



Marketing Your Wound Care Practice in the Age of AI and Changing Algorithms

New technology helps to streamline work, but tried-and-true methods still prevail.

BY JEN MCCAFFERY

Every Thursday, Andrew Schneider, DPM, posts a video to YouTube. The Houston-based podiatrist first started producing videos about wound care three years ago. The results weren't immediate, but now his most popular videos, on peripheral neuropathy and edema, have garnered about 1.5 million views and 500,000 views, respectively. "It takes time for the algorithm to pick up on your consistency, and at some point it's going to hit," says Dr. Schneider, who also serves as president of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management (AAPP). "For me, it took a full year before I really saw any benefit from YouTube, but now I see a tremendous benefit."



Dr. Schneider

New patients come to his practice, Tanglewood Foot Specialists, from all over Houston, around Texas, and even out of state—because they saw his videos on YouTube. But in an ever-evolving professional and digital landscape with algorithm updates and artificial intelligence (AI), it can be challenging to ensure that your wound care practice stands out amid the noise and competition.

The number of podiatrists actively building or expanding independent wound care practices is decreasing, largely due to the rise of private equity groups and private acquisitions,

according to Jonathan Moore, a DPM and consultant based in Kentucky. "Yet many practitioners remain deeply committed to serving this high-need population, and there is still tremendous opportunity for those willing to invest in compliance-focused, patient-centered



Dr. Moore

wound care," Dr. Moore says.

Whether you produce your own content like Dr. Schneider, contract with an agency, or have marketers on staff, using a combination of tried-and-true methods along with the latest technology can help ensure patients think of you first for both wart removal and wound care.

"We like to say: be there before they need you, so they can remember you when they do," says Shaun Zaken, CEO of Blue Orchid Marketing, which works with hundreds of medical practices around the United States.

Educating Patients

Your existing patient population remains your most powerful marketing tool. "Delivering consistent, above-and-beyond care builds trust and turns patients into advocates for your practice," Dr. Moore says. "This kind of organic growth stems directly from clinical excellence

and a personal investment in each patient's outcome."

That said, often when a patient comes to a podiatrist with one condition, they may not be aware of all the services a practice provides. When a wound develops, people often default to their primary care physician, and

from there, are often referred to a hospital-affiliated wound care center.

"Where many practices fall short in building a wound care center of excellence is not a lack of digital marketing—it's a failure to educate their current patients and local medical community about when and why to seek podiatric care for wounds," Dr. Moore says. "The key is encouraging patients to come in early—as soon as a wound develops or when a family member notices a skin breakdown. From there, having protocols in place is essential: vascular assessment, evaluation of footwear, selection of the most appropriate topical products, and when necessary, implementation of offloading or biologic grafts."



Shaun Zaken

Dr. Moore also recommends that wound care practices consider a platform like the Amerx Patient Direct Program, which allows practitioners to order wound dressings, compression garments, foam and other essentials, and have

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them sent overnight directly to a patient's home. The platform also verifies eligibility and insurance information—at no cost to the provider.

Zaken says the ecosystem of a successful podiatry practice should include past, present, and future patients. Most podiatrists focus on bringing in new patients, but the often-neglected active patient base is a practice's bread and butter. Marketing efforts to keep current patients can range from print mailings to email communications that wish them happy birthday, provide tips, highlight new treatments and even offer special promotions.

For patients who haven't visited in a few months, Zaken's company has developed a proprietary patient recall program in which all hardcopy letters and email communications are HIPAA-compliant. They're linked to his clients' Electronic Medical Record Systems (EMRs) and segmented by condition and last visit date.

Based on that information, the marketers start communications to patients who haven't been in the practice in 12-14 months. First, Zaken and team send a condition-specific letter to the patient's home, then follow up with educational emails to make sure the patient comes back in to see the podiatrist. From there, they add up all the recalled patients each month and multiply that by the cost of visit to determine the return on investment (ROI).

For engaging new patients, Zaken recommends local pay-per-click ads to attract patients for people who are actively seeking specific services and treatments in your market. He also says for patient recalls that it's very effective



Jeffrey Hartman

to reach out to inactive patients who haven't been back to the practice for anywhere from a year to three years. He says their most popular campaigns include diabetic wound patients, custom orthotics, heel pain, and plantar fasciitis.

"We of course suggest that routine foot and ankle care is of great value, and as such, it would really behoove you to come back and see us," Zaken says.

