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# YOUR PRACTICE—MARKETING ON THE INTERNET

**Y**OUR PRACTICE'S WEB SITE AND A SMILE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON. In a few seconds, they convey a first and lasting impression of who you are. A well-designed dental Web site will look good, be intuitive, and communicate your practice's services and atmosphere. You can create a Web user experience that will serve you well.

## Getting Your Message Across

A pleasing presentation is a tempting invitation for your Web site visitors to learn more. The right combination of visual images and words will get your message across effectively and with impact. Statistics and user interface studies show that few Web viewers read the bulk of what is written; most people prefer to scan or chunk select blocks of information. Words are important, but when it comes to the Internet, less is more. On the Web, graphics play a larger role than in traditional media, and graphics are the signposts that help guide the reader. A well-designed Web site will personalize your practice, specialty, and yourself to your prospective patients. Your Web site should easily communicate what you offer. You can save a few dollars with prepackaged Web templates or listing services, but they limit your ability to distinguish yourself from every other dentist. Your Web site can be a very powerful marketing tool.

## Building Your Site

Before you begin creating or redesigning your Web site, there is a seven-step process that will help you build a site that works and that will assist you in understanding what a professional Web developer should be doing for you.

1. **Discovery**—Conducting a business analysis and customer analysis to provide a clear understanding of patient demographics and services needed to help you build your practice and direct advertising resources.
2. **Exploration**—Defining the structure of the Web site and the site's navigation so that it presents your practice's services fluidly to your prospective patients.
3. **Refinement**—Determining the look and feel of the site through sketches or computer mock-ups, selecting image sizes, layouts, and multimedia treatments, including computer animation and/or Web video, as well as a visually effective color palette.
4. **Production**—Bringing the design concepts together into high-fidelity prototypes where you provide written content for each page (or this task can be assigned to a copywriter).
5. **Implementation**—Building your Web site, where graphics are enhanced, code is created, and each page is tested for quality and user-friendliness.
6. **Launch**—Debuting the live deployment of the Web site,

including confirming that all grammar and spelling is correct and checking all hyperlinks to ensure that references to internal and external pages function as expected on the live site.

7. **Maintenance**—Overseeing the ongoing process of content updates, usability, and satisfaction metrics; site analytics for marketing; and search engine optimization. Site analytics are accomplished through analysis of the actual Web usage statistics, and other metrics are accomplished via surveys.

## Being Found on the Internet

The best-designed Web site will do little good if people can't find it. On the Internet, search engines are the tools by which the majority of people find what they are looking for. Getting your site to the top of Google, Yahoo, and MSN is very important for your Web success. Search engine optimization falls into two models: organic search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click (PPC) marketing.

SEO is the strategic use of keywords within the Web page to increase its rank on the search engine's results page. Each search engine's algorithms are different and they are constantly changing. Achieving and maintaining a high page rank is like being in a horse race. Your actions, as well as your competitors' actions, will determine your position.

PPC allows you to buy an advertising spot for your Web page. The price you are willing to pay for a prospect clicking on a link to visit your site is the determining factor as to where your page will rank in the pay-per-click lineup. As of late 2007, costs were running anywhere from 5 cents to more than \$5 per click. Third-party programs can range from \$500 to \$1,500 per month to achieve a page-one position.

My own statistics derived from Google for high-ranking dental sites show that 50 to 70 percent of visits are the results of search engines, and 20 to 38 percent of visits are accessed directly via the Web site's URL.

## Marketing Dynamics

Traditional marketing—dubbed interruption marketing—is where you attempt to get your ad in front of viewers and hope they respond. Your ad may be broadcast by television, radio, newspaper, or direct marketing. Search engine marketing is very different. The prospect actively seeks out the provider using Internet search technologies. If your Web page is consistent with what the prospect is looking for, your probability of success is significantly improved.

A well-designed Web site that is easy to find can be one of the best investments you make in your dental practice. No other media offers so much for so little cost. Help those looking for your services to find you, and your practice will prosper. ■