
What the Experts are saying about
Business Blogging for Health Professionals

"Dale's book is an important milestone in the development of healthcare blogging. For the first time, it articulates a clear case for healthcare professionals to blog, as well as providing a very encouraging step-by-step guide to getting started. Blogging is yet another technique to be assimilated into the healthcare communication toolkit. I applaud Dale's quest to eliminate guesswork for healthcare professionals who want to leverage this new medium."

Dmitriy Kruglyak, The Medical Blog Network
<http://www.healthvoices.com>

"I've assisted with the blogging strategy and set-up of three blogs hosted by Typepad. I've found their blogging platform to be well suited to physicians and healthcare workers... enough bells and whistles, easy enough to use, affordable and upgradeable as your skills and needs grow. Dale's book advances the state of the art in healthcare professional blogging. His book is a good introduction to how to make Typepad work for you. The book not only walks you through the steps to get your blog underway, it also teaches you techniques the experts use to get their blogs noticed and to develop a loyal readership."

Carol Kirschner, Healthcare Educator and Marketer
<http://www.drivingintraffic.com>

About The Author

Dale Hunscher is a clinical research informatics geek, a student at the University Of Michigan School Of Information, a 23-year IT industry entrepreneur and consultant, and the proud husband of one and father of two of the most compassionate, intelligent, and beautiful women in the world. He lives and works in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and spends a lot of time wishing he still lived in the Pacific Northwest, where he used to plant little trees and cut down bigger ones for a living and climb mountains for fun.

Business Blogging for
Health Professionals Using
TypePad™:
A Jump-Start Approach

by Dale Hunscher

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Acknowledgments

This book owes a lot to Bud Gibson, whose High Octane Blogging Boot Camp course at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business inspired me and got me going on blogging. You can learn more about Bud and his work at his Community Engine site:

<http://thecommunityengine.com/>

You can learn more about the evolution of his High Octane teaching approach by following the [HighOctaneBlogging](#) link under Topics.

If you ever need an intense, in-person ramp-up on blogging for business purposes, give Bud a call. He is a star among stars at the best B-school on the planet.

Dmitriy Kruglyak of the Medical Blog Network offered many useful suggestions that enhanced the content. He also offered encouragement and advice that have helped bring the book to light. His insights have helped me to understand the commercial aspects of blogging. His assistance is gratefully appreciated. The Medical Blog Network can be found at:

<http://www.healthvoices.com>

Chapter 1. Introduction

1. Overview

When I started blogging a couple of years ago, it was for personal reasons. I didn't need instructions; like many parents of teens and young adults who have grown up immersed in the Internet culture, all I had to do was watch how they did it. I still post there occasionally.

In the summer of 2005 I began to wonder if there were professional uses for blogs. I began doing some research in my spare time, but since spare time was a scarce commodity, it took me until November to get something going.

In January and February 2006 I took Bud Gibson's High Octane Blogging Boot Camp course at Michigan's Ross School of Business inspired me and got me going on blogging. I've learned a lot on my own since then, and doubtless forgotten some of the valuable things I learned in his class, but I remain grateful to Bud for his insights and encouragement. Much of what you'll find here had its origins in his class, whether through the readings, his slides, his lectures, or the lively classroom discussion.

The blog that resulted from my classroom experiences is my FutureHIT blog (see screen shot below):

<http://hunscher.typepad.com/futurehit/>

FutureHIT - Speculations on the Future of Health IT
 Commentary on the future of information technology and its effects on society and culture, especially with respect to health IT and biomedical research informatics, from a socio-geek in the U.S. academic health center clinical research informatics community. The Long Tall, social networking and network visualization tools, folksonomies, Reed's Law, the Nokia 770, serious games, scenario planning... Always In Beta.

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Technorati

*** Delicious**
 My Tag Cloud
 advertising, collaboration, Ajax, ann Arbor, BIT742 blog, business, clinical+research, coding, community, complexity, communication, computer+science, COTS, database, design, Development, education, education+informatics, based+medicine, future, google, HCI, health+informatics, health+IT, healthcare, information+technology

JULY 20, 2006

CCHIT EMR Certs: The Prisoner's Dilemma Revisited

Word is out: CCHIT, an independent, voluntary organization with broad participation from health IT professionals, has announced their [list of certified products](#) (see [HHS Secretary Touts Value of Certification](#) on the AAFP site, which I found through [an insightful post at MedPundit](#)). I feel vindicated - not by the list of certified products, which holds no surprises, but by HHS Secretary Leavitt's explicit acknowledgement of the Prisoner's Dilemma problem I've been talking about (most recently in [EMR: Threat, or Menace?](#), [Digital Health Coming to Grandma's House](#), and [EMR: How Likely?](#)).

