

## Editing for the Online Environment

### Panelists:

**Diane Lang**  
Radiological Society of North  
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**David Ansley**  
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BMJ Publishing Group  
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**Bill Silberg**  
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New York, New York

### Moderator:

**Alex Williamson**  
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### Reporter:

**Laura Altobelli**  
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Now that online publication is inescapable, publishers must become adept at managing the challenges peculiar to the medium. David Ansley, Web editor for BMJ's *www.besttreatments.co.uk*, highlighted six strategies for a successful Web presence.

**1. Talk frequently with your developers.** Web editors must serve as project managers, technology managers, customer-relations managers, and marketing managers. The resulting influx of information requires that editors form partnerships with their developers to make the best use of all available resources. Bill Silberg suggested that editors learn to read and write technical requirements to communicate better with colleagues.

**2. Maximize flexibility.** Ansley emphasized the importance of trying to predict the future: Editors should prepare to add sections to and delete sections from their

sites, and they should expect to experience several changes of heart.

An online presence often leads to new author interest, requiring site flexibility to accommodate a greater variety of content. For example, Diane Lang cited the 10% increase in submissions to *Radiology* within 5 years of its Web launch. "Be prepared to get feedback from unexpected places", Silberg added, and use that feedback to develop new content.

**3. Take advantage of the medium.** The traditional narrative style of scientific publishing doesn't naturally take advantage of the online medium. As Ansley noted, the sidebars and pull-quotes of the printed page have no Web equivalent. Consequently, key information must be emphasized in new ways. Navigation matters, and editors should be conscious of content sectioning so that they can maintain integrated relationships among all other site content.

The Web provides a means for distributing more dynamic content, such as *Radiology's* moving images that are more practical than the static radiographs of the printed page. Without the constraints of print, *RadioGraphics* was able to offer more continuing-medical-education articles, more tests, and a database link (*CMEgateway.org*) that tracks user credits from multiple sources.

Silberg reminded the audience to take advantage of the power of e-mail products, such as alerts, blogs, and forums. When incorporating those features, editors should work with developers to ensure that they work seamlessly with the rest of the site.

**4. Rewrite the past.** Fact: Visitors always assume that Web content is current. Unlike print, in which typographic errors and minor inconsistencies go to rest after publication, the Web allows editors to fix mistakes once identified. With that benefit, however, comes the burden of constantly updating content so that the site doesn't

showcase information that users know (or later learn) is out of date. Lang stressed the importance of establishing a policy for updating pages. By separating online and print publication staff, some editors remain able to concentrate exclusively on content while others focus on technology.

**5. Track your users.** Ansley strongly recommended the use of traffic reporting systems to determine how users access their content—and when they leave a site. With that information in hand, editors can manipulate the links to content so that core messages can be more easily reached. Merely rewriting a headline can also create impact, as Ansley demonstrated: when "How to Work With Your Doctor" was changed to "7 Ways to Work With Your Doctor", his site saw traffic to that link triple almost instantaneously.

**6. Write for search and syndication.** "Worry about how people will find you", Silberg cautioned. Although Google can find almost anything eventually, syndication may help content to get more exposure. To make material more marketable for syndication, Ansley recommended that editors keep formatting simple and avoid embedding content too deeply.

Whether or not syndication is the goal, Silberg advised editors to work with their developers to "make it easy for users to make decisions". Providing information about file sizes, plug-in requirements, and estimated download times reduces user frustration. Similarly, clear identification of updates, new content, and corrections makes data-sifting less onerous. In simplest terms, the site known to have up-to-date, dynamic content that can be easily navigated will be the site most likely to attract repeat visitors. 