

## Don't Sell Your Patients (Or Let Them Be Stolen from You)

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As ChiroWeb.com increases in popularity, more and more companies are contacting us to form alliances or joint ventures. A few of these entreaties are from legitimate companies that wish to offer their products and services to doctors of chiropractic on line. Most of the companies, however, are "start ups" that endeavor to capture your patient database by offering you their "valuable" services (translation: "questionable value").

You may not realize it, but a number of companies are trying to get a list of your patients so that they can market to them. Some will offer you a small percentage of their sales (to your patients); many will give you "your own web page" (on a site that hasn't been built) and expect you to be happy.

*Their* goals are not *your* goals. Most of these "start ups" seek to amass a list of chiropractic (and other alternative care) patients, sell them someone else's products (regardless of what you may be doing with your patients), and then sell the company (and your patients) for millions of dollars. It isn't about caring for patients, enhancing your practice or supporting chiropractic. They have been bitten with the ".com" bug and hope to be the next to reap a windfall.

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not maligning viable companies offering quality products and services for you to review and assess. There are many such companies that have long supported chiropractic and wouldn't dream of trying to come between you and your patients.

The companies I'm warning you about have some attributes in common:

**Start Ups** - The company didn't exist a year ago and probably won't a year from now. The future is not rosy for these internet-only, incubation-type companies.  
**Name Dropping** - It must be the lack of credibility that forces them to do it, but every one of these guys is a name-dropper. "We're working with Microsoft," or "We used to work at WebMD," they say. And the tales grow taller. The fact is, if they were so successful, they wouldn't be talking to you or me.

**No Real Services** - These "companies" aren't really offering anything. They hope to gain access to your patients and begin selling them someone else's products and earning a percentage of the profits. They're just trying to worm their way between you and your patients or "own your waiting room," as they put it.

**Worthless Web Pages** - The first thing they want to offer you is "your own web page" on a site that has very little traffic and probably didn't exist last year. This is like having your own billboard at the bottom of the ocean - impressive looking, but not the place to reach potential patients.

**E-Commerce You out of the Picture** - The big hype always includes the thousands of dollars you will receive as one of their e-commerce "affiliates." Never mind what they sell to whom for how much. Just

shut up and cash your \$4.58 check every month on the sale of products you've never even heard of.

Selling Out - Almost every one of these "start ups" intend to sell out in three years or less. They're hoping to "roll up the alternative health industry" and sell you off to the highest bidder. They aren't here to stay; they're only interested in you until they sell.

It's clear from the start-up "lingo" that these companies are only in it for the bucks. Everything is about "rolling up," "going public" or "being bought out."

The online world offers viable opportunities, but like every new frontier, beware the bushwhackers and shysters. But regardless of the territory, the rules of survival are still the same:

- Work with a company you know, one that has a proven track record.
- Ask questions - lots of them. Keep asking until you are completely comfortable.
- Keep control of your patients.
- Make sure that their goals are your goals. Are they pro-chiropractic, or do the nuances in their speech betray them?

Life is more than money, and if we ever forget it, we will regret it.

According to all of the experts, more and more internet-only businesses will fail over the next couple of years, many by the end of this one. Your relationship with your patients and the future of your practice are moving you on line. This is where the world is going and you need to be there.

But go cautiously and prudently. Know the people with whom you're working and understand their goals. If they haven't established a history of supporting chiropractic, work with a company that has. You will be better off in the long run.

*Reference:*

1. Bell tolls for e-tailers. *I Marketing News* April 10, 2000.

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