Geez, I hate being right...

Continue reading "CCHIT EMR Certs: The Prisoner's Dilemma Revisited" »

05:00 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

*** Quotes**
 opinmind
 "The way I work, like many people, is as Marcia Bates described in her invention of the berrypicking metaphor for search-I wander here and there, follo..."
 - June 15, 2006

*** Categories**
 » [Biomedical Research](#)
 » [Computer-Supported Collaborative Work](#)
 » [Evidence-based medicine](#)
 » [Future](#)
 » [Healthcare](#)
 » [Health IT](#)
 » [Innovation](#)

It's focused on a rather obscure subject, the future of information technology as it relates to clinical research informatics. I have a small but loyal group of readers and am working on getting others in my field going on blogging. This book is a clandestine part of that effort.

1.1 About this book

There are a lot of books you can buy and places you can find on the Web that will tell you how to get started in blogging. This book is written for professionals – not *professional bloggers*, who blog for a living, but members of the traditional *professions*, in particular the *health professions*. In other words I'm targeting professionals, such as doctors, dentists, nutritionists, nurse practitioners, and therapists when I talk about business blogging, professionals in practices where they get to know most if not all of their clients personally.

Although I focus on health professionals in this book, the lessons it teaches will be easily adapted by to the needs of other

professionals, such as lawyers, accountants, and information technology consultants. All sorts of professionals need to create a credible presence on the Web, and a blog is a great way to do that, inexpensive and effective.

The focus of this book is not just blogging per se, but *business* blogging – using a blog to build your practice and help you achieve your career objectives. Many professionals use a blog to let off steam or share humor and grief with their peers or the world at large. There's nothing wrong with this use of blogging, but if that is your objective you don't need the information in this book – just go sign up with one of the free services and blog to your heart's content.

In this book I'll go beyond the basics and try to teach the techniques and skills that serious bloggers employ to make their blog into one of the less than 1% of all blogs that are true success stories.

2. How to Use This Book

You'll want to read it through that way to get a feel for the kind of commitment it takes to do the kind of blogging that will make a difference for your professional practice. Do a fast read-through of (or just skim through) the whole book, then come back and start in earnest with Chapter 2, Getting Started.

☛ *Helpful hints look like this.*

...and are sometimes followed by more detailed explanations that look like this.

3. The Irrational Appeal of Blogging

A business blogging success story doesn't necessarily mean the blog is read by hundreds of thousands of people daily. It means that the blog that fulfills its purpose to the degree intended by the creator. It therefore follows that a business blog has a clearly defined purpose that acts as a benchmark against which success can be measured.

However – and this is *extremely important* – **you don't need to understand fully why you are blogging up front.** Analysis paralysis is very dangerous when operating in the realm of cutting-edge technologies. Until you get involved, you won't know whether your purpose should be creating an image for yourself (packaging yourself as a "brand"), educating your readership, or establishing yourself as a thought leader in your particular niche. It could be any of these or any combination, or it could be something completely different that is unique to your situation. What gets you started in blogging, though, is hard to put into words, and probably different for each blogger. Ultimately, I suspect, it's the irrational little child in each of us, the one who loved to be noticed, that is the initial motivator.

Learning to blog is not unlike learning to speak. Until you develop a voice and find listeners who can relate positively to what you are saying, you're going to babble and gurgle a bit. Don't panic if this happens. It's a growth process, and missteps are inevitable.

⚙️ Will I Make Money Blogging?

This book isn't about using a blog solely or even mainly for selling your products and/or services, and certainly not about how to make money from advertising on your blog.

There are scads of other books out there about such things, but to my mind "overt" selling is the wrong reason to use a blog. Overly commercial approach is not well-appreciated by many in the Blogosphere, for one thing, so it might make it harder to find serious conversation partners, a key component of successful blogging. Blog should not be viewed as a storefront, this format is more informational and news-oriented. Blog could be a component of a good merchant site, but it's not the central focus.

