

## ANAESTHESIAUK

AnaesthesiaUK provides an up-to-date website with free examination-standard information for those studying for post-graduate qualifications in anaesthesia, and for healthcare consultants seeking updates or news of developments in the field of anaesthesia.

### OBJECTIVES

Like many other professions, anaesthetists in the UK have to keep up with constantly evolving professional standards and, quite rightly, the professional examinations for anaesthetists are highly demanding. For doctors who are training for the profession, this provides a considerable challenge and hurdle to overcome.

Dr Sumit Das and Dr Luke Koupparis are both experienced anaesthetists who saw the potential for a website that would help doctors prepare for these rigorous exams. Because the training and examination process itself is expensive, they wanted the site to provide a free education rich service to its users and, through a range of interactive resources to provide as much value to them as possible. In order to meet this objective of free access, they needed not only to obtain sponsorship, but also to be able to offer value-added services such as the sale of books and software, preferably at discount prices to the user base.

The first problem was how to build the site, since both doctors had full-time jobs and only limited experience with creating websites. The second was how to ensure sufficient revenues to keep the site going, and the third was how to keep generating quality content that would keep users returning. Finally, there was the question of how to attract new users.

### SOLUTION

In their spare time, the two doctors developed a free-to-access educational site. The site offers help on interview questions, a medico-legal resource and a monthly round-up of relevant articles from the medical literature. Among the site's interactive features are tutorials in a wide range of subjects, often using Flash-based animation and high-definition images for illustration of tutorials written by Sumit and the editorial team.

The site also has an active discussion forum where experts from various anaesthetic disciplines reply to specific queries. This includes answering queries from overseas doctors who are interested in working in the UK.

"Our target audience gets a free, highly accessible resource that helps them to pass difficult, expensive and time-consuming exams," says Sumit. "We also get questions from

**Best practice in:**  
E-trading

**Sector:**  
Other

**Size of firm:**  
6 employees

**Location:**  
Bristol

**Website:**  
[www.anaesthesiauk.com](http://www.anaesthesiauk.com)



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DR SUMIT DAS

users that we feedback into the site as content. Thus, users feel part of a community, and see their contribution benefit others.” Registered users also receive a monthly electronic newsletter with highlights of new site features and edited exam questions, a selection sent in by users, others from anaesthetists, and others from authoritative medical journals. An additional facility enables users to download questions and answers to handheld devices. This enables the user base to access interactive resources without the need for online access.

Finally, there is an online examination centre, which is accessible to registered doctors who have to provide their General Medical Council registration number. Their results are then compared against those of other doctors sitting the exam. Non-UK visitors are also able to enter the online examination centre but are carefully vetted and registered only when their status is proven. These security processes ensure that the average scores of the tests are reliable.

To fund the site and keep it free to access, the founders sought sponsors – with marked success. Following initial sponsorship from a locum agency, it now has 17 different companies providing funding. An online bookstore provides additional income.

## RESULTS

The site has only been promoted by word-of-mouth and its reputation means that it now gets more than 10,000 unique visitors per day from an international audience, without having spent significant budgets on promotional advertising.

“We have always relied on word-of-mouth,” says Sumit. “We do not advertise and the number of users grows daily by approximately 80-100.” The range of users has grown to include nurse anaesthetists, operating department assistants and medical students.


The site’s reputation, particularly as a teaching aid, has spread widely. One interactive animation, showing how to insert a catheter into the central veins in the chest, has become a teaching aid for a consultant who uses it to instruct junior doctors in the technique on a national resuscitation course. “We also get many queries from students who want to use our material for presentations or essays,” says Sumit.

The site was a regional winner of the E-trading category in the DTI and InterForum Awards for E-commerce 2004.

## CHALLENGES

The site was set-up and is still run by Sumit and Luke, still full-time working doctors. They have devoted part of every day for the four years since it went live to its upkeep and improvement. “The site has always been maintained in our spare time,” says Sumit. “You could say a weakness is that we’re not able to invest our full time





on the site.” But, he adds: “The presence of full-time doctors working in clinical medicine ensures credibility.”

Luke says: “A challenge we were faced with was acquiring new content. Content for websites is expensive to buy or produce. Due to the fact that our site is free at the point of access to our clinician user base, they have been more than happy to submit content to benefit others sharing information rather like a small community. Our site is therefore, provided with ongoing content at no cost as a result of this.”

The appeal of the site to overseas audiences creates additional problems, As Sumit indicates: “We are aware that many of our users have a limited grasp of English and there are a lot of abbreviations used in medical jargon. To this end we have employed a medical editor who checks through all of our content and ensures the reliability of the content and that there is no confusing abbreviations on the site.”

#### Top tips:

- Keeping your site free can attract users who are willing to contribute useful content to the site on quid-pro-quo basis.
- Having expert practitioners to develop and write for a site like ours strengthens its reputation significantly.
- Viral (or word of mouth) advertising can be just as effective, and much cheaper, than other forms of marketing. It also often tends to see a more managed growth forming a loyal user base.

#### THE LAST WORD

From its beginnings as a spare-time site created by a pair of doctors trying to help post-graduates, AnaesthesiaUK has become a leading resource for people taking exams in this specialist subject. Thousands of visitors from around the world use it every month. “We plan to keep the resource free to use, since this is the strength of the internet, and of our site,” says Sumit.

“We have exploited the versatility of the internet to maximise our service,” continues Sumit. “We’ve learned a great deal about web design and maintenance – and about running a business, good client relationships, e-commerce and good time management.”

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