

Doctor's Digest Podcast: Marketing for the Primary Care Physician "Creating your Own Blog"

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Hello and welcome to this new series of podcasts brought to you by the publishers of *Doctor's Digest*, bridging the gap between the business of medicine and the practice of medicine, with single-topic manuals that provide practical solutions from the experts. Support for this program comes from McNeil Pediatrics, division of Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals.

Have you ever considered creating your own blog? An online blog is an excellent way to establish your reputation as a trusted source of information on a specific healthcare topic. If you have a well-written blog that you update frequently, this device can build your credibility in the local community and serve as a stepping-stone to regional or even national opportunities in speaking, specialty leadership, or publishing.

To begin, a definition may be in order. A blog is a type of Website that lets you communicate directly with your target audience by typing news, opinions, or any other information into a Web-based template on a regular basis. If you decide to create a blog, you should plan to post a new message at least twice a week so that it's kept current and gives your audience a reason to keep coming back for more.

While your blog can be independent of your Website, maintaining it on your Website keeps that site rich with relevant, continually updated content. Your Web design firm or consultant can suggest some useful blogging tools and can link your blog to your practice's site. Some blog tools are free, but others will involve a fee.

Dr. Kevin Pho, an internist based in Nashua, N.H., writes what may be the best-read doctor's blog on the Internet. With 25,000 subscribers after 5 years of blogging, his site has caught the attention of mainstream media from *The Wall Street Journal* to the CBS Evening News. This has led Dr. Pho to host his own show on XM Radio and to hold a seat on the board of contributors at *USA Today*. While the blog has attracted some patients to his practice, Dr. Pho says that's not why he started doing it. "I first started blogging to give a doctor's perspective on medical news because so much of it is presented through the media without a doctor's commentary," he says. "Since then, [my blog] has also become a platform for me to advocate for the things I think are important," he says, including educating the public about healthcare reform and the role of primary care in the healthcare system.

If you decide to create your own blog, here are some tips. Focus on providing content that will be useful and interesting to your specific target audience. Tap into what you see on the evening news, in the daily newspaper, or from the daily activities of your practice. If available, subscribe to blogs that are published by national specialty or healthcare leaders so that you can monitor what they're talking about online. Keep your postings brief; usually just a few paragraphs are quite enough. Offer tips, comment on newly published findings or research, and link to news articles online. You can drive traffic to your blog by including its Web address in all your other marketing materials. You can set up Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts) for key terms or phrases for your field so that you will know when others are blogging about the same topics; then you can visit those blogs and comment on their postings. When you do, be sure to include your own blog's Web address in a signature after your comment. Make sure other sites that include your online identity have updated information and link to your Website.

Despite its many benefits, blogging has two downsides. One, doing it well is going to take time. Dr. Pho dedicates about two to three hours a day reading and writing for his blog. Two, you won't easily be able to outsource your blog to an employee who acts as your ghostwriter. You may partially solve this problem by developing a blog schedule that includes a turn for all of your practice's physicians, nurse practitioners, and other staff.

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