Most importantly, a blog has a higher purpose—it's a way of defining yourself and your professional practice in the minds of your clients, prospects and peers, a way to demonstrate to them that you are an expert in your niche and a real, approachable human being, someone they would like to know better, someone they can trust.

In other words, your blog is a marketing medium rather than a sales medium. It's one means to building your real-world business, not with the ch-ching! of the cash register but in more powerful yet subtle ways.

4. The Blogging Dynamic

In his Business Blogging Boot Camp course, Bud Gibson describes what he calls the Business Blogging Dynamic (see Figure 1, reproduced here with his permission). It shows the various factors at work in the conversational environment of which your blog is a part.

4.1 Inputs and Interactions

Your primary input is *Communication* – this includes blog entries themselves, obviously, but also any other ways you participate in the dialogue, such as your comments in the blogs of your conversation partners, their comments in your blog, and any emails, telephone, chat, and face-to-face contact you have with them. *Distribution* via RSS feeds is how you will stay in communication with many of your regular visitors, those who use a blog reader program to view your feed (most likely along with several others).

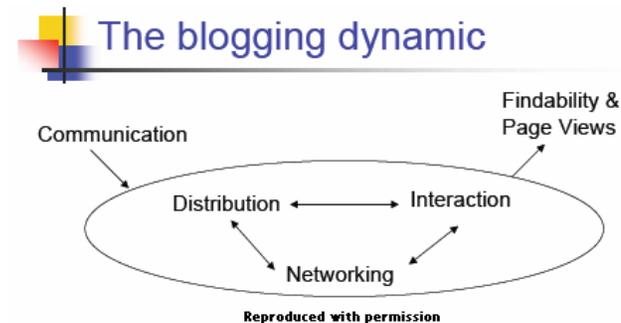


Figure 1 - The Business Blogging Dynamic

Communication and distribution facilitate *Interaction* and *Networking*, which in turn synergize to augment distribution. Interaction and networking are mainstays of business development, and these affect your business more directly than

your blog posts in and of themselves, but since our focus here is on the blogging environment, the measures of success are the number of *Page Views* your blog receives and your *Findability*.

4.2 Page Views

Page views are partly the result of return visits by those who have already found you, and partly the result of new visitors finding you via search engines – so findability is another key output of the Blogging Dynamic.

Page views are easily measured, but it is important to know more than just how many visitors you have. You want to know which pages they visited and in what order, how long they stayed to view each page, and whether they are repeat visitors or first-timers. It's also useful to know where they came from – which sites are referring visitors to you with the greatest regularity. We'll go over how you can obtain this kind of information and what you can learn.

4.3 Findability

Findability can be also assessed, but is more difficult to discover and requires more analytical effort than page views. Are people who visit via search finding what they expect, or are search engines misinterpreting the meaning of your site? If the latter is the case, you may be using words that have multiple meanings, some of which may be unrelated to your content. Your measure of success in findability is not the *raw number of search engine referrals* – the measure is *the proportion of people searching for content like yours who managed to find you*.

The terminology you use determines whether or not you appear *at all* in the results of their searches. Just as important, your terminology determines *where* you appear in their results. Your chances of being visited by a searcher drop off dramatically as you move down the results; pages below the top ten or so are unlikely to be visited at all.¹ We'll cover how to assess

¹ Your popularity relative to other pages in the result set also affects your position, but that can only be built up over time.

findability and how to improve it, both in terms of getting into the right result sets and moving to the top of these sets.

4.4 Distribution

Within the Blogging Dynamic, the factor that is least familiar but nonetheless key to your success is *Distribution*. This refers to the ways you can make your potential readers aware of and interested in reading your blog.

Of all the ideas and concepts of value in this book, those related to distribution are likely going to be the most novel and of greatest utility to you. You already know a lot about communicating with your peers and clients, but if you are like me, you don't know very much about how information is disseminated on the Web, and without this knowledge the odds are good that your blog will remain as obscure as it is when you first bring it up on the Web.

Although I learned a good many more things about communication, interaction, networking, distribution, and page views than Bud could cover in his Boot Camp, I haven't learned anything of value that does not fit into his Business Blogging Dynamic. I recommend that you bookmark this diagram and revisit it from time to time as you read on. You'll benefit from reminding yourself of how the various factors interact with each other.

