Patients know they can go to your practice’s Web site to learn about the services provided, read the doctors’ bios, and find all contact information. Although it is informative and helpful, a Web site doesn’t give your practice a personality the way a blog does. For example, a blog is real-time, so you can immediately address patients’ questions and comments, create buzz about a new product or service your practice is offering, and share your thoughts on a recent study or news item related to ophthalmology.

But here’s the key draw: Because you regularly update your blog with new content, there is something different every time patients visit. That keeps it fresh and interesting, unlike your Web site, which has probably featured the same content for awhile.

A blog, short for “Web log,” is made up of short entries, or posts, written in an informal, conversational style and arranged so that the newest post is always “on top.” Most entries include a timestamp letting readers know the date and time they were posted. If you assign a category to each entry that you post, your readers can quickly and easily search for a topic of interest.

Advantages of a Blog
It may be easy enough to do, but what are the advantages of having a blog? A blog is straightforward, informal, and honest, so you can create a personality for your practice. This is not the place for anything too technical or complicated. Rather, a blog allows you to speak openly to patients or potential patients so they become comfortable with your practice.

Think of blogging as part of your marketing strategy; you can use a blog to build a brand and distinguish yourself from the competition. “An ophthalmic practice that makes an informative blog a key piece of its online presence is putting itself head and shoulders above its competitors,” Weil noted in an email.

“*If you can send an email, you can compose and publish a blog entry—and update your blog instantly.*”

—Debbie Weil
“People have many questions—and fears—about their eyes. Why not answer them preemptively and establish your practice as the go-to experts?”

Blogs also offer readers the opportunity to “talk back” if you allow them to post comments. You can even solicit feedback from readers to get their thoughts on an issue affecting your practice or a new product or service you are offering. Worried about getting negative feedback and comments? This can actually be a good thing. By responding to the negative comment and sharing how you plan to handle the problem, you are not only satisfying that one unhappy patient, you are demonstrating that you’re willing to listen and actively work toward a solution. Keep in mind that you can delay readers’ comments so you have a chance to review them before you publish them.

How to Do It

Before you start, you may want to read a few blogs regularly to become familiar with the style and format. From there you can decide the focus and tone of your own blog. It’s important to remember that if you’re going to launch a blog, you have to commit to keeping it updated. According to Weil, daily updates are best for a blog, but weekly or even monthly could also work. Of course this depends on the topic of the blog, so daily updates for your practice might not be necessary. When you decide what an appropriate frequency is, develop a schedule and stick to it.

You want to keep the writing friendly and conversational, almost as if you are writing an email, but you don’t want it to be sloppy, so double check each entry before you publish it to ensure it is coherent and grammatically correct. Keep in mind that writing for the Web is different than writing for a print publication. Readers don’t want to have to scroll through long blocks of text, so keep paragraphs short and use catchy headlines, bullets, lists, and interesting graphics.

One important point to keep in mind for any medical practice blog is the issue of including too much patient information. Of course you would never give a patient’s name, age, or other identifying details in a post, but you also have to be sure not to write about a patient in a way that his or her identity could possibly be guessed. Never mention a specific case; instead, try making up a scenario that illustrates the situation you are discussing.

Take your topic and explore different avenues. Have fun with it and keep it interesting with insights, pictures, and links to other Web sites. The idea is to make your blog one that patients will want to return to again and again and tell others (potential patients) about, too.

Resources

