

Five Ways to Enhance Your Website and Grow Your Patient Base

Today, most people looking to purchase a new product or service head straight for the internet. Findings reveal that at least 89% of consumers turn to search engines like Google – the market leader – before making a purchasing decision. Similarly, approximately 80% of consumers use search engines to seek out local businesses – including nearby dental care providers.

The above data highlights the ever-growing importance of establishing an online presence for your dental practice. Unfortunately, in an increasingly competitive, constantly shifting digital landscape, it isn't enough to just build any website and call it a day. Steps must be taken to ensure that potential patients not only find your site but, once they do, are compelled to choose your practice over another.

Building a great website requires an investment of both time and money, but it's well worth it. In the age of the internet, your online presence is an extension of your practice – just as you would invest in creating an enticing and accommodating office environment, you must do the same when putting together a website. The following five tips are designed to help you build and optimize your website so that you can grow your patient base and business online.

MAKE THE MOST OF SEO

Since most consumers, including patients, begin their online experience with a search engine, it's



important to employ the principles of search engine optimization (SEO) to maximize your website's visibility. SEO is an expansive, multifaceted and ongoing process, but at its core, it's about creating great content and effectively implementing keywords.

Crafting well-written, engaging and valuable content might include comprehensive descriptions of services and treatments or the unique story behind your practice. After content, conducting keyword research will help you find frequently searched terms relevant to your content and organically insert them. Common keywords might describe your practice's geographic location or your dental specialty. Site elements that benefit most from SEO include your homepage, page titles, URLs, and descriptions. In particular, it's important to have a clear, concise and keyword-rich homepage title and meta description as these elements hold the most weight with search engines and are the first things patients will see.

Another major key to optimizing your website's search engine performance is ensuring that it is "responsive." This means that regardless of whether a user accesses your site on a laptop, mobile phone or tablet, the site will remain attractive, easy to navigate and quick to load, displaying content that is engaging and informative. According to Google, nearly 40% of people search using only a smartphone, and, as a result, more searches occur on smartphones than computers. Based on these trends, Google and other search engines are giving preference to mobile sites. So, now more than ever, your site must be responsive if you want to be competitive.

PIQUE PATIENT INTEREST WITH VISUAL CONTENT

As the adage goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words" – and

this is certainly true when it comes to marketing your business. Your website offers a great opportunity to show patients how exceptional your practice is rather than just tell them. Professional photography and video can enhance the appearance of your website and accentuate your practice's most special and alluring aspects. Some ideas for visual content include patient testimonial videos, office walkthroughs, scenes of staff at work and procedure or tech demonstrations – anything that gives site visitors a virtual preview of the experience they'll have as patients of your practice. Aim for high-quality content that provides helpful, accurate and relevant information, and you'll be sure to attract more visitors to your website and your office.

GIVE YOUR PRACTICE CREDIBILITY WITH CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS

Before the internet, dental practices relied heavily on person-to-person referrals to spread the word about their services and bring in new patients. Today, online customer testimonials fill this role – 88% of customers reportedly trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations and positive reviews can significantly boost your business's search engine ranking. Because of this, it's important to follow up with satisfied patients and encourage them to leave reviews after appointments. For many patients, a simple post-appointment email, text or in-person reminder should be enough to get them to share their feedback online. Patient engagement software can streamline this process by automating patient outreach and

satisfaction surveys. Some tools even support cross-posting of reviews to and from Google and social media, making it easier than ever to display your credibility online and draw in new patients.

CREATE A CONVENIENT AND COMPELLING CALL-TO-ACTION

Once someone has found your website, the next step is establishing contact. For potential patients, the contact process should be as painless as possible, and a well-designed website that provides a user-friendly experience can facilitate this. All relevant contact information – such as your practice's address, phone number and email – should be easy to find at the top and/or bottom of each page. For added convenience, consider a portal that doesn't rely on contacting your office during work hours and, instead, allows patients to input information and schedule appointments at their leisure. This should be located on a separate, clearly labeled "Contact Us" or "Schedule an Appointment" page and feature a concise, easy-to-understand form with information on what they can expect when they come to your practice for the first time.

BOLSTER YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

As of 2019, 72% of American adults use some type of social media. While your website may be the center of your online presence, social media presents many additional opportunities for reaching new patients and shaping their perception of your practice. Content

that might not “fit” your website – such as videos and infographics – are all highly suited for social media. You also can provide educational resources and even show off the lighter side of your practice by posting about team gatherings, office celebrations and dental humor. If your content is popular enough, it can generate likes, shares and backlinks, translating to more visibility on search engine results and increased success for your practice. Social media also provides you a rare chance to engage with patients directly, so be sure to respond to comments and messages in a helpful, timely manner to win their respect and their business. **BP**

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