



Making the Most of the COVID-19 Digital Disruption



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Given recent, rapid and radical changes to digital usage, **Jason Borody** explains why it is essential to update your communications and digital strategies to reassure patients and help maintain your business through the pandemic (and beyond)...

2020 began with a prediction of continued growth in the digital sector. We planned for growth in online content, an influx in video usage, and expected that social media adoption would continue its growth. What we did not predict, however, was the pace at which the digital disruption would take place.

With the rapid spread of COVID-19 and the resulting social distancing protocols, activities previously deemed too difficult to implement and manage became the new norm within, seemingly, the space of a couple of weeks. Education establishments across the globe expedited plans to deliver learning online, businesses of all domains rapidly enabled their employees to work from home (Vividus included), and many medical practices were quick to develop telehealth and virtual appointment programs.

In the sudden onset of mass-accessibility, it has become glaringly obvious that the Internet is no longer a luxury - it is a necessity, fuelling change and revolutionising the way we communicate and conduct business. As the world appears to change around us and physical contact becomes less viable, there is a positive aspect to focus on – the resulting digital shift is paving the way for numerous growth opportunities and accessibility improvements.

SEARCH IS GROWING AS DISRUPTION CONTINUES

In March of 2019, *The Telegraph* reported David Feinberg of Google's announcement that about 7% of all Google search queries were health-related – amounting to about 70,000 health searches each minute, or

around 7 billion per day. Only a year later, primarily in the past three months and thanks largely to the coronavirus pandemic, this number has grown exponentially – Google Trends reported in mid-March that search interest in health-related topics had more than doubled, reaching an all-time high.

The takeaway here is that search – particularly health-related search – has increased its reach as patients take to the internet in place of seeking face-to-face advice directly from professionals or friends. Potential patients, therefore, are more likely to first find your practice online, making search engine optimisation more important than ever before.

One of the most effective optimisation methods is the provision of content – as explained by Google's Martin Splitt in a 2019 interview, this is Google's number one ranking factor for websites. It is essential, therefore, that practices who wish to benefit from the digital disruption produce and distribute valuable, reliable content – not only to educate and inform patients about health issues, but because a specific health query is the most likely way to for a potential patient to find your website.

Although this comes with its own set of challenges – differing online reading patterns and intents should be accounted for to maximise effectiveness – the anticipated benefit is well worth the extra effort, potentially leading to increased credibility, greater online reach, and better-informed patients.

SOCIAL USE IS INCREASING

Social media usage has long been a

hot topic for medical professionals as it comes with a long list of inherent risks, concerns, and procedures to abide by. However, given that patients are increasingly turning to social media for health advice and updates on the COVID-19 pandemic, a medical social media presence is becoming more valuable than ever before.

A report by GlobalWebIndex released on March 12 of this year – less than a month from when Google began to record its major interest spike for the term 'Coronavirus' – found that 25% of survey responders already reported checking their social media more often in response to the health risk. A similar report, produced two weeks later by popular social platform Snapchat, also found that two in three of their surveyed users feel that social media has made them more informed about preventing the spread of disease, even compared to just a month prior. This growing trend suggests that social media is an increasingly necessary – platform for the distribution of health-related information, particularly to the younger patient demographic.

As social platforms continue to grow and COVID-19 pressures platforms to take more responsibility for controlling misinformation (Twitter, for example, has announced the prioritisation of COVID-19-related tweets from verified authoritative health sources), developing and maintaining a credible social media presence is also becoming far more important. Combined with the growing search for online health information, this developing situation makes a medical social media presence all the more valuable.

VIDEO ACCESSIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL

Perhaps the most revolutionary digital result of the Pandemic Panic is the rapid introduction of video in all its shapes and forms. Although its usage was projected to grow further in 2020, the rate at which it became adopted by practices was unprecedented. Social distancing policies called for the rapid introduction of video for conferencing and communication, particularly through the adoption of telehealth for managing patient appointments.

The aforementioned GlobalWebIndex study also found that only 15% of those surveyed are not open to digital or virtual medical appointments, particularly due to their elimination of physical contact and reduced burden on critical healthcare workers. In addition, early indications from the medical industry have shown that 60% of patients who were offered a telehealth appointment in lieu of a cancellation or reschedule would accept, saving vital business in this time of great uncertainty.

The implication here is that digital patient conferences are becoming more trusted, accepted, and relied upon by the average consumer, especially in the reduced capacity for face-to-face contact. A functioning method of video accessibility is currently absolutely essential for maintaining business at this time - if you or your practice have encountered difficulties with getting this critical service functioning, please contact Vividus for assistance.

THE PATH THROUGH THE DIGITAL DISRUPTION

As the digital disruption booms and communications undergo a rapid and radical change, the time is now to begin establishing essential communications and strategies which can reassure your patients and help maintain your business through the pandemic. Avoid losing sight of the future to come – this situation too, like many others before it, will eventually come to pass. Whether it be three, six, or nine months from now, business will resume as usual. ©

It's worth taking action

In this time of growing uncertainty, Vividus is here to help. We can assist with COVID-related content preparation and essential communications, help establish patient communications, help your practice implement video communication for essential face-to-face meetings, and help your practice prepare for the inevitable post-COVID rebound. Head to [vividus.com.au/resource/covid19checklist/](https://www.vividus.com.au/resource/covid19checklist/) to download our free COVID-19 Health Marketing Checklist. For more information please **contact us** for an introduction to **Jason Borody**.

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