
Online Radiology Communities and Networking

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Abstract

Human beings are social animals. By definition 'Social' refers to a characteristic of humans. It refers to the interaction of person with other persons and to their collective co-existence, irrespective of whether they are aware of it or not, and whether the interaction is voluntary or involuntary. It would not be an exaggeration if we label the current era as the internet era. From emails to online shopping to films to medicine to politics, there is no field today that is untouched by Internet.

INTRODUCTION

A sense of community is an essential need of ours; however, in our current busy schedules actual personal interactions have become more or less diminished. Online social communities have made it easier for us to connect to, and stay in touch with people who are either important to us or share similar experiences to ours, or both. Popular examples are Orkut (<http://www.orkut.com>), Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>), blogging software like Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), Wordpress (<http://www.wordpress.com>), networking sites like LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>), Ning (<http://www.ning.com>), wiki (<http://www.wikipedia.com>) etc

We all agree that the internet is changing medicine. Amongst the current trends the current buzz word in the dictionary of World Wide Web is Web 2.0. According to Dean Giustini in British Medical Journal, Web 2.0 means "the web as platform" and "architecture of participation"[1]. It is the web or internet information which is created by the users themselves. Web 2.0 is about the spirit of sharing which is in contrast to the traditional concept of "knowledge is power". Knowledge in the world of web 2.0 is about sharing and is nobody's property resulting in "democratization of knowledge". As of today, Web 2.0 is an important repository of medical knowledge editable in real-time by physicians. It is in contrast to the static delivery of contents over the traditional internet hence the term Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is primarily about the benefits of easy to use and free internet software. For example, blogs, wikis and social networking sites facilitate participation and conversations across a vast geographical expanse. Information pushing devices, like RSS feeds, permit continuous instant alerting to the latest ideas in medicine. Multimedia tools like podcasts and video

casts are increasingly popular in medical schools and medical journals.

Today's Radiologist although often talked about otherwise by the other clinical colleagues is aware of this need to socialize and the following discussion will highlight some websites and attempts of a radiologist to socialize in the this era of internet.

In order to participate in most communities, there is a need to create your own login name and password. This is necessary because there must be a way to identify you if you write on a discussion board, or send short intranetwork messages to other users, and most communities also allow you to start your own blog within that particular community which also has to be connected to at least a login name.

WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN SOCIAL COMMUNITY SITES?

Connect: Surely the basic most thing one can do on these sites is to connect with old friends from residency and medical school, Orkut and Facebook are popularly used examples worldwide. However, the potential is immense and is often untapped. One of the most popular business networking sites worldwide is LinkedIn.

Collaborate: Specifically private practice in Radiology is lonely as compared with institutional practice. In solo practice there is an absence of team of peers and professional experts to discuss and share. Here, Internet comes to rescue by allowing one to discuss, share, and see interesting cases with fellow radiologists from around the world. Additionally one can share research ideas and establish a new collaboration. Besides one can search, locate and participate actively or passively in a lecture/CME on a general or

specified area of interest.

Get answers: On blogs and social networking sites one can discuss the latest topics and turf battles of radiology.

Few popular examples of Online radiology communities are-
{image:1}

RadRounds.com, denoting Radiology Rounds, is one of the largest networking site for Radiologist created by Radiologists. It is similar to Facebook, MySpace etc, but on a professional area. It is considered as the Facebook counterpart for Radiologists. Members are either medical professionals, medical students, technicians, or programmers, related to the field of Radiology. Although this site has been around recently, it has made the great impact and is increasingly accepted by the radiology community worldwide.

Auntminnie.com is another popular community site in Radiology. "AuntMinnie provides a forum for radiologists, business managers, technologists, members of organized medicine, and industry to meet, transact, research, and collaborate on topics within the field of radiology with the ease and speed that only the Internet can provide. AuntMinnie features the latest news and information about medical imaging."

Filmjacket.com is a website for all professionals affiliated with the field of radiology. One can post and browse radiology jobs, submit and read the latest radiology news, participate in discussion forums, read radiology-related articles and browse radiologic images and cases.

iRADiX.in : This exclusive Online Radiology Community has over 2,200 registered members and is one of the largest Radiology community in Asia. It has a large collection of teaching files and videos. This site has more users from Indian subcontinent.

Refindia.net : This is a popular educative website in India . It "was started in August 1996, after the Saturday radiology meeting in KEM, a few residents and Dr Ravi and Dr Bhavin were sitting at the "katta" having "chai", when the usual subject of resident education came up" [5]. REF or The Radiology Education Foundation is an organization that was started in fun! And is now full of serious activities that are ever growing. The REF Quiz is a weekly event that has had tremendous response.

Sumer's Radiology Site

A new area of promise is blogging. A blog available at <http://www.indianradiology.com/> or alternatively at <http://www.sumerdoc.blogspot.com/> was created by this author in 2004 to post interesting cases from routine practice along with any interesting abstracts from day-to-day work (Fig. 1). A few cases were put up as image quizzes too. [2, 3]

The success of 'rad-blogging,' in Indianradiology.com, is manifold. More than 3 lakh visitors eyeball the site from all over the world, with numerous queries from patients, colleagues, and many interested medical students.

Radiolopolis

Latest to join to the radiology networking sites is "Radiolopolis" : The Radiology community for education and research!. "Radiolopolis is a community platform for Radiology by Dr Roland Talanow, where people from all over the world connect to peers, find information from colleagues and share their knowledge. The purpose of this platform is to create a possibility, where most of the needs of radiologists, residents, medicals students, technologists and industry can be melted within one central platform. It is based on a "taking and giving" principle, where you share your knowledge and others do the same." Seems like this will fill up a much needed gap in the world of social radiology.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Micro-blogging is the new buzz word and gained into prominence by the way it was used by Presidential elections of USA and is defined as "a form of blogging that allows users to write brief text updates (usually 140 characters) and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, email, MP3 or the Web". [4] Micro-blogging allows writing brief text updates on the go, and sharing them with friends and interested observers. Popular examples of micro-blogging services include Twitter (<http://twitter.com/>), Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com/>) and Jaiku (<http://jaiku.com/>).

CONCLUSION

Social networking allows sharing knowledge simply and fast. In radiology, there has been a growing trend in emergence of online Radiology community networks, which is now an integral part of Radiology Web version 2.0. There are various packages available for assisting in blogging and

networking in Web 2.0 and these are mostly free or at a low cost to individual users. These new tools facilitating online social networking ensure that there is no software to learn or download, and there are no requirements for membership to become an editor. This is only a beginning of democratization of knowledge in the field of radiology and healthcare in general and surely the future looks exciting.

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