

## Social Digital Media – A New and Powerful Way to Educate Your Patients about Optometric Vision Therapy

**Nathan Bonilla-Warford, OD, FAAO**

*Private Practice, Tampa, FL*

**Keywords:** social digital media, Twitter, Facebook, COVID Blog, EXCELerated Vision, MainosMemos, BrightEyesNews

At this very moment, people are looking for information about optometric vision therapy, but they might not know it. They are quietly discussing their struggles with friends and family and looking for answers to problems they do not understand.

There are other people who are passionate advocates for optometric vision therapy (OVT). They have seen firsthand the powerful and permanent improvements in quality of life that result from vision therapy and they want to talk about it with others. They know what it is like to be uncertain, even skeptical, about OVT initially and they understand the emotional and financial commitment vision therapy requires. Yet they want others to know that it is worth the investment several times over.

Sadly, these people do not cross paths often enough. Patients with visual problems continue struggling with undiagnosed and untreated vision problems. This happens despite our best efforts at educating patients, community involvement and by using increasingly expensive traditional marketing tools, such as the phone book, print advertising and television/radio marketing.

Fortunately, we now have access to new tools of communication that will help overcome the limitations of traditional marketing. We can improve our abilities to communicate, and forge strong ties between the two groups of people noted above.

I have spent the last several years studying and employing the new communication tools of social media and am convinced that these new tools will result in higher numbers of patients seeking care for their visual problems.

“Social media” is a term that describes applications or programs on the Internet that allow many users to communicate within a network in a simultaneous, cooperative manner. Unlike email or text messaging, which is sent from one person to one or many people, social media networks allow many people to communicate to many other people. While this concept may seem to be disorganized or chaotic, each network has established protocols and rules that allow for their surprisingly efficient use. In this article I’ll discuss examples of social media networks and how they can be used to inform the community about optometric vision therapy.

### Blogs

One of the most familiar forms of social media is the blog. The blog is a frequently updated website designed to foster communication between the authors and readers. Authors write blog posts and readers can share comments or send links to the article to friends or family.

You can find COVID’s blog at <http://covdblog.wordpress.com/>. While COVID’s subjects are always current, the idea for a COVID blog is not new. Past COVID President Dr. Dan L. Fortenbacher had the foresight to start laying the groundwork for COVID’s blog about five years ago. Dr. Fortenbacher regularly posts on his practice blog, EXCELerated Vision at <http://wowvision.typepad.com/>, and he currently writes for half a dozen different blogs.

---

*Correspondence regarding this article can be emailed to Dr. Nathan Bonilla-Warford at [natebw@gmail.com](mailto:natebw@gmail.com) or sent to 10108 Montague St, Tampa, FL 33626. All statements are the author’s personal opinion and may not reflect the opinions of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, Optometry & Vision Development or any institution or organization to which the author may be affiliated. Permission to use reprints of this article must be obtained from the editor. Copyright 2010 College of Optometrists in Vision Development. OVD is indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals. Online access is available at <http://www.covd.org>.*

Bonilla-Warford N. Social digital media – a new and powerful way to educate your patients about optometric vision therapy. *Optom Vis Dev* 2010;41(2):102-105.

---

Via an email discussion, I asked Dr. Fortenbacher why he feels blogs are a valuable use of his time. His reply was:

... blogging offers a huge opportunity for those of us in this specialty of optometry to influence professional and public opinion. We need more bloggers to carry the torch for behavioral/developmental/rehabilitative optometry. The more voices, the faster our message will be heard! This is good for our practices. This is good for the visual well being of patients. Ultimately, it is good for the lives of children and adults who need the care that only those of us in optometry are trained to provide.

## **Facebook**

The largest social media network is Facebook: <http://facebook.com>. Quite likely, many members of your extended family already use Facebook on a regular basis. While social media has a reputation for attracting younger users, Facebook in particular is quite popular with baby boomers who want to connect with old friends and grandparents who want to stay in touch.

