

The 10 Best Ways to Maximize Your Office Web Site

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Web-based marketing has become a *de facto* standard of conducting business. Just like hanging a sign outside your door in the 20th century, hanging your sign on the Internet in the 21st century is the best way to let people know who you are and what you do. It is especially important for health care providers, since the Internet is the primary information resource for many people seeking health care information.

Chiropractors, like all physicians, undergo extensive training in science, but only a few courses in business and probably none in information technology. Understanding how a well-designed Web site can help market a practice is vital for today's chiropractor. Before you speak with a professional Web designer who specializes in chiropractic, you should be familiar with the 10 most important factors for a successful Web site design.

1. Attractive home-page design. The home page is your introductory or cover page to your Web site and first impressions count! Think of your home page as your 30-second pitch to a new patient. Be sure that the design is up-to-date, with a layout that highlights the specialties in your practice and offers links to catch the attention of prospective patients. Quick links for achieving wellness, help with back or neck problems, or lists of accepted insurance companies can help to draw in a new patient looking for help with a specific condition. Save the flashy videos or high resolution graphics for the inside pages and keep the home page clean, quick and crisp.
2. Doctor's biography. Prospective patients are searching the Web to help them select a doctor, so be sure to tell them about yourself. Knowing more about you helps them to make a decision about scheduling an appointment. Let them know your credentials and what all those initials after your name mean. If you have been active in your community, your chiropractic society or with a particular sport, then add it to the biography. Don't get so personal that you include the names of your kids, dog and favorite uncle, but provide enough information so the reader has every reason to have confidence in you professionally and personally.
3. Explanation of services. Besides looking for information about the doctor and staff, people want to know what kind of services you provide in your office. Not everyone is familiar with different chiropractic approaches in care, so it would be helpful to list and explain your style of care, and any special testing, diagnostic and treatment procedures. Do you incorporate massage, exercise training, orthotics or nutrition with the adjustments in your practice? That may be just what the person is looking for, so be sure to mention it. You should even explain chiropractic philosophy and the adjustment, because not everyone knows what they mean. Keep the explanation brief and easy-to-read. If you did it right and they want more information, you can clarify everything when you give them a report of findings.
4. Office description. Doctors often forget to describe the atmosphere in their offices on their Web sites. Is your office a soothing corner of tranquility or an energetic, high-octane sports rehabilitation center? Do you have a special treatment area for kids or a state-of-the-art exercise room? It may help to include some photos of your office and staff that highlight these unique points.

5. Chiropractic-specific content. Many people who end up at your Web site probably did not start looking for a chiropractor and want to know more about the benefits of "back cracking." One doctor in Maryland noticed this when he added other words like "pain" and "therapy" to his search engine listings at the advice of his Web site designer, and started drawing more traffic to his site: "The library of information in my chiropractic content pages not only gets attention from search engines but also helps my active patients to promote my chiropractic services to their friends and family and get them scheduled to see me."
6. Patient testimonials. One of the most powerful motivators is a patient testimonial. Seeing how you successfully helped someone with a similar problem can help convince a prospective patient to schedule an appointment. Be sure to follow HIPAA privacy regulations and get the patient's written consent, but don't forget to include this important patient marketing tool on your Web site.
7. Contact information. Every chiropractic office Web site has the phone number and address, but you should also have an e-mail contact form to make it easy for a prospective patient to contact you while they are reading your Web pages. The Web site should also have printable directions from major highways, along with an area map. This will save your receptionist time from having to provide directions when the patient calls to schedule.
8. Online appointment requests. A new patient can be just a click away by providing the ability for the prospective patient to request an appointment online. Some computer office management programs allow doctors to establish appointment time slots that people can schedule online, and that can be confirmed with a phone call from your receptionist. Having either of these features will help make your office stand out as a modern, high-tech office.
9. Downloadable forms. Every new patient has to fill out a stack of forms on his or her first visit, so why not put them online to print, fill out and bring in? Many doctors who use downloadable forms see a reduction in cancelled first appointments because the act of filling out the form psychologically commits the patient to coming to your office. Forms filled out beforehand also increase the likelihood that the patient will bring in all the necessary ID cards and paperwork. Be sure to use a common program for your forms, like Adobe or MS Word, which most people have on their computers.
10. Optimized for search engines. According to a widely cited study on local Internet searches by The Kelsey Group and BizRate.com, local commercial searches - those seeking merchants "near my home or work" - represent 25.1 percent of all searches being performed by online buyers. Experienced professional Web design companies understand the nuances of search engines and can engineer your Web site with features that catch the eyes and ears of search engines like Yahoo! and Google. Your entire Web site program can go down the drain if search engines don't find it and rank it high for local searches. Leave this one strictly to the professionals.

Remember that your Web site is a promotional tool for a patient to learn more about you and hopefully be motivated to schedule an appointment. In today's computerized world, the Web site is your virtual "sign outside your door" and one of the most important marketing tools for a chiropractor. Follow these tips and work with a Web site designer experienced in creating customized chiropractic office Web sites. It's the cheapest and hardest-working 24-hour marketing director that you will ever employ.

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