5. Constraints

I set the following constraints when writing this book.

1. This book is designed to be concise enough to be read through in less than eight hours, for example during a round-trip flight between, say, New York and Los Angeles or Miami and Seattle.
2. The method it teaches is designed to be efficient enough to **get you started doing serious blogging in as little as one to two eight-hour work-days of effort** spread out over whatever time you like.

Although this means you should be able to get an industrial-strength blog up and running over the course of a weekend, it does *not* mean you are done at that point—blogging requires ongoing effort, the nature of which we’ll discuss in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 2. Getting Started

Done with the first read-through? Ok... Now you’ll want to come back to the beginning and work your way through the launch.

You can do it in a couple of days if you can find the time to do it all at once. This assumes you don’t end up having far too much fun in the stage where you are finding and studying sites and blogs that you like. This is a real risk, but it will inspire you and give you a better basis for choosing your conversation partners, so don’t let the delay worry you too much.

1. The Business Case for business blogging in healthcare

My months-long, systematic investigation of the healthcare Blogosphere showed me that many people use blogging as an outlet for their opinions and frustrations. That’s all well and good—but it’s not business blogging. *Business* blogs are aimed at audiences whose decisions directly affect the growth of their practices. My sampling suggests that for every business blog, there are about fifty opinion/rant blogs.

Bloggging requires time and effort. For most healthcare professionals, time is in critically short supply, so there has to be a good reason for any time-consuming activity. The blog you will create using the instructions in this book is aimed at furthering your career—whether by growing your practice, building a reputation as a thought leader, or by increasing sales of books you have written or products you have developed.

A business case is the logical justification for taking some action involving risk and intended to achieve some business objective.

The *business case for blogging* by health professionals is based on a fundamental real-world fact:

The cornerstone of healthcare is the bond of credibility and trust between caregiver and recipient.

Of course, the same is true of *any business relationship*—it is founded on a bond of credibility and trust between the vendor and her customer. We'll touch on this theme time and again throughout the book, but for now let's take a look at how this works.

1.1 *Identifying the customer*

Business blogging starts with identifying your audience—most often your “customer.” We'll start by assuming you are a physician and the recipient of the care you give is your patient, but most everything said in the following sections applies equally to other healthcare professions and to other customers beyond direct hands-on consumers of healthcare services. For example:

- **Physicians and others engaged in the practice of healthcare**

Your primary customer is the patient or client you see in your office or clinic. They—or their third-party payers—are the ones who pay your bills. They live and/or work nearby, and know others who are similarly local. They most likely talk about you by name with their friends, neighbors, and co-workers. You'll use a blog to entertain, inform, and advise them, and to attract prospects by letting your wisdom and compassion shine through your blog posts.

- **Healthcare professionals isolated from their peers and co-workers**

If you live and work in a remote location, it may be difficult for you to stay in touch with others who share the joys and sorrows of your work. You'll use a blog to connect and network with your peers. If they have as much spare time on their hands as you have, they'll be looking for someone like you, and a blog is a great way to make yourself known to them.

What's more, you may someday want to get out of that pristine rural or wilderness setting and see the bright lights of the big city again—in which case it would be a Good Thing if, after reading your cover letter and C.V., potential employers who think they might want to hire you can learn more about you

from both a personal and professional perspective. You can make this easy by showing off your knowledge and good work attitude to potential employers through your blog posts.

- **Specialists**

For some of you—radiologists and pathologists are good examples—the consumer of your services is another professional or institution who refers patients or clients and receives the results of your professional activity, be they diagnoses, prescriptions, recommendations, or whatever. The relationship is more like a typical business relationship between vendor and customer; it's still based on credibility and trust, but there are also pricing and evaluation aspects components to the relationship.

Your referrers may or may not be local in the geographic sense; if you are a radiologist in India, it's a good possibility that some of your work comes from halfway around the world. Your blog will be aimed at leaving them with the impression that you are very knowledgeable and thorough and can communicate well.

- **Research investigators**

For research investigators, your customers come from four groups: your sponsors, past, present, and potential; potential co-investigators, whether more or less stellar than yourself; research institutions who may be seeking faculty in your field of expertise; and members of the general public who are past, present, or potential study subjects. With the exception of the last segment, your customers may be anywhere in the world.

