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**Advances in
Technology
Which Make
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Plus:

**Cardiovascular Disease:
How Home Care is Helping to
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Jump Into Social Media With a Successful Home Care Blog

By Merrily Orsini



Need some convincing reasons to add social media or at least enhanced Web site offerings to your home care agency? The latest Pew Internet Research found not only that eight in 10 Internet users have looked online for health information, but that many say the Internet has had a significant impact on the way they care for themselves or for others. Additionally, according to 2008 surveys from Princeton Survey Research Associates, larger percentages of older generations are now doing activities online than in the past. Contrary to the image of Generation Y as the “Net Generation,” Internet users in their 20s do not dominate every aspect of online life. Boomers are just as likely as Generation Y to make things like travel reservations online. And even Silent Generation Internet users are competitive when it comes to email. The trend is clear; everyone is seeking more information about health care online, and seniors are a very active and increasingly savvy Internet user group. Utilizing this powerful Internet marketing component for your agency can only increase your visibility and bring in more clients and referrals.

As the “grandparent” of today’s social media world, the blog is probably the easiest tool to implement, making it a natu-

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ral start for practicing social media as a marketing tool. So, what is a blog? “Blog” is an abbreviation for “Web log,” which is typically an online journal or newsletter that is intended for the general public to read and is updated frequently. Blogs often include photos and links to other sites, and their conversational style often lends them the tone of having a chat with friends about what they find interesting and helpful.

Consider how people find products and services online. They turn to Google, enter a search term, do their research, make a decision, and either make a call or put in their credit card number. By their nature, blogs create content that provides the answers to search terms from prospects’ (or current clients’ and referral sources’) questions, challenges, wants, and needs. Understanding how search terms work to help people find

your Web site will get you well placed to attract those who are looking for the services your agency offers. Blogs are famously effective in producing excellent search engine rankings. One caveat, however, is that whoever writes the blog needs to a.) like to write, b.) have talent in making the material interesting, and c.) link to other information that relates to the subject.

Dip Your Toes Into the Water: Here are some key things to consider when creating your blog:

- **Put the audience first.** The focus should be on what your intended audience wants and needs. Think industry news, senior issues, caregiving tools, hot topics of community interest, resources, etc. Do some keyword research (www.keyworddiscovery.com), talk to prospects, and note their frequently asked questions to determine what topics are hot on people’s minds when considering your agency’s services.
- **Don’t overdo it.** Blogging and all the associated tasks can get addictive. Allocate a certain amount of time in your week, and don’t feel you have to write every day. Also, don’t feel you always need to write something from

scratch, as content from other sources or repurposing a previous subject matter's materials can be done if it is topical and timely.

- **Network about your blog.** Add links to it from your agency Web site. Add the blog address to your business cards. When you are talking to people, tell them about your blog.
- **Get people to subscribe.** You want to capture as many visitors as possible, so get them to subscribe to your email list or blog feed. Give them good reasons why they should - perhaps with an up-to-the-minute report on the latest findings of some health issue, or helpful tips they can download for free. You can then use these new leads in other marketing areas.
- **Write compelling content.** Engage readers with attractive headlines, draw them further in with savvy introductions, entertain with anecdotes, and leave them with inspiration, new knowledge, or fresh motivation.

A crucial part of a successful blog is how it is integrated with online blog promotion, i.e., how it is marketed. Remember, the purpose of having a Web site and a blog is to a.) have resourceful, helpful information available, and b.) have those seeking care and resources find and use your agency. When setting up your blog, either direct your designer to integrate the following, or research and do it yourself.

For a blog to be successful, it needs to be optimized for search engines so that it ranks high on searches (is listed on the first page when someone enters a search term). Understanding the keywords that people choose when they search for home care and using them regularly in your blogs is a start.

There is an entire industry now that relates to blogging and aggregating all the information so it is easier to find. Just like having your agency listed in the

Yellow Pages requires actually calling them and confirming the information, you have to tell aggregators about your blog's existence, and also let them know when you have a new entry. When you connect with an aggregator to send information, it is called a 'ping.'

Aggregators take the pinged information, categorize it, and also rank the interest others have in the blog. Technorati (www.technorati.com) and Bloglines (www.bloglines.com) are two popular aggregators. Visit their Web sites, become a member and the information on how to set up a ping is easy to find.

RSS stands for really simple syndication, and you use an RSS reader to subscribe to various blogs. Once you've subscribed, you have a virtual inbox that lists the headlines from all of your selected blogs. You then only click on the headlines that interest you to view the blog's content. Intriguing headline writing has become a VERY valuable skill.

Jump In With Both Feet! Warning: Although the following information appears technical, you may find yourself easily mastering and enjoying this portion of social media.

- **Set up your ping list.** Make sure you have your ping list set up on your blog software so that every time you write a post, it pings the major RSS aggregators.
- **Feedburner registration.** Feedburner.com allows you to change your feed so that you can keep statistics on subscribers, plus offers quite a number of other benefits.
- **RSS feed availability.** Make sure that your RSS feed is available on every page of your blog so that people can subscribe to your blog through RSS.
- **Allow for bookmarking to social media sites.** Many people now use and have profiles on the hundreds of social bookmarking sites that have sprung up online over the last few years. Make sure that your blog read-

ers can bookmark all of your posts by adding a booking plug-in. www.AddThis.com is one example that can be used.

- **Get your blog posts syndicated.** Some blog resources and directories will actually syndicate the URL of every posted entry, and/or snippets of each posted entry. This includes Technorati and Bloglines.
- **Place your blog on the major blog directories.** There is a list of the major blog directories at www.toprank-blog.com/rss-blog-directories.com.
- **Place your posts on the major social media news sites.** Once you have written your posts and they are online, add them to these news sites for wider promotion. Examples include Digg.com, Newsvine.com, and Propeller.com, to name a few.
- **Join in blog conversations.** By far the easiest way of promoting your blog is by getting into conversations about home care or senior issues on other blogs. Making comments doesn't take much time and can begin to build your traffic. Look for other blogs with senior-related topics at Technorati.com or Bloglines.com.

Using these guidelines to jump into the social media pool with blogging will get you pretty far in a short amount of time, so leave the excuses about not being tech savvy enough behind. Before you know it, blogging will become second nature, and will be a great communication and marketing tool for your agency.

About the Author: Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is Managing Director of corecubed, an integrated marketing communications company that specializes in home care and home health industries. Merrily has been active in internet marketing since 1990. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Private Duty Homecare Association of America. She was recently elected to the NAHC Board of Directors.