

## PR & Web Marketing triage for clinicians

Media relations and Web-based information are two of the most cost-effective *and credible* marketing tools available for enlarging a medical practice's patient base.

Gary Bridgman

**D**o you often wonder why the same 5 or 6 doctors in your area always appear in local broadcast and print media? Notice how they seem so unsurprised by the attention, like a press interview is routine? You'd be surprised how much self-promotion led up to the coverage. Simply put, these doctors (or their hospital's communications professionals) convinced some editor or producer that they could add valuable content to their news coverage of health-related issues.

Someone made a lot of calls and mailed or transmitted a number of announcements or fact-sheets before making their case. And now these doctors are asked for comments, quotes or demonstrations on a regular basis, mainly because editors don't have time to continually source new experts.

Show initiative. Build a relationship with the local media and reporters will come to you when a story related to your field breaks. Concentrate on the local newspapers and radio and TV stations, most of which carry a "health beat" feature.

You have to position yourself as the expert in your community. Send out "technical-based alerts," like case studies, updates on new technology, or drug treatments.

### Media Relations Tactics, or

#### "I am a doctor and I portray one on TV"

Learn which reporters cover health topics (call the news organizations and ask; they get these questions every day) and send them announcements about new technology and expansions or hirings.



Always remind print reporters that you **have high-resolution photos** available. Have a studio-quality headshot of yourself available as a print and 300-dpi jpeg file. And avoid providing images that have been imbedded in a PowerPoint presentation, where they have automatically been shrunk.

**Opportunities:** When Paul Lauterbur and Sir Peter Mansfield were tapped for Nobel prizes for developing MRI, local reporters contacted many rank-and-file radiologists who use that technology for comment. *Watch for similar opportunities* related your field and send quick emails or phone messages to reporters with your take on the national/international story.

Research historic and celebrity figures who have suffered from conditions you treat and send comments on their cases to reporters when new coverage about them emerges.

For example: *fibromyalgia-suffering Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, was the subject of the film, Frida.*

Helping reporters cover politically charged topics, like healthcare reform or nursing shortages, may not seem like a good business opportunity, but they'll be more likely to call on you again when the story is a three-page Sunday feature on cutting-edge medical techniques.

**Good, topical news:** Does your office have a knack for quickly processing insurance claims or “playing well” with medical insurance companies? That could become a local good news tie-in when the paper or a TV station covers a breaking insurance-related national story.

**Build a PR/media “inventory.”** Hire a local video production company to film a procedure or edit your existing video records into what TV producers call a “B-roll.” That is the background footage they depend on to illustrate their stories when they don’t have time to send a camera crew to a location. Include close-ups of technologically advanced equipment. Your device and equipment suppliers’ all have marketing organizations behind them that can also supply media materials directly to your local news outlets or to your hospital’s marketing department.

Once you have a relationship with a reporter or producer, give him or her your 24/7 contact info and return calls promptly. You won’t be the only doctor on their call lists.

Produce your own **patient newsletter**, write and submit articles to local health and fitness publications or health-club newsletters, or hire a writer to do both.

### **Medical Practice Web Sites: content is king**

For more effective patient and media relations, take a critical look at your Web site or your bio page at your hospital’s Web site and measure it against this content checklist:

- Clear navigation within the site
- Easy-to-find contact information
- Glossary of technical terms
- Photos of the doctors and senior nurses
- C.V. with updated C.M.E., honors and accomplishments
- Bibliography of your published journal articles (with links, if they are online and free to read)
- Articles (or their links) already covering your practice or individual physicians.

- Information on your areas of interest and expertise that differentiate your practice
- A map to your practice (this works on both a practical and psychological level)
- Names of managed care plans and health care plans
- Directories of support groups or associations
- Links to your suppliers’ patient information resources (when appropriate)
- Ask operators of other Web sites or blogs to link to yours, which raises your Google profile.

### **Dr. Blog, M.D.**

Web-logs, or blogs, now draw more traffic than the average Web site, if they are maintained properly. Hire a freelance writer to develop for you (ghost write) a series of a dozen or so 2-paragraph micro-articles with helpful information for your patients. Then set up a blog (or have the writer do it for you) on Blogger.com and link to it from your regular Web site. Post one of the articles each week and email your patients about it. When you have used up the dozen articles, you can always re-post them (reruns) or revise them a bit.

Several developments in Web marketing are likely to usher in new ways of reaching your potential patient base: emerging Web 2.0 communities such as Twitter and Tumblr as well as Google’s recent purchase of YouTube, the proliferation of audio “podcasts” and the college-students-only Facebook.com’s plans to break down the town-gown wall and let anyone join the fun.

*The Payoff?* Appearing to be actively engaged with the community. Just having a blog raises your bedside manners reputation through the roof—provided that the most recent post is always less than a month old, so it doesn’t look stale. ❌

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