While Facebook offers many ways to connect, the basics are simple. As with most social media networks, you create a profile that includes basic information about yourself and a picture or image to represent you. Your profile details are not necessarily accessible to the general public (you set your own level of privacy). On Facebook you can also choose who you want to join your circle of “friends” and have a closer online relationship. You also can choose to support different groups or businesses by becoming a “fan”. Once you do this you will receive news and posts from those groups.

One interesting element of Facebook is that anyone can start an online group on any subject. One OVT advocate started a group called “Vision Therapy Changed my Life.” This group is an online spot for parents to discuss vision therapy as they do with their friends and family in real life. The only difference is that when people share their success stories on Facebook, other people can read them. This Facebook Fan Page already has 239 members (and counting). All can share or just listen to the powerful impact OVT has had upon their lives. I encourage you to go to <http://bit.ly/VTchangedmylife> and join the discussion yourself.

## **Twitter**

Another social network is <http://Twitter.com>. Twitter allows users to send short messages, 140 characters long, to “followers.” You can select who you want to “follow” (who you receive messages from), but anyone can see what you post. This can be confusing at first, but once comfortable, it allows for quick dissemination of news. This network received a lot of attention during the protests in Iran because it allowed for information to spread much faster than TV or news websites.

To reinforce the message that optometric vision therapy can significantly improve the quality of life of the patient, I have started a Twitter account called “VT Stories.” On a daily basis, people mention vision therapy on Twitter. I use this to encourage current patients and to extend the excitement that OVT graduates and their families experience. You can follow this discussion by going to <http://twitter.com/VTStories>.

## **COVD Social Media**

COVD has been proactive in engaging social media for the benefit of our patients. In 2009 vision therapist, Ruth Villeneuve, joined COVD as a social media consultant. She has done a marvelous job in assisting COVD in establishing its social media presence.

I asked Ruth about why OVT is successfully communicated online. She said:

The Vision Therapy topics that have gained the most attention on social media sites are those that are timely in nature and reflect current news topics. For instance, after Judith Warner wrote her questioning article about vision therapy in the New York Times, a response was quickly submitted to COVD’s blog by Dr. Shelley Mozlin. Her blog post titled “Vision Therapy - Where is the Evidence?” definitively answered all the questions put forth in the Warner article. Just as quickly, links to this important blog post were submitted on all of COVD’s social media outlets including Twitter.

I am both pleased and excited that COVD is engaging social media. Throughout 2010, COVD will become even more active. For instance, in the near future, COVD will be releasing educational materials for both doctors and patients. The practice management symposium at the annual meeting in October will extensively cover social media and its

use in the busy vision therapy practice. I encourage all members to explore the tools of social media. Use it to connect with COVD, other colleagues and patients. Together we can spread the message far and wide!

---

*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.*

---

## Social Media Examples and Resources

### Websites

*College of Optometrists in Vision Development*  
<http://covd.org>

Official website for COVD, the College of Optometrists in Vision Development which is a non-profit association of eye care professionals including optometrists, optometry students, and vision therapists.

*The Optometric Extension Program Foundation (OEPF)*  
<http://epf.org/>

The Optometric Extension Program Foundation is an international organization dedicated to the advancement of the discipline of optometry through the gathering and dissemination of information on vision and the visual process.

*Optometrists Network*  
<http://optometrists.org/>

Tremendous amount of information for professionals, parents, and teachers about many types of vision problems and treatments.

*Vision Therapy Success Stories*  
<http://www.visionstories.com/>

100s of Vision Therapy Success Stories from real people struggling with many different types of visual problems.

*Parents Active for Vision Education (P.A.V.E.)*  
<http://pavevision.org/>

P.A.V.E. is a national non-profit education, resource and support organization whose mission is to raise public awareness of the crucial relationship between vision and achievement.

*SOVOTO the Vision Therapy Connection*  
<http://www.sovoto.com/>

This website links individuals, including doctors, therapists and patients, who have an interest in optometric vision therapy. You might call it the Facebook of OVT!