Credibility and trust in the research arena is based on many factors, but most fundamentally on the researcher's demonstrated ability to identify promising research questions—the frontiers of knowledge—and to carry out research that answers such questions in an ethical and methodologically correct manner. Your blog will be aimed at showcasing these abilities.

- **Business and policy professionals**

This category covers such diverse types as governmental staff, consultants and advisors, reporters—anyone whose work

Getting Started

focuses on the future of healthcare practice and policy. If this description fits you, your customer is anyone you are trying to influence with your advice and counsel.

One type of thought leader is the consultant. For you, credibility and trust are based on your knowledge of the domain, the players, and the rules of the game. Your blog is a place to show off this knowledge. You need to decide how much of your expertise to give away for free, and how much to hold back for paying customers. It's a delicate balance, faced by all types of consultants.

If you are not a consultant, the relationship between thought leadership and your income may be indirect yet still strong. For example, you may seek thought leadership to increase your chances of acceptance into a prominent position of some sort—a highly competitive residency if you are a medical student in your internship year, or membership in a lucrative partnership in your specialty if you are already a practitioner.

Your customers may be nearby—e.g., somewhere else inside the Beltway—but they also may be anywhere in the world. If that's not true already, a blog will make it more likely those distant prospects will find you.

1.2 Why physicians need to blog—or not

We live in a highly interactive world, but in some ways it is a throwback to earlier times. When I was a child in the nineteen-forties and fifties, it was not unusual for a physician to visit patients at home, or give you his² phone number at home when someone was seriously ill in your household. Your doctor knew you by first name; knew your parents, siblings, and children; knew enough of your family medical history to know what chronic ailments to expect over time; et cetera. He was in a position to advise you on how to take care of yourself and your family, and gave you that advice whether you wanted it or not.

² In those days, sad to say, the doctor almost always was a man.

Business Blogging for Health Professionals

Medical care in those days was a highly interactive people-oriented profession. This degree of interaction, coupled with the vast body of knowledge the physician had mastered in medical school and later training and practice, naturally created a strong bond of **credibility** and **trust** between caregiver and patient.

We are near the end of a phase that has lasted forty-odd years in which medicine stopped being personal and instead became scientific and compartmentalized, and the locus of care was the clinic or hospital exclusively. Many great advances in medicine occurred, but the healing voice and touch were missing. Instead of being responsible for a few hundred patients, physicians may now easily have a few thousand on their rolls.

In such a situation, how does a physician establish a relationship of credibility and trust with his or her clientele? For four decades or more this was a difficult if not unanswerable question. In today's wired world, it is again possible for physicians to get to know their patients personally. It may never again be as up close as it once was, but it's once again possible for a doctor to address all of her³ patients at once, or specific segments of the patient population, and give the kind of advice that used to be the norm. Blogs are one way to do that, and a very good way.

But blogs are not a panacea. They have distinct benefits, balanced by distinct drawbacks and limitations.



Benefits of business blogs

- Blogs are cheap.
- They require little or no IT consulting.
- They are easy to start.
- They are easy to “jazz up” if you want them to look really good.

³ That was then; this is now. No one can doubt any more that females make great doctors, except maybe for male surgeons, Neanderthals that they are.

Getting Started

- They are inherently suitable for starting and maintaining conversations.
- Their geographic reach is limitless.
- Blogs are forever: if people find them engaging, the posts you write today will still be read years from now. They are a kind of word-of-mouth advertising you can initiate that keeps working for you indefinitely.

✚ Drawbacks and limitations of business blogs

- “Blogs are forever” is a two-edged sword. Things you say will be grabbed off the Web by RSS reader programs and stored who-knows-where. Consider carefully what you say in a blog. A good test to apply before blogging something is whether you would want to see it attributed to you on the front page of NY Times.
- They require effort and time. Nothing is less impressive than a half-hearted blog effort. This drawback is augmented by the “blogs are forever” factor. Plan your workflow to make sure your blog adds to your reputation instead of putting it in question.
- Their geographic reach is limitless, but that doesn’t mean anyone in your local area will notice you, unless you make an effort to promote your blog in all of your professional communications. Consider adding blog information to your business card.