Jeffrey Hartman, CEO of Podiatry Content Connection, which works with about 600 podiatry practices in the United States and Canada, has also developed a proprietary software called Patient Pro-Connect™ that uses search engine optimization, content marketing, and digital directories to reach new patients as the first step in outreach.

"A lot of practices just worry about bringing the new patients in and it's one-and-done and they don't follow up with them," Hartman says. That's why the second part of marketing is connecting with existing patients with communications and patient education, as many don't know podiatrists can perform surgery. Then he also uses what are known as spot campaigns, targeted communications that are specific to wound care.

Building Referrals

Referrals from other healthcare providers are still a fantastic way to expand your practice, especially for

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wound care, because many doctors don't know how to treat a diabetic foot ulcer, Dr. Schneider says. "I see so many family practice doctors and so many internists who are treating diabetic foot ulcers and they're just putting a topical antibiotic on it and saying, 'Come back in a month,'" Dr. Schneider says. "And they do that until it can miraculously heal or it blows up on them and [the patient] ends up in the hospital. But doctors are very happy to know that there's a place that they can send them that enjoys seeing wounds." And once those doctors know that they can trust that their patients are going to get proper care, they're absolutely going to keep sending patients, Dr. Schneider says.

Dr. Moore notes that referring doctors have a habit of automatically sending chronic wounds to hospital-based wound centers, often unaware that podiatric physicians provide the same advanced treatments. "It's your respon-

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sibility to educate them," Dr. Moore says. "Demonstrate that you have the tools, training, and outcomes to provide excellent wound care. Share case studies, provide feedback on mutual patients, and establish personal rapport."

Dermatologists in particular are an under-looked resource for referrals as many manage wounds but look for trusted specialists to co-manage complex cases. "If you can build relationships with local dermatology clinics and show them you specialize in diabetic, venous and pressure-related wounds, they can become a steady source of high-quality referrals," Dr. Moore says.

In addition, it's a good idea for DPMs to consider how they might specialize in one or a few modalities to differentiate themselves in their local market—as opposed to simply promoting general foot and ankle care. "Gone are the days of: 'I'm your generic local practice that is here to handle all things foot and ankle,'" Zaken says. "You're missing out on the opportunity to specialize a little bit, though that's not to say you can't treat other conditions as well." He recommends picking two or three specific conditions you want to treat, noting that minimally invasive surgery comes with larger price tags. In particular, Zaken is seeing an emerging trend for newer practitioners wanting to focus on sports medicine and minimally invasive surgery in addition to cash-based practices that promote more personalized care without the hassle of insurance.

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Hartman has incorporated a campaign within the Patient Pro-Connect software to target other medical providers specializing in various areas, encouraging them to refer patients who require wound care or other surgical interventions. “A lot of podiatrists don’t want to get involved in wound care,” Hartman says. “It’s something of a specialty, and obviously, they get certified for it and they only want to take it to a certain level, because it requires a lot more attention.”

Artificial Intelligence

Online marketing has unquestionably gotten more difficult with the advent of AI. Individual practices aren’t visible because search engines like Google are taking search results and amalgamating them into an AI overview.

“For a lot of people doing a search, if they’re looking not for a provider, but for an answer, their answer could very well be in an AI overview in the search,” Dr. Schneider says. “And they don’t have to go any further and click on anything.”

That said, some AI tools can also be helpful in producing content. Dr. Schneider uses ChatGPT for researching and brainstorming topics and Claude for copywriting. While he appreciates Claude’s more human-sounding re-

sponses, he never uses what AI produces directly. Instead, he relies on it to produce a good first draft for blog posts and video scripts. “I always edit it and change at least 25 to 30 percent of the output,” Dr. Schneider says. That includes making sure everything is correct and adding in new statistics.

Dr. Moore’s practice sees the greatest return on reaching out to their existing patient base and referrals, but they have experimented with ChatGPT, Jasper, and Copy.ai to draft blog posts, social media captions, and simplify medical information. “For busy practices, this saves hours of staff time while keeping your online presence alive,” Dr. Moore says.

Email marketing platforms like Mailchimp, Constant Contact, and HubSpot integrate AI to optimize subject

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lines, personalize email content, and determine the best send times for maximum engagement. And tools like Podium, Birdeye, and Doctible help automate review requests, monitor patient feedback, and even respond to online reviews in a HIPAA-compliant manner.

“These systems not only enhance a practice’s digital reputation but also streamline communication and scheduling through chatbots and SMS reminders,” Dr. Moore says.

