



YOUR PRACTICE

What's Your Website Missing?

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A great website should be more than just a place on the web where you have some contact information and a couple of links to find out more about your practice. Patients of all ages have become more comfortable using the internet and are expecting more from a website. And not only do your patients expect more; the web itself expects more – and demands more – if you want your website to do the most it can do for you and your practice.

It's not just what the public sees that matters; the back end (coding, etc.) also matters if your site is going to do all that it can for your practice. This is why it is more important than ever to make sure you know what you – or the person you hire – is doing when your website is built. Here are some essential elements every great practice website should have.

1. Is It Accessible?

The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against anyone with disabilities. While there are no clear guidelines that state exactly how the ADA applies to your website, your practice, as a business, is required to offer "reasonable accessibility" to people with disabilities.¹ This may include your website.



To make your site ADA compliant, web content should be accessible to blind users, deaf users, and those who must navigate by voice, screen readers or other assistive technologies. Some simple things you can do include:

- Use large-enough text and images that can be read and recognized by those with visual impairments
- Use easy-to-read sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Veranda
- Use 16-point font size or larger for all body copy
- Create a consistent, organized layout so visually impaired users don't have to hunt around for navigation and other essential features

Other, more-involved accommodations require back-end coding on your web developer's part, but can be equally important. These features include:¹

- Alt tags for all images, videos and audio files
- Text transcripts for video and audio content
- Identifying the site's language in the header code
- Offering alternatives and suggestions when users encounter input errors

If you want to make sure your website is adhering to all guidelines, the government has made a checklist available here: www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap5chklist.htm.

2. Is It Secure?

HTTP (HyperText Protocol Transfer) is what your web browser uses to load websites, but there is an

updated version you should be using called HTTPS. The "S" stands for "Secure," as all communication is encrypted. And while having a secure website is important in and of itself, there are other benefits to using HTTPS as well.

For one, secure websites tend to rank higher on Google searches than non-secure ones. Beginning in 2018, Google started penalizing non-secure sites in searchengine rankings. As of today, secure sites make up an estimated 70 percent of page-one Google rankings.

Secure sites also run better on Google Chrome - the most popular web browser, which helps create a better user experience for site visitors.

Considering these factors, all practices that are not using HTTPS should ask their web hosting provider to enable the HTTPS protocol on their site; or switch to a hosting provider that has HTTPS enabled by default.

3. Does It Have Ideal Form and Function? UI and UX

Of course, your website should look good, but there is more to design than just the subjective opinion of whether or not it's "pretty." There is actual data behind what makes a design not just attractive, but also effective; and a lot of it comes down to UI (User Interface) and UX (User Experience), which are intertwined.

"UI" stands for "User Interface"; that is, the parts of your website the users touch - the controls. The elements of the UI include:

- *Input controls*: checkboxes, radio buttons, drop-down lists, list boxes, buttons, toggles, text fields, date field
- *Navigational components*: breadcrumb, slider, search field, pagination, slider, tags, icons
- *Informational components*: tooltips, icons, progress bar, notifications, message boxes, modal windows
- *Containers*: also known as "accordion" or "drop-down menus"; give the user more choices when clicked on

All elements should be optimized for use on all devices a patient may be using to access your site (more on that later); and for users who have differing abilities to comply with the ADA.

"UX" Stands for "User Experience." Since UX is a topic that can warrant a full article of its own, I won't get into too much detail about all that it entails. Nonetheless, it is important to touch on the essential elements of good UX. Those include:²

- *Well-organized architecture*: organizing and labeling your site to help users locate the information they need and complete tasks
- *Interaction oriented*: designing with a focus on user behavior; making the site simple and intuitive to create a personalized experience
- *Usability-aligned*: meaning users can easily accomplish what they need to; once again, simplicity is key
- *Visually appealing*: layouts, spacing, images, videos, graphics, and colors that not only add to aesthetics, but also make the site interactive
- *Well-planned*: start with user research to see *how* your visitors are going to be using your site and begin your plan from there

These are just basics. To develop a truly optimized site for UX, work with a team of professional developers who know the minutiae. The result will be more than worth the expenditure.

4. Is It Mobile Responsive?

As of February 2021, almost 55 percent of all website visits occur on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets,³ and that number continues to go up. So, your website needs to look and work great on all devices. That means the coding needs to consider how both UI and UX will function on these smaller screens.

Ensure that your website design is mobile responsive so your website automatically adjusts to the user's screen size for best readability and navigation. Any negative experience can have a detrimental effect on your website, your search results and your business.

Practical Takeaway

A lot goes into making a great website, but start by designing around accessibility, usability and security, and you'll be off to a great start - ready to create an online presence that will help you attract more visitors and bring in more new patients than ever before.

References

1. Caramela S. "Is Your Website ADA Compliant?" *Business News Daily*, March 23, 2021.
2. Khindri J. "5 Essential Elements of Great User Experience Design." *Net Solutions*, Feb. 4, 2020.
3. Desktop vs Mobile vs Tablet Market Share Worldwide: March 2020 - March 2021. StatCounter Global Stats.

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