⚙️ *Cyberspace is a two-edged sword*

If you depend on local clientele, you need to make extra efforts to reach your clients and prospects. You'll need to promote your blog face-to-face, through a newsletter, and maybe even through ads in traditional media. If the newsletter is needed to get the message to them, you may find yourself asking why you need a blog—why not just put your content in the newsletter? Good question, but remember that blogs offer a chance to reach out beyond your subscriber list and work for you forever. A newsletter is great for highlighting the most important updates, while a

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blog is best for storing them permanently and publicly as your professional “portfolio”.

- Blogs are generally read by younger segments of the population, though this is starting to change. If your customer segment is fiftyish or older, many of them may never see your blog, no matter how well you promote it in traditional media or face-to-face interaction. It is worth noting that many of them still use web search to find information and read blogs without even realizing it. However, they are less likely to become active conversation participants.

✚ Some great health professional blogs

⚙️ *A picture is worth a thousand words...*

...so an online example must be worth even more. Here are some examples of how and why doctors blog.

- **“Information For The Patients” and “Sumer's Radiology Site”** <http://www.radiologyinformation.blogspot.com/>
<http://sumerdoc.blogspot.com/>

Dr. Sethi, an Indian radiologist, has two blogs. His blog “Information for the Patients” is a great source of information for patients interested in the whys and hows of radiology procedures they or their loved ones require—and for anyone else looking for down-to-earth, easily understood explanations of the benefits and risks of the tools of the radiology trade.” I’m not sure this blog is still active, since as I write this the last entry is several months old, but the entries in it contain practical, readable patient-oriented information.

The second blog’s target audience consists of physicians, including but not limited to other radiologists and medical students. Targeting other physicians makes good marketing sense: a radiologist’s “customers” are really referring physicians rather than the patients themselves, so it makes sense from a marketing perspective.

- **The Examining Room of Dr. Charles**

http://scienceblogs.com/drcharles/2006/08/the_finest_hour.php

Dr. Aidan Charles' blog description reads, "A young family physician's attempt to say something pithy. Some stories loosely based on real experience."

The above hyperlink will take you to the entry "The Finest Hour", which he posted on August 10, 2006. This is a doctor who is addressing a wide audience with what amounts to creative writing. Does it succeed as a business blog? His business objective for the blog is not clear. There may not be one; this may simply be a medium for creative expression. But let's assume for a moment he is trying to recruit new patients, and that he lives in a locale where a lot of young professionals live, a population that is technologically savvy.

If I lived where he practices and didn't already have a doc to whom I was attached, I'd choose him in a heartbeat. A person with more specific ailments than mine might look for more indications of expertise in their area of interest, but I believe that a passion for understanding the human condition is fundamental to family practice. Dr. Charles' blog clearly reflects his passion.

Dr. Charles has put together a collection of his posts in book form, entitled "Legends of the Examining Room." As far as I know you can only obtain it through his blog, and I can't say I've found the time to read it. From the posts I've read online it sounds like a good buy.

- **Dr. Deborah Serani**

<http://drdeborahserani.blogspot.com/>

Dr. Serani is a clinical psychologist who writes blog entries to help her patients and others understand the causes and evaluation ameliorations of various psychological ills.

I don't know this for sure, but I'd bet that a lot of Dr. Serani's patients read her blog regularly. Patients in therapy often become interested in psychology more broadly than their own particular ailment, so her coverage of different topics

will likely entertain and inform her readers, and also act as advice when an entry touches a patient's personal pain.

- **The Patient's Doctor**

<http://doctorandpatient.blogspot.com/>

This blog is maintained by Aniruddha Malpani, MD, an Indian physician, whose "About" description reads:

"I am an IVF⁴ specialist who believes in *information therapy*. [italics mine] I also run the world's largest free patient education library, HELP (www.healthlibrary.com)."

I really like the concept of information therapy. Information therapy connotes an information flow from the caregiver to recipient, obviating the need for clients to search blindly for useful information about the ailments from which they suffer. Blogging is a near-perfect vehicle for information therapy.

- **Driving In Traffic**

<http://www.drivinginttraffic.com>

This is a different kind of healthcare blog – Carol Kirshner's blog is mostly about healthcare marketing and education. It often has entries that bring in her other interests, adding a personal touch that goes beyond the insights into the blogger's character that are a normal byproduct of the conversational nature of blogging.

