

## Twitterdom and Beyond: How to Get Started With Social Media

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INTERVIEWING KIMBERLY COCKERHAM, MD, ANDREW DOAN, MD, PHD, ROBERT WIDIG  
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**A**s radio, TV and print are being replaced by MP3s, DVRs and other formats, traditional methods of advertising are becoming obsolete, said Randall V. Wong, MD, retina specialist at Capital Eye Consultants and Dressler Eye Associates in Virginia. “This makes social media the most viable marketing strategy left,” he said. It provides an “inexpensive, effective and trackable way to promote your business,” added Kimberly Cockerham, MD, a private practitioner in the San Francisco Bay Area.

With websites like Facebook, Twitter and Vitals becoming increasingly important, how should your practice address the use of social media? Here are some quick pointers.

### Your Website Plays a Key Role

“You should not even consider developing a social media presence until you have created a website,” said Dr. Wong, who is the cofounder of Medical Marketing Enterprises, a website design and optimization company established specifically for physicians. When potential patients notice social

media activity—whether a blog post or a review of your practice—the next thing they’ll do is look for your website, which should contain certain information in order to capitalize on their interest.

**Include the basics.** At a minimum, your website should state: 1) who you and your staff are, 2) what services you offer, 3) your hours, 4) your location and 5) your contact information.

**Humanize yourself.** Although diplomas, accolades and a list of published articles are meaningful to your colleagues, those accomplishments won’t strike a chord with most patients. “Humanize yourself by adding your practice philosophy, accomplishments you have achieved outside of medicine, your humanitarian work or your community services. Conversely, do not reveal personal information and do not soapbox about taboo topics like political or religious views,” said Andrew Doan, MD, PhD, a comprehensive ophthalmologist at Eye Associates of Southern California, who maintains an active online presence.

**Raise your rankings in the search results.** Suppose a potential patient searches the Internet for a doctor in your locale with your practice specialty. Where would your website appear in the list of search results? The likelihood that this person will visit your website increases dramatically if you are near the top—especially if you are

### Watch for Poor Reviews

Not everyone who has a good experience writes a review, but those who have a bad experience will tell everyone they can. Sign up with Google Alerts ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) to receive a notification every time your name is used online. “Respond to negative reviews in a nondefensive, upbeat way,” said Dr. Cockerham.

In some cases, negative reviews are bogus—submitted by a competing doctor or a disgruntled employee. Immediately after Dr. Doan opened his practice, a false review was posted about him. “I was angry, frustrated and felt helpless,” said Dr. Doan. “After considerable effort, I was finally able to get the review removed. As a result, some colleagues and I decided to start Credential Protection ([www.credentialprotection.com](http://www.credentialprotection.com)), an online reputation management service for physicians.”

first or second. There are a number of ways to improve your ranking.

- Your content must be relevant, meaningful and up-to-date. New material should be generated and posted on a regular basis. Outdated, inaccurate or superfluous information will detract from your credibility, decrease your ranking and can actually drive potential patients away.



Each month, Practice Perfect addresses one of the AAOE's seven key competencies.

- Use meaningful keywords that correspond to the diagnoses you typically make and the procedures you perform. These terms should appear as links that people click on to get from one part of your website to another. And you can boost your ranking yet further if other websites link to your practice site using those same terms.

- List your practice with Google Places ([www.google.com/places](http://www.google.com/places)), a free, online mapping service that connects people to local businesses.

- Include a blog that is regularly updated with useful patient information.

- Download analysis software to evaluate your website and pinpoint any problems that need to be fixed. (For a list of analysis tools, see the online version of this article at [www.eyenetmagazine.org](http://www.eyenetmagazine.org).)

- Make sure your website is accessible to people with visual disabilities. Standard practices for improving website accessibility tend to increase search rankings. This is because search engines and assistive technologies tend to “read” web pages in similar ways.

### Who Is Talking About You Online?

**Patients are checking reviews before making appointments.** “When patients receive a referral to a specific physician, they go directly to the Internet, search for the doctor and read the comments before making an appointment,” said Dr. Doan. “As a result, patient reviews are important for generating new business. For example, Vitals.com has more than 8 million patients searching for doctors on a monthly basis. They want to know what other patients think. And if they do not like what they read or cannot find any reviews about you or your practice, they will ask for another referral.”

**Locate physician review sites and create your profile.** “Google yourself and claim your profile on sites such as HealthGrades, Vitals, DoctorBase and every other site that lists your name,” said Dr. Cockerham. “Otherwise, inaccurate information about you and your practice could be on those sites. Equally important, ask your satisfied

patients to post a review about their experience.” (For a list of review sites, see this article online.)

### Your Use of Social Media

**Create a Facebook page for your practice.** Your practice should consider having a “public” presence on Facebook, which is free and gives you access to more than 800 million active users. More importantly, it enables your followers to comment about your services. Dr. Doan offered a salient example: “A LASIK surgeon performed a surgery and did a fantastic job. The patient can then go to the practice’s Facebook profile and ‘like’ them. They can also leave a review. As soon as the comment is posted on Facebook, it is automatically reposted to everyone in that patient’s Facebook community, creating a ripple effect. The more people who see and ‘like’ the content, the more positive exposure you receive.”

**Keep patients up to date with Twitter.** Twitter works in tandem with your website, Facebook page and blog as a fast, free and effective way to keep your patients updated about what is going on in your practice—from the addition of new staff members to specials in your optical shop. Your followers will read the “tweet” and go to your website for more information.