### Blogs

*Bright Eyes News*

[BrightEyesNews.com](http://BrightEyesNews.com)

Written by Bright Eyes Family Vision Care, with information on office events, children's vision, vision therapy, orthokeratology, and vision news.

*COVD Blog*

<http://covdblog.wordpress.com/>

Official blog for the College of Optometrists in Vision Development.

*MainosMemos*

<http://mainosmemos.blogspot.com/>

Written by Dominick Maino, OD, MEd (editor of COVD's Journal, *Optometry & Vision Development*) and contains the latest research and information about eye and vision care of children, developmental disabilities, and traumatic/acquired brain injury.

*News from the AOA blog*

<http://newsfromaoa.org/>

This blog provides the latest news from the American Optometric Association. The AOA has published many stories regarding binocular vision dysfunction, diagnosis and treatment in the AOANews.

*Eyes on the Brain*

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/eyes-the-brain>

Susan R. Barry, PhD a neurobiologist and author of "Fixing My Gaze" explores the amazing capacity of the brain to rewire itself at any age. Fascinating.

*Little Four Eyes*

<http://littlefoureyes.com/>

Not a vision therapy site, but a blog written by a team of moms about babies, toddlers, and young kids in glasses. Tons of great references!

*Adventures in Amblyopia*

<http://www.amblyopiakids.com/>

Written by a mother with an amblyopic daughter. Tons of resources, including info on patches, pictures, and activities.

*EXCELeRated Vision*

[http://wowvision.typepad.com/the\\_wow\\_vision\\_blog/](http://wowvision.typepad.com/the_wow_vision_blog/)

Written by Dr. Dan Fortenbacher. A blog for patients, parents and Teachers to gain tools and insights about vision development.

*Eye Can Too! Read*

<http://eyecantooread.blogspot.com/>

Vision therapist Lesley Barker gives short tips, research summaries, and ideas to help teachers and parents understand what could be going on.

*ONE EYED GIRL – My Life With Strabismus*

<http://seeing3d.blogspot.com/>

Written by a strabismic woman who recently has undergone surgery and now is learning through Vision Therapy to use both eyes

**Facebook**

*Bright Eyes Family Vision Care*

<http://www.facebook.com/BrightEyesTampa>

Our Facebook page, with information on vision news and office events.

*COVD*

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=74321220306&>

The Facebook page for the College of Optometrists in Vision Development.

*Optometry & Vision Development*

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Optometry-Vision-Development/363947120808>

Become a Facebook Fan of COVD's official journal, *Optometry & Vision Development*.

*Vision Therapy Changed My Life*

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/group.php?gid=74321220306&ref=ts>

For anyone who has gone through Vision Therapy themselves, had a friend or family member go through vision therapy, works in the field of vision therapy or just wants to cast their personal support.

*American Optometric Association*

<http://www.facebook.com/American.Optometric.Association>

Great place to learn more about what the AOA is doing.

*Amblyopia Kids*

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Amblyopia-Kids/45192314977>

Great online support group for parents with children with amblyopia.

*Little Four Eyes*

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/group.php?gid=33422177467>

Facebook page for Little Four Eyes with lots of information, sharing and great pictures of little kids with glasses!

**Twitter**

*BrightEyesTampa* – Our Twitter account

<http://twitter.com/BrightEyesTampa>

*COVD – College of Optometrists in Vision Development*

<http://twitter.com/COVD>

*VTStories* – Links to success stories and experiences with Vision Therapy

<http://twitter.com/VTStories>

*MainosMemos on Twitter* – Hear the latest about what's on MainosMemos here.

<http://twitter.com/dmaino>

*LittleFourEyes* – *Little Four Eyes*

<http://twitter.com/LittleFourEyes>

*AmblyopiaKids* – *Amblyopia Kids*

<http://twitter.com/amblyopiakids>

---