A frivolous necessity

Social media can be a key tool for ophthalmologists

Caroline Anderson, ESCRS

What can one say about social media in 2017? Despite its ubiquity, it can still prove difficult to wield as a marketing tool. ESCRS social media manager Caroline Anderson addressed delegates at the XXXV Congress of the ESCRS in Lisbon at a special Practice Management and Development Programme with a view to explaining the pitfalls and benefits of social media for ophthalmologists.

Her presentation began with a quote from Diana DeBrohun, a social media coach, which pointed out that even going back to the telephone in 1876, “tools for connecting with others have often been considered frivolous before being accepted
as a necessity”. It’s a decade since Apple launched the era of the smartphone with the iPhone, and despite its naysayers social media has only grown since then. Today, it’s an essential part of any business strategy.

Anderson honed in on some examples of how doctors can make themselves heard in a busy marketplace. One of these was Florian Kretz MD, who uses Facebook to communicate with patients and highlight work he’s doing, both professional and humanitarian.

Her next example was a US-based Surgical Retina Fellow and blogger named Steven M Christiansen MD, who has successfully built his own brand under the moniker ‘Eye Steve’. His site covers new and interesting stories that he hopes will “educate, inform, and inspire all things eye”. Recent entries covered tips on how to view the solar eclipse safely in the US, as well as a breakdown of the story involving a woman who had reportedly lost 27 contact lenses in her eye. He also appeared on local news radio ahead of the eclipse, giving him more of an opportunity to expand his reach.

Most interestingly for Anderson, Eye Steve once light-heartedly tweeted “The Richard Lindstrom, MD just added me on LinkedIn. Whoa. #starstruck”, showing the power of social media as a networking tool. “There are no boundaries, just opportunities,” said Anderson.

What these doctors do best is provide good content, “the Yin to the Yang of social”. This may be news from conferences such as the ESCRs Congress, special offers at their clinic or even news about new members of staff. “People do business with and use the services of people they like and trust, so social media can help you connect and engage with these potential customers.”

Ultimately, using social media is a marathon and not a sprint, as it takes time to build your network or following. Anderson pointed out that doctors wouldn’t use a machine in their practice if they were unfamiliar with it, so they shouldn’t use a social media platform to market their practice without a proper understanding of it how it works. There’s no time like the present, however: “The longer you wait to get on social media, the more behind the competition you will be.”

Caroline Anderson: caroline.anderson@escrs.org