**Publish useful information by blogging.** Blogging is a simple and cost-efficient way to share information with your current and potential patients. “Patients tend to use Google as a triage—they are looking for answers to their questions. For example, ‘Why does my eye hurt?’” said Dr. Doan. You can anticipate these common types of query by, for instance, blogging about the top five causes of eye pain. “Not only is this an excellent way to attract new patients, but it also conveys helpful information to current patients,” said Dr. Wong. If this helps get patients up to speed on the more rudimentary information, “the time when we are face-to-face becomes much more valuable than it used to be.”

**Observe four rules for a quality blog:** 1) Write about what you know; 2) write frequently; 3) provide relevant

and quality content (this is crucial); and 4) avoid self-promotion.

### Exercise caution when blogging.

“Refrain from talking about cases or events based on actual patient encounters, even if you believe the information has been ‘de-identified,’” said Robert Widi, vice president of sales at OMIC. “There is a risk that, even with general details (especially in small communities), patients’ confidentiality could be compromised. Physicians and employees of a practice should also never post sensitive information, answer specific medical questions or make informal, personal or derogatory comments about patients, other physicians or practices. These activities can open the physician up to professional, employment and general liabilities. As with any representation of a doctor or practice, statements or claims must be verifiable in order to be ethical.”

### Manage the Details

**Create written protocols or practice rules for using social media.** “This makes it easier to take actions against an employee who has damaged the practice by posting inappropriate content about the practice, its patients or other employees while at work,” said Mr. Widi. “Give a written protocol to each employee and post it in a common area of your office. Similar to your informed consent process, a social media policy for your practice is not designed to completely protect you from liability, but rather to strengthen your defense should a person or entity claim to be harmed by something posted on behalf of the practice. It will also assist you in taking action to discipline or terminate an employee who violates your practice standards. You should also limit access to social media forums to trustworthy staff members directly responsible for content.”

**Track your return on investment (ROI).** Always ask your patients on the intake form, “How did you find us?” This will help you measure what percent of patients you are attracting based on your blog, website and Facebook page. Track this information to determine your ROI.

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# PRACTICE PERFECT

MARKETING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

## Additional Web Resources

### PHYSICIAN REVIEW/REFERRAL SITES

*Check review and referral sites to see if anybody has posted inaccurate information or negative comments about your practice.*

Angie's List	<a href="http://www.angieslist.com">www.angieslist.com</a>
AVVO	<a href="http://www.avvo.com">www.avvo.com</a>
Castle Connolly Medical	<a href="http://www.castleconnolly.com">www.castleconnolly.com</a>
Compare Health Care	<a href="http://www.comparehealthcare.com">www.comparehealthcare.com</a>
DoctorBase	<a href="http://www.doctorbase.com">www.doctorbase.com</a>
DoctorScorecard.com	<a href="http://www.doctorscorecard.com">www.doctorscorecard.com</a>
FindaDoc	<a href="http://www.findadoc.com">www.findadoc.com</a>
HealthGrades	<a href="http://www.healthgrades.com">www.healthgrades.com</a>
Healthcare Reviews	<a href="http://www.healthcarereviews.com">www.healthcarereviews.com</a>
LifeScript	<a href="http://www.lifescrpt.com">www.lifescrpt.com</a>
LocateADoc	<a href="http://www.locateadoc.com">www.locateadoc.com</a>
MDNationwide	<a href="http://www.mdnationwide.org">www.mdnationwide.org</a>
RateMDs	<a href="http://www.ratemds.com">www.ratemds.com</a>
Vitals.com	<a href="http://www.vitals.com">www.vitals.com</a>
Yelp	<a href="http://www.yelp.com">www.yelp.com</a>

### WEBSITE ANALYSIS AND SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION TOOLS

*Use website analysis tools to examine the data on your website and determine how you can improve it in ways that will drive more visitors to your site.*

AdWords	<a href="http://adwords.google.com">http://adwords.google.com</a>
Clicky	<a href="http://www.getclicky.com">www.getclicky.com</a>
GoingUp	<a href="http://www.goingup.com">www.goingup.com</a>
Google Analytics	<a href="http://www.google.com/analytics">www.google.com/analytics</a>
JAWStats	<a href="http://www.jawstats.com">www.jawstats.com</a>
KeywordSpy	<a href="http://www.keywordspy.com">www.keywordspy.com</a>
Pear Analytics	<a href="http://www.pearanalytics.com">www.pearanalytics.com</a>
SEOMoz	<a href="http://www.seomoz.org">www.seomoz.org</a>
Website Grader	<a href="http://websitegrader.com">http://websitegrader.com</a>
Woopra	<a href="http://www.woopra.com">www.woopra.com</a>
Yahoo Web Analytics	<a href="http://www.web.analytics.yahoo.com">www.web.analytics.yahoo.com</a>

### TRACK YOUR WEBSITE/BLOG VISITORS

*Monitoring the number of visitors over time will help you fine-tune your practice's online presence.*

AWStats	<a href="http://awstats.sourceforge.net">http://awstats.sourceforge.net</a>
eLogic	<a href="http://www.elogicwebsolutions.com/website-statistics.html">www.elogicwebsolutions.com/website-statistics.html</a>
Optimizely	<a href="http://www.optimizely.com">www.optimizely.com</a>
ShinyStat	<a href="http://www.shinystat.com">www.shinystat.com</a>
Site Meter	<a href="http://www.sitemeter.com">www.sitemeter.com</a>
StatCounter	<a href="http://statcounter.com">http://statcounter.com</a>
VisiStat	<a href="http://visistat.com">http://visistat.com</a>
W3Counter	<a href="http://www.w3counter.com">www.w3counter.com</a>

### OMIC

*OMIC's website ([www.omic.com](http://www.omic.com)) features a plethora of information on risk management, including a blog entry titled Social Networking Policy for Your Ophthalmic Practice ([www.omic.com/blog/?p=5](http://www.omic.com/blog/?p=5)).*