Hartman is also using AI to train chatbots for his clients’ websites that simulate talking to a live person at the practice, though they still offer a live person and make it easy for website visitors to set up an appointment 24/7. His company is also developing videos that simulate the health care provider speaking to patients about various foot and ankle conditions. “We train the AI on what their voice sounds like and then we train them in what their image sounds like, and it produces videos,” Hartman says. “We do stamp them ‘AI-produced.’ We’re not trying to fool anybody, but it gives the doctors a chance to talk about what their practice is about.”

Changing Algorithms

Web search is by far still the most effective strategy to reach new prospects, Hartman says. “Because they’re in the market,” he says. “They need something right now. These people are searching because pain is a motivator.”

Google Ads are only as successful as your website landing page, Zaken says. “In other words, a modern ad promoting a specific service that leads to an outdated or disorganized webpage with very little information—or too much information!—and no clear opportunities to easily book an appointment or request a call back are a waste of money. Google’s job is done as soon as the platform refers a prospect from their audience to your website. Then

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it's your job to have a website that convinces the prospective patient to commit to your practice."

While keeping up with the updates in Google's algorithms can be a full-time job, sites are being rewarded for valuable, relevant content that's authoritative and up-to-date. "Please, every podiatrist reading: your practice's Covid protocol needs to be taken off your website," Zaken says. "It's the quickest way to date yourself, and frankly, the Google algorithm knows it."

And chasing every change may also be counterproductive. "If you're focusing on something that Google came out with today and that they're going to change six months from now, then you're just going to put yourself in a hole for when it changes," Dr. Schneider says. Instead, he continues

tice. "Since most folks won't do this, it's a great way to set yourself apart from your competition and demonstrate to Google and any visitor that you're an authority in the space and

not be effective in all areas of podiatry. "I've found it less effective in the wound care space. The open and engagement rates tend to be low among older patients, and the return on in-

Video is a great way to demonstrate your expertise to current and potential patients.

that it's new and custom content that AI can't do on your behalf," he says. Then, like Dr. Schneider, he recommends uploading the videos to YouTube for additional reach.

Schneider says people aren't expecting studio lighting and high production quality. He used his iPhone as a camera for years and went outside to use natural light. But it is important to make sure the sound quality is good on your videos. Dr.

vestment doesn't justify the time and effort for our specific demographic," Dr. Moore says. "That said, email can still be a helpful tool in more urban, tech-savvy markets or when used for targeted campaigns to referring providers or caregivers."

Hartman says that people now prefer to consume smaller bites of information, instead of a long newsletter. So he and his team produce what are known as spot campaigns, which are short pieces of content that highlight one aspect of wound care.

When it comes to social media, Dr. Schneider says one mistake practitioners can make when they're marketing their practices is that they talk only about their specialty... wound care. "It's important to mix it up and even throw in some non-medical content for wound patients, especially some good affirmations, which are important because people with wounds get so frustrated and so dejected," Dr. Schneider says. "That's a very good way to get people in the care population to notice you." The biggest takeaway, he says, is to not think of marketing as being intrusive but as educational and a potential solution for people who want to know more about wound care.

"Ultimately," Dr. Moore says, "the most effective marketing strategy is a combination of personal connection, clinical excellence, and clear communication—online and off-line." **PM**

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to focus on quality. "If you write good content that's designed to educate the end user and give them the information they need to make a decision, you're going to do well with SEO," Dr. Schneider says. The rise of AI search summaries on the top of search results also emphasizes the importance of local SEO and ensuring your Google Business profile is up-to-date.

Be sure to link to your social media channels and highlight your specialties on both your website and your Google Business profile, so your practice will come up for people searching for that term.

Video

Video is a great way to demonstrate your expertise to current and potential patients. Zaken recommends posting a short video on every one of the condition pages on your website, in which you can explain the condition, your approach to care, and share a short personal anecdote that makes the video unique to your prac-

Schneider recommends investing in a microphone that you can plug into an iPhone or Android. You can purchase one for about \$35.

Email Marketing & Social Media

Email marketing remains a cost-effective way to stay top of mind with patients and educate them about all the services your wound care practice offers. "Sometimes I'll have a podiatrist complain about the patient they treated for a plantar wart six months ago, and they came back only to find out that they went to an orthopedic surgeon for a minimally invasive surgery that the podiatrist also could have addressed," Zaken says.

Dr. Schneider sends out an e-newsletter every Tuesday in which he discusses treatments and it serves as a trusted resource for his patients. When his office is promoting a new cream, for instance, he'll get a handful of people who will shoot him an email and ask, "Will this help my wound?"

However, email marketing may



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