



Four Digital Trends Dominating Healthcare Communications in 2018



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Research Findings: Current Trends in Digital Healthcare Communications & How Medical Practices Can Benefit

More than ever, it is apparent that we live in the Information Age. American patients are ratcheting up health-related online activity to unprecedented levels. And the activity applies to every demographic group – evidence abounds that any digital gap among older and lower-income groups has all but vanished.

Our latest research has identified four dominant digital trends that will determine many of the winners and losers in the drive for new patients and patient satisfaction:

- More than ever, **content reigns as almighty king** of the digital universe. Humans en masse use the internet not just for entertainment but to learn.
- **Search engines and social media have become perhaps the most influential factors in individual healthcare, notably in selection of providers.**
- **Online video views are rising to record heights.**
- **Smartphones have become the portable computer of choice.**

How do these trends translate into our work on your behalf? We propose guidelines to follow in our mission to help you build practice reputation, visibility and new-patient volumes.

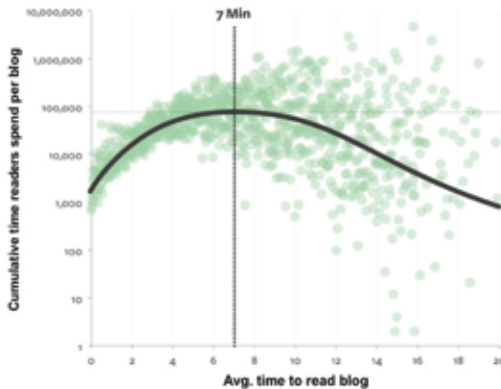
1

Blog early, often & voluminously

A considerable benefit of digital communications is that the actions of website visitors is highly trackable through a type of software called analytics. In our analysis of multiple healthcare providers, website analytics demonstrate every day that patients want a torrent of information from healthcare providers, who they see as teachers. What's the ideal length for a website article? Five years ago, the e-newsletter company Constant Contact suggested that the optimum blog length was 500 words – about twice the length of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

But current web analytics indicate that more is, well, a whole lot more. Medium, an online blogging company, conducted research with Google and discovered that blogs requiring an average of seven minutes to read are the most popular and engaging.¹ A seven-minute blog post is about 1,700 words – the length of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech (1,677 words).

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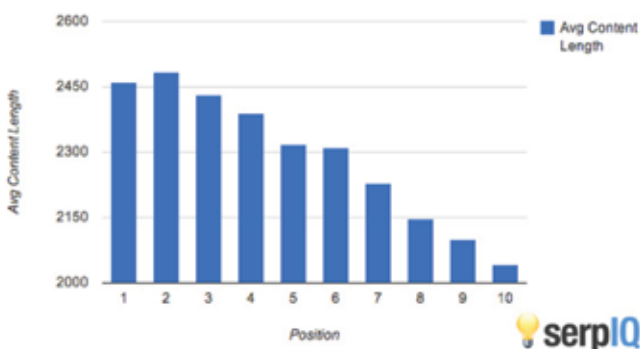
1

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Another study found that a website's home page with 1,292 words generated more and better sales leads than a similar page on the same website with 488 words. Accordingly, Google typically rewards longer online articles with higher rankings. One analysis from search-engine optimization firm serpIQ revealed that online articles about 2,500 words long get the highest rankings.²

The power of content is why the Cleveland Clinic doubled down on blogging in 2013. Within 18 months of dedicating a team of four full-time bloggers, the institution saw website visits explode from 200,000 to 3.2 million visits each month.³

Avg. Content Length of Top 10 Results





2

Talk about the patient, not the provider

Patients need and want doctors. But overwhelming evidence suggests that learning more about doctors is decidedly not where patients usually start healthcare journeys.

Vanguard's analysis of Google data shows that **internet searchers look online for health conditions and treatments as much as nine times more often than they look for providers.**

Similarly, with the help of more than 500 hospital researchers, Google partnered with the web analytics company Compete to evaluate how patients make hospital choices and the role of digital media in their selections.⁴

Findings:

- Patients primarily use the internet to search for information on symptoms and conditions.
- Internet search drives nearly three times as many visitors to hospital websites compared with nonsearch visitors.
- Before booking an appointment, 50 percent of patients visited health information websites.

- continued



2

Talk about the patient, not the provider

On our own clients' websites, it is not uncommon for doctor blogs to pull more website traffic than even the home page. Meanwhile, information on review websites is drawing record numbers of eyeballs.

For example:

A study by Price Waterhouse Coopers reported that about half of all Americans – more than 150 million – have read healthcare reviews, and **two-thirds of those have used digital reviews for decision making in their healthcare.**

Research firm YouGov found 88 percent of consumers in the U.S. trust reviews as much as they do personal recommendations made by friends and family.⁶

Vanguard's analysis of visits to the business-review website Yelp found 12.2 percent more visits to our clients' pages on that site in 2016 than in the prior year. Some practices saw increases at twice that rate.

Similarly, new-patient leads from Yelp rose 20.6 percent from 2015 to 2016. Leads are defined as trackable actions taken directly on Yelp.com: Clicks on hyperlinks to practices' websites, mobile phone calls to the practices, requests for directions, and messages to the practices.



3

Catch the video bug

The year 2016 was the first in history in which as many households had access to online TV (Netflix, Hulu Plus, Amazon Prime) as to TV programs recorded on DVRs.⁸ Last year was also the first in which more than half of all Americans were expected to watch TV online at least once a month.⁹ In anticipation of a trend continuation, the tech company Cisco Systems projects that global internet video traffic will quadruple from 2015 to 2020.¹⁰

Video has swarmed social media websites as well. The digital consulting firm Research Now discovered that 82 percent of Twitter users watch video on Twitter. Remarkably, 90 percent of them watch the videos on smartphones.¹¹ (See more on smartphones below.)

Meanwhile, Facebook reports that 500 million of its users watch videos on that website an astounding 8 billion times a day.¹² A likely downstream effect is that video content will become a standard expectation of visitors to healthcare websites as well.

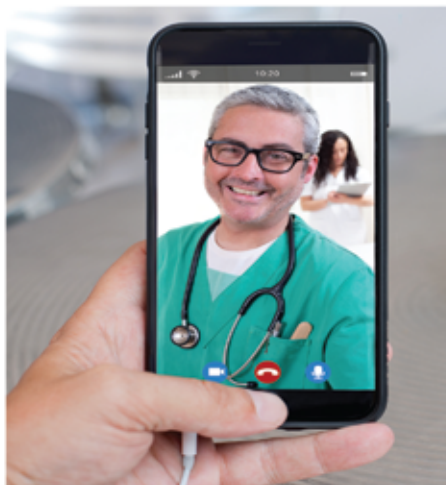
This trend makes all the difference in selection of providers. To be able to see and hear a physician in an online video before making a first appointment may increasingly become the tie-breaker for a patient evaluating a handful of physicians.

4

Embrace the era of the pocket computer

For the 12 months just ended, **58 percent of all visits to our clients' websites nationwide were on smartphones**. Barely one-third (34 percent) used desktop and laptop computers. (Another 7 percent were on tablet computers.)

It's notable that Apple CEO Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone a decade ago, at the 2007 MacWorld convention in San Francisco. It subsequently took five years for smartphone traffic to our clients' websites to approach 5 percent of the total, and just another two years for it to quadruple to about 20 percent, and another 12 months to climb beyond 30 percent.





In review - the takeaway

Overall, website visitors want more words on smaller screens.

Those healthcare providers who provide both will rise above others on the internet and most likely in clinic activity as well.



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