

EMBRACE YOUR DIVERSITY IN A VIRTUAL REVOLUTION



Sharing your true self through an online presence is easier than ever before—if you do it carefully.

BY NIMESH PATEL, MD

The recent digital revolution that has consumed the globe is only gaining momentum. Science and medicine, including ophthalmology, are being overhauled; almost every doctor carries a smartphone and has immediate access to its compulsive applications. Although there are some valid concerns surrounding the decrease in face-to-face interaction (not to mention the haunting prospect of society eventually existing in a meta-verse) caused by the shift to digital communications, there are some positive aspects to this transformation. Budding and established retina specialists alike can embrace these changes to further certain professional goals.

Retina specialists can employ many new online platforms—practice websites, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok—to brand themselves and connect with patients and colleagues. Although this specialty is historically lacking in representative ethnic diversity, each individual practitioner within ophthalmology is truly unique. The modern doctor has a distinctive range and depth of interests in research, education, culture, and practice building, all of which can be promoted online. Original content appeals to and inspires a diverse and insatiable cyber audience while simultaneously adding notoriety to the physician or practice.

WHAT TO SHARE

Many ophthalmologists maintain a strong focus on education, and this is often the easiest—and safest—starting point for building your online presence. As demonstrated by the wealth of virtual rounds and conferences held by various organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, retina specialists have plenty of interesting content they enjoy sharing. Posting unique clinical photos and surgical videos to your own website or on a reputable content-sharing plat-

form is one effective approach to launching an online presence and reaching a large audience. Using your own monogram or watermark in this setting can help to establish a personal identifier while also safeguarding against plagiarism. Moreover, participating in online group discussions and following other media accounts can improve your knowledge and broaden your online network. It could be argued that, with all the cases online, Instagram has become the preeminent modern version of *Clinical Atlas in Ophthalmology*.

In terms of formal research efforts, the ultimate objective is to advance the field and improve patient care. Currently, many scientific publications are distributing novel findings by several means, including nontraditional digital platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Retina specialists can now find useful articles and abstracts by passively scrolling through their social media feeds, in addition to actively combing

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Retina specialists can employ many online platforms—practice websites, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok—to brand themselves and connect with patients and colleagues.
- ▶ Your hobbies, talents, culture, and language are integral to who you are as a physician, and building that into your online brand can strengthen connections with both patients and colleagues.
- ▶ Never post any identifiable patient information or full-face photos without written consent from the patient.

YOUR HOBBIES, TALENTS, CULTURE, AND LANGUAGE ARE INTEGRAL TO WHO YOU ARE AS A PHYSICIAN, AND BUILDING THAT INTO YOUR ONLINE BRAND CAN STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS WITH BOTH PATIENTS AND COLLEAGUES.

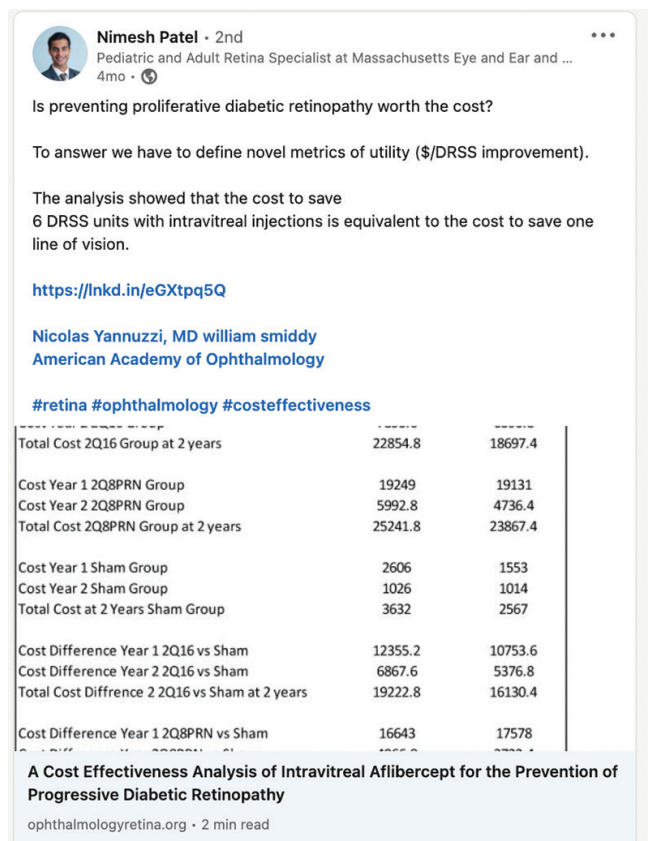


Figure. Social media is a great way to promote your new research papers and share data with colleagues. Just be cognizant of copyright issues—sharing a link rather than the full text is usually the best avenue. Don't forget to tag your collaborators and publishing organizations!

through print journals. Many researchers share new publications through their social media channels, improving access to colleagues, departmental leaders, and motivated patients. If your goal is to increase the viewership and citation of your new manuscript, consider distributing articles through your online platforms to increase the tangible and intangible impact (Figure).

GET PERSONAL

In addition to using your online presence to highlight your academic interests, there is a trend toward incorporating personal traits into your online presence. Many of us have a story that might resonate with others within the field and the public. Your hobbies, talents, culture, and language are integral to who you are as a physician, and building that

into your online brand can strengthen connections with both patients and colleagues. How much you should share is certainly controversial, but it appears that the public, for the most part, is not only accepting but welcoming of this personal color, as the definition of “professionalism” is continuously being updated.

THINK BEFORE YOU POST

While building your nonfungible online brand, it is necessary to follow some guidelines. Most importantly, never post any identifiable patient information or full-face photos without written consent from the patient. Take care to check the background of any photos, which may have computer screens with visible patient information. Other tips include not including the age of a patient and not posting on the same day as a patient visit. If including others such as practice staff or colleagues, check with them prior to sharing to ensure they do not have an objection. When deciding to add research articles, a link to the abstract is often the safest route because uploading a full text document may infringe on copyright laws.

In general, when crafting and sharing personal content on social media, always remember that the digital universe is both public and permanent.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The old saying often holds true, “out of sight, out of mind,” particularly in today's society driven by instant access to information. Maintaining an online presence by sharing unique cases, research, skills, and personal interests can provide significant unanticipated benefits to clinicians looking to expand their reach and stay top-of-mind for patients, referring doctors, and colleagues in leadership positions. A robust online brand can improve your visibility within the field of retina, serve as an advertisement for patient referrals, and even lead to consulting prospects within industry and advancements within professional societies. Finding your passion, professionally or personally, and sharing—carefully—with the expanding digital world can increase opportunities to accomplish your goals. ■

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