- **THCB: The Health Care Blog**

http://www.thehealthcareblog.com/the_health_care_blog/

Matthew Holt's blog is an example of yet another kind of blog, the "health wonk" genre. Health wonks are policy wonks who focus on healthcare. *Wonk* is a term that has become synonymous with *pundit* or *expert*. His blog has a lot of posts per week on a wide variety of topics, almost all

⁴ In Vitro Fertilization.

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related to U.S. healthcare policy and the business of healthcare in the United States.

1.3 Where can I find more examples?

There are a number of hub sites that you can visit to find links to health professional blogs. You'll want to become familiar with these sites anyway, since you'll eventually want them to include a link to your blog.

Blogs covering most aspects of healthcare from doctor, patient, nurse or business perspectives can be found at Dmitriy Kruglyak's **Medical Blog Network**, which also offers a wide range of free services for healthcare bloggers to help connect with audiences.

<http://www.healthvoices.com>

Blogs related to healthcare information *technology*, many by physicians, others by techno-geeks like me, can be found at Shahid Shah's **HITSphere** aggregator:

<http://www.hitsphere.com>

When you find a site you like, follow the links on the site's blogroll to find more sites in the same or similar vein. You'll get a feel for what everyone else's blog is like, which will come in handy later.

1.4 What makes blogging so powerful?

What makes blogging so valuable from the perspective of a health professional? It's a **quick and easy** way to communicate **useful** information in a **personal** way to address **large audiences** of clients.⁵

⁵ For simplicity's sake I use the convention throughout of referring to your target audience as if they are end-users of healthcare—laypersons who are patients or clients. For those of you who have different business objectives, I apologetically leave it to you to make appropriate adjustments as you read.

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✦ Quick and easy

TypePad's customer relations folks posted an interview with Anthony Pigliacampo, co-founder of custom handbag maker Freddy & Ma (<http://www.freddyandma.com>) that explains what "quick and easy" means: "It took 8 months to get www.freddyandma.com up and running; the TypePad blog took 5 minutes." You can read the whole interview at:

http://featured.typepad.com/interviews/2006/06/anthony_pigliac.html

Up and running is one thing, and fully fleshed out is another, of course, but we're going to get you up and running *and* fully fleshed out in just a couple days of effort, which is still a couple of orders of magnitude to the good.

✦ I say "quick and easy", but...

...do you have time for all this? You're a busy professional. You're realizing how much work this takes, and how much your practice partners are going to benefit from it.

The good news is: they can contribute too. You can have a blog for your practice, to which all members can contribute. Chances are you have different interests and areas of expertise, which is good, because you can broaden your blog's scope and put more energy into segments of the client population than you could afford to do by yourself.

Caveat: Get their buy-in before you make assumptions about this... Otherwise they may see it as an unfunded mandate.

✦ Useful

Blogging gives you a way to provide useful information to your patient population, information they can use in their daily lives. Give your clientele information, advice, and entertainment they can use and enjoy and they will visit your blog regularly, and tell their friends about it to boot.

▶ Information

Even general information about common chronic conditions is useful, but you'll communicate it most effectively if you can use

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real-life examples from your personal experience. Take extra care to protect patient confidentiality if you do, though.

▶ Advice

You need to keep your advice general and make sure to point out when and why a face-to-face visit is necessary, but you can give a lot of useful preventive and palliative advice from a distance.

▶ Entertainment

It may seem odd to talk about entertainment as a potential purpose for your blog, and I wouldn't recommend it as your primary focus. That said, letting your light side shine through won't hurt.

Entertainment by itself generally isn't a good enough reason to maintain a business blog. It can make your advice and the information you provide more engaging, giving people an emotional reason to come back to your blog in addition to the rational motivations for information and advice.

Should you use humor in your blog? It's dangerous in that it may fail to amuse the majority of your audience, and can be offensive to some. Things you find funny may bore some and enrage others. However, humor can be valuable if you can pull it off. Keep the humor focused on professional topics and make sure it's family friendly – no sarcasm; nothing off-color; no laughs at the expense of someone's personal appearance or speech, place of birth or residence, ethnicity, gender, hair color, or whatever. Humor doesn't have to hurt anyone.

