crisis."

Initially Miller was a broker only in New Jersey, but since he began using social media three years ago his business has expanded to all 50 states. An active member of 17 different social networks, Miller teaches organizations how to make social media work for them. With Facebook, for example, he teaches companies to set up a fan page and then use Facebook search features to target certain consumer groups.

Randy Zimnoch and his business partner, Jon Steingraber, set their sights on the real estate industry when they launched the New Jersey Real Estate Social Network (NJRESN) in 2008. Using Meetup.com, the two real estate agents and investors began holding monthly meetings for industry and related professionals. Attendance has averaged 100 and has reached as high as 160.

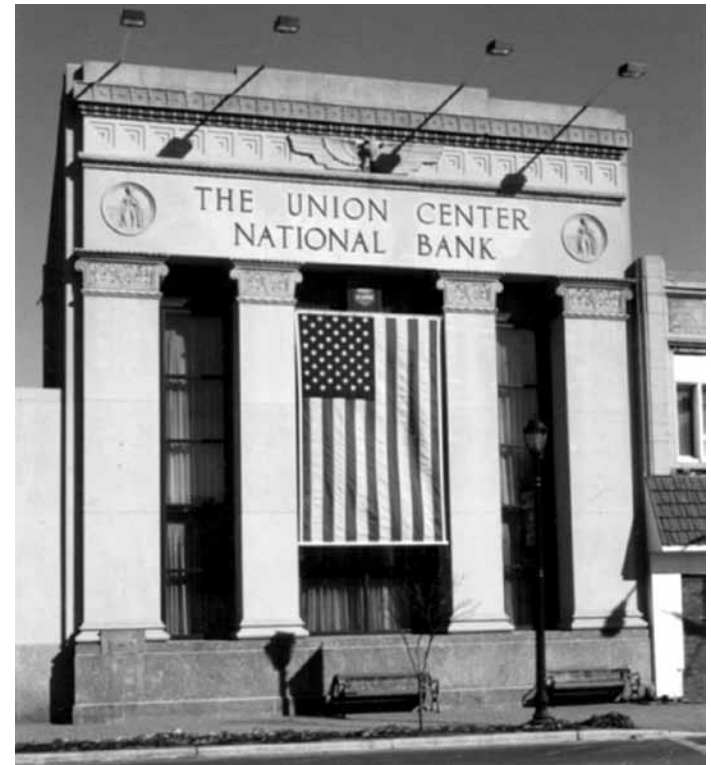
"Social networking is changing the way big businesses and small businesses market now because the two things that were always lacking were targeting audiences and relationship management," Zimnoch said. "Those two things are taken care of in...social media."

Beyond Meetup, Zimnoch is active on additional sites, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter – as well as the NJRESN's own social networking site, www.loginlocally.com – but he explains that leveraging social media is about more than simply having a presence; it's also about building relationships and providing something of value.

"Social networking is like a big conversation," he said. "Facebook, Twitter, YouTube – these are pretty much growing by leaps and bounds. People want and need information and these platforms...deliver this information in a quick amount of time, which wasn't available three to four years ago. If you don't keep up with...social media, I think you get left behind."

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