Baby Day: A Case Study in Social Media for the Optometrist

Nathan Bonilla-Warford, OD, FAAO
Private Practice, Tampa, FL

Keywords: Baby Day, social media, blogs, Twitter, tweets, Facebook

Introduction
Office events can be excellent opportunities to have fun, educate patients about vision, and grow the practice. To be successful, optometrists and their staff must be creative to effectively get the word out and encourage patients to participate. This article presents a case study of how my office used the tools of traditional marketing and social media to successfully promote “Baby Day.”

Social Media
Social media is a term used to describe internet-based software applications that allow many people to communicate with each other in an organized manner. One example is blogging. Blogs are frequently updated internet-based writings that other people can comment on. Other examples are social media networks. Facebook, with 500 million users, is the largest social media network. People use Facebook to keep in touch, share pictures, discuss current events, and make plans with others. Another example of social media is Twitter, a “micro-blogging” site that limits communications to short 140-character messages or “tweets.”

At my practice, Bright Eyes Family Vision Care, we use all of the above forms of social media and more. I have been writing my blog, Bright Eyes News, for three years. The blog is used to highlight recent news in vision science and vision care, share patient successes (with permission) and discuss office events. I may discuss treatment options for specific conditions, but I do not diagnose patients or make recommendations for any patient on the blog. I use my practice Facebook page and Twitter account to share pictures, links to my blog posts, and links to other sites on the Internet. There are links to all of the above on my office website.

The Event
I am a provider of the American Optometric Association’s InfantSEE® program. I perform eye and vision assessments for infants with some regularity, but I know that most babies in the neighborhood do not receive an evaluation from an eye doctor. Although the informational literature and signs are helpful in educating parents that come into the practice, I wanted to educate the general public on eye care for infants and invite families to come into the office to learn more.

My staff and I came up with the idea of a day set aside just for baby exams, and the Saturday before Mother’s Day seemed like a great day to hold it. The event included free infant sunglasses and gift basket raffles from local businesses, as well as refreshments, coloring books for siblings, and educational literature. Parents could make an InfantSEE® appointment for their babies and walk-in appointments were available as well.

How We Promoted the Event
To promote Baby Day, we employed a specific strategy of combining old and new media to try to broadcast the message as far as we could with a limited advertising budget. First, we talked with other doctors by posting messages on the social network Sovoto, the optometric forum ODWire, and the email list, Optcomlist. By reaching out and involving others early, we gathered ideas for the event and encouraged other optometrists to create a Baby Day in their...
own offices. Several optometrists from around the country did participate, giving the day a larger, more significant feel.

We used traditional marketing approaches to reach new patients. First, we contacted several local businesses that targeted children and families and invited them to sponsor the event by donating a gift basket. We then created a printed flyer that we made available at these businesses and our office. A press release was written and posted on an internet-based press release service, in hopes that local news would be interested in the story. Finally, we ran a quarter-page ad in the neighborhood magazine.

We targeted our existing patients using email and in-office promotions. An email was sent to patients who had “opted-in” to receive email updates from us. We created eye-catching window and counter signs and mentioned the upcoming event to patients, especially those with children.

Using social media tools, we reached out to both existing patients and new patients. A blog post announcing the event served as the central information hub for details. The office website, Facebook, Twitter, and even print materials all included links to this blog post.

A Facebook Event was created to promote Baby Day. This provided an RSVP system, as well as a social way for friends to share that they were attending or to leave feedback. This was monitored daily for any interesting questions or discussions that might arise. Facebook and Twitter accounts were updated on a daily basis with reminders, links, and information pertaining to infants, vision, and the Baby Day event.

The Results

In the week prior to Baby Day, the event received considerable local press, especially through social media outlets. It was featured on the TampaBay.com “Things to Do” Community events calendar. Each of the local newspapers included the event in their affiliated blogs. “Whoa, Mama” included details about Baby Day in a summary of things to do with kids. And “Laptops and Lost Socks” dedicated an entire blog post to Baby Day.

On Baby Day, we had approximately 25 people in attendance from 10am to 2pm. In total, ten exams were completed: eight InfantSEE assessments and two toddler exams. For our small office, this was a very successful event.

Discussion

With a limited marketing budget, Bright Eyes Family Vision Care’s Baby Day had great attendance and considerable online media coverage. Our direct costs included the press release service, printing of 100 flyers, two window banners, and purchasing infant sunglasses. Indirect event costs were our monthly advertising space in the local magazine, the hosting fee for the blog, and time spent planning and promoting via social media.

Social media was a great way to promote discussion about this event, especially when people would “share” links with others, “re-tweet” reminders, and reference various blog posts. Combined with strategic print pieces, like flyers and signage, we were able to reach potential patients both within our neighborhood and throughout the local area.

While a number of the infant exams were from existing patient families, we also had several new families attend, who then proceeded to make appointments for parents and siblings for a later date. Many of our current patients took educational information and decided to make appointments for their young children. Some families who could not attend the event called to make appointments for other dates. Overall, we accomplished our goal of promoting infant and children’s vision care to both new and existing patients in a low-key, fun way.

References
2. http://Facebook.com/BrightEyesTampa
4. http://BrightEyesTampa.com

Nathan Bonilla-Warford, OD, FAAO practices in Tampa, FL. He serves as COVD’s social media committee co-chair and is a candidate for COVD Fellowship.