✿ *Word to the wise...*

If you are the "through a glass darkly" type and don't have a light side, don't worry about entertaining your readers; it's not necessary and it probably won't work. But for Pete's sake, go rent "Young Frankenstein" or "Clean Slate" or something, and laugh a little. It hurts at first if you haven't done it in a while, but you get used to it, and even start to like it after a while.

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✿ *Personal*

Anyone who gives you good advice on blogging will stress how important it is for you to write in your own normal voice when you blog. Blogging is by definition personal. You can still give quality professional advice (and you should, indeed you must), but you'll do so in a personal tone as you address hundreds or thousands of patients at once.

Blogging is also interactive, and publicly so – your patients will respond to your posts, and respond to each others responses, in ways that may involve some controversy. You'll want to retain control over what comments get posted, and TypePad will help you do that, but you shouldn't overly censor patient contributions to the conversation. This is all part of the personal nature of blogging.

✿ *Large audience*

Blogging allows you to address thousands of patients at a time in a tone that seems very personal to them, and still give high quality and very useful advice. You can easily address specific segments of the patient population with information targeted at that segment, making it seem even more personal to those in that particular segment.

✿ *Can my audience become too large?*

The global nature of the Web makes it likely that your blog will reach far beyond your own client population. There's nothing wrong with that—in fact it enhances your reputation as an expert in the eyes of your clientele. However, keep the intended purpose of your business blog in mind as you proceed. If you are using your blog to serve as a support system for your client population or specific segments thereof, make sure it remains personal and useful in their eyes.

On the other hand, if your goal is to become the next Dr. Ruth (or Dr. Phil), the global nature of the Web is a huge benefit. You go, girl (or boy)!

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1.5 As doctors blog, so blog other health professionals

Much of what was said in the past few sections was written to sound like it was addressed to physicians, but that was just to keep things simple. Are you a psychotherapist, nurse practitioner, massage therapist, or other health professional, or a lawyer, accountant, or consultant in the healthcare field? All of the above applies to you too. You can substitute “client” or “customer” for “patient” if that will help make it feel closer to your own domain.

1.6 A Word about Monetization

There are all kinds of books and articles on how to “monetize” your blog. In general, this means allowing Google AdSense ads or something similar to appear on your site, or advertising something you sell.

⚠ *Caveat*

I'm no expert in this area, so feel free to consult any and all other sources of information about monetization for better advice on this subject I can give.

✚ *Google AdSense Ads in your blog?*

A general rule about this is to exercise caution. As a professional, the fundamental purpose of your blog is to build credibility and trust and poorly chosen ads could distract from that purpose. Use your judgment to decide what is appropriate. While there are people who oppose any commercialism on blogs whatsoever, others use ads selectively where it adds to content. Some prominent publications (such as LA Times) serve Google AdSense. Consider these exceptions:

✚ *If you have something to sell...*

You may have written a book (remember Dr. Aidan Charles), or you may offer seminars on the topic of your expertise. You may also have other types of well-targeted goods to sell: for example, you may be a massage therapist or herbalist selling a line of

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alternative medicine products. The purpose of your blog is first and foremost to build credibility and trust. There are much more suitable online store formats than blogs, and you can set one up easily through Amazon zShops or its many competing services.

That said, your blog can be a sales tool, albeit indirectly. You can advertise on your blog, but keep the ads tasteful and in proportion to their value to the reader.

As a general rule, “keep the ads in proportion to their value to the reader” translates directly to “Keep your ads small.”

Once people are impressed with your expertise and credibility, they are more likely to want to buy whatever you have to offer. Tasteful, small ads can give them a way to ease the pain of this urge to buy something. Your ads should direct customers and prospects to your online storefront; you can use loss leader products or time-limited discount offers to lure them over to your store, just as you would with any other advertising medium.

⚠ *Google AdSense is still not always appropriate*

*If you have good reason to be selling on your blog and you're going to have ads for your products, let **your** ads be the only ads. Google will look at your blog, categorize it, match it with advertisers interested in these categories. Depending on how you set it up, Google AdSense could end up displaying your competitors' ads on your site. If you want to be the next Dr. Ruth or Dr. Phil, you don't want Dr. Ruth's or Dr. Phil's latest book advertised next to (or instead of) your own.*

Google AdSense has a feature to ban your competitors' ads, but you will need to enter them by URL.