# Why Your Internet Presence is Critical to the Future of Your Practice





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#### Why you need more than a basic website

Only one out of five doctors and dentists believe that patients are actually looking for them online, according to the 2012 National Physicians' Survey. The reality is that more than 150 million American adults are searching for health information and practitioners on the Internet. And their numbers are increasing rapidly. Given that reality, merely having a basic website is no longer enough for your practice. And not having a website at all is like not having a business card or a sign on your front door. You need a website that is user-friendly for patients, easy to navigate, informative and branded to your practice.

Once you have such a website up and running, you have to get the right patients to visit it. You need effective search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) to make it work for you. To have a truly integrated Internet presence, you'll also need an email campaign, an e-newsletter, social media, online video and perhaps even a blog – all synchronized for maximum effect. Otherwise, you're resting on one leg of a three-legged stool. And that's not very comfortable. Today's healthcare practice has been besieged by monumental changes in America's economic landscape, and now, by sweeping healthcare reforms in the Affordable Care Act affecting medical practices (dentists get to avoid this one). Despite the uncertainties of managing a medical or dental practice in this new world of change, you can take steps to ensure that your practice remains healthy and viable no matter what the future brings.

#### The importance of SEO for delivering results

A critical step to grabbing a strong online presence is search engine optimization, or SEO. Your site should be properly and thoroughly optimized to appear high up (preferably the first page or two) in search engine results if you really want to generate traffic. When your website is found, it will be read. When readers find it interesting enough, they will share it. That's why it's important to have sharing capabilities on your website. Sharing capabilities should include email-to-a-friend and links to FaceBook®, LinkedIn® and Twitter® at the least.

The main conduit to your website from various search engines is organic
SEO. If you are investing in a website for the first time, you owe it to yourself to
ensure your return on investment through one or both of this conduit. SEO catalogs your
web pages so that your site will appear high on the search engine results page (SERP) every time a prospective patient
makes a query. Search engines like Google®, Yahoo!®, Bing™ or MSN® index billions of web pages every day to return
relevant data to their search patrons. Your current website could have structural "walls" and "bumps" you're unaware of
that prevent search engines from finding it at all.

## Why your website needs to appear high in search listings

Keep in mind that 92 percent of search engine users review no more than the first three pages, or SERPS, prior to clicking on a result. Don't get buried too deep or remain invisible on the web.



## Why you need social networking to build relationships and referrals

The third step to achieving a strong presence and position online involves investing time in "social media." Social media includes all the major social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube®, LinkedIn, Google+) that facilitate talking to your patients and prospects directly. Social media allows you to increase your online presence, answer questions and build trust over time. Here are some tips for getting the most out of Facebook engagement, for example:

- Plan what you want to achieve with a professional online presence (e.g. Facebook "like" page). Start with clear objectives.
- Consider adding practice pictures or video to your professional account to help generate traffic.
- Think twice about adding personal friends versus patients: If friends (non-patients) post a personal comment on your wall, would you want your patients to see it?
- Remember that social media websites offer a space for you to engage in authentic dialogue. If you treat social media solely as a method for pushing your promotional messages, you will turn prospects off and waste your time.
- Monitor what's being said about your practice, and respond only when necessary, in a nonconfrontational manner.
- Don't build a Facebook page for your dental or medical practice without having a solid website first. It's important to provide a link back to your main website on all of your social media profiles to build credibility and visibility.
- Don't respond to personal healthcare-related questions on Facebook or any other social media platform.
- Don't, under any circumstances, post any identifying information about patients online.
- Don't "friend" your patients online. Instead, steer them to "like" you on a professional fan page.
- Don't expect to achieve results overnight.
- Don't get too personal in your updates.



#### A strong online presence is as easy as 1-2-3-4

Having a strong Internet presence boils down to doing four things well:

- 1. Creating traffic through search engines, SEO and social media.
- 2. Turning traffic into leads through calls to action on web pages and web forms.
- Turning leads into patients by having trained staff handle phone calls and greet walk-in prospects. Do each of the three steps to help your practice grown and prosper.
- 4. Protect and manage your online reputation to mitigate negative reviews and facilitate positive reviews.

If you'd like to know more about developing and maintaining a strong Internet presence, or if you need help getting your practice online, call Practice Builders at 800.679.1200.







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