

Web 101: Site Essentials

Five pillars of an outstanding chiropractic website.

By Naren Arulrajah

According to a recent national Pew Internet Survey, 72 percent of American Internet users say they accessed a website to look for health information of some kind within the past year.¹ It takes more than just a nice-looking website to be accessed by a lot of people who get real answers to what they were looking for and visit the website again in the future.

It also takes special website development and marketing skills to ensure that most of those site visitors are actually localized target audience of the chiropractic practice. To begin with, an effective chiropractic website must be founded on five important pillars that constitute the backbone of the website.

1. Innovative Website Design

It is fairly easy to create a standard website design that nearly everyone else is already using. Ready web design templates can help create a website quickly and inexpensively. However, if the goal is to create a website that stands out in an overcrowded Internet space, it needs an original, innovative and user-friendly website design.

Internet users are spoiled for choices and will quickly move on to other sites if the web design fails to deliver everything they are looking for in an efficient and likeable manner. Website navigability should be seamless and intuitive, to encourage the reader to explore maximum areas of the site and spend maximum time on it. Navigation buttons, links and menu items should be placed right to make the overall experience comfortable and pleasing for the reader.

Google officially recommends that webmasters use responsive web designs that make website viewing equally effective on a laptop, tablet or mobile phone.² The design allows the website to adapt naturally to the display screen, irrespective of the size of the screen. Ethan Marcotte was the first one to propound the

theory of responsive web designs that include elements which will position themselves based on the breadth of the browser screen. With an explosion of the usage of mobile devices for Internet viewing, responsive web designs have become more important than ever.



2. Professional Visual Appeal

A chiropractic website does not have to be overly colorful, stylish or flamboyant, but it does not have to dull and unattractive, either. If the visual appeal of the website can impress the target reader within the first few seconds, half the job is done. A professional-looking website will reflect positively on the image of the chiropractor and create a favorable first impression. The choice of background color schemes, fonts, headlines, images, videos, graphics, icons and the professional quality of primary content will play a subtle role in determining how a new visitor views the practice and forms an opinion about it.

Ambiguity in visual texture and overcrowding the pages can confuse the figure and background relationships of various page elements. A typical problem with crowded elements is the $1+1=3$ effect, which causes visual chaos. Two of the key Gestalt principles in page layout are uniform connectivity and proximity. Groups of content are clearly marked on a well-organized web page so the reader can identify the content of their choice in a single glance. The content patterns must be predictable across the web pages to provide optimal visual experience to the reader.

3. Original and Relevant Content

All style and no substance will not work for a chiropractic website. The primary audience of such a website will be potential patients who are looking for useful information that addresses their queries, doubts and concerns adequately in a reader-friendly language. Google and other search engines are increasingly inclined toward promoting websites that are strong on content and satisfy the search queries of their users in the most effective manner.

The content must be updated periodically to ensure readers receive something new each time they visit, and gain the confidence that they will receive the very latest and accurate information at the website. According to TMG Custom Media figures, 90 percent of readers prefer custom content, and 78 percent believe that businesses offering custom content are genuinely interested in creating relationships with their readers.³

4. Functional Efficiency

The chiropractic website must be impeccably functional and usable for site visitors. Every web page must download properly, and have clean and unbroken links. The site should ideally have a clear site map that helps both the readers and the search-engine crawlers to navigate easily. Contact forms, images, videos and PDF files should download correctly and smoothly. Simplicity should be preferred over flashy content, such as animation, that takes time to download.

Economic layout, minimal scrolling on each page, and logical menus and navigation are important to provide an excellent visitor experience. The website should be compatible with multiple browsers and a mobile version must be included. A well-managed web page will at the first glance define the functional areas of the page, so the reader can determine what is relevant and what is peripheral. Website content must be structured in such a way that related page elements can be grouped logically for maximum functional efficiency.

5. SEO

Even the best website with the most brilliant content will be ineffective if it fails to reach out to its target audience and remains buried obscurely in endless Internet space. Search engine optimization or SEO is the most crucial pillar of a successful chiropractic website. It begins with an appropriate choice of localized keywords that help the search engines to identify the website when local people are searching for relevant information. Natural and organic link-building continues to be a critical part of creating a search engine-optimized website.

An "eye-tracking" study conducted by UserCentric.com revealed new insights about searcher behavior. Between 70 percent and 80 percent of participants in the study ignored the paid ads on the web page while using Google or Bing search, and looked only at the organic search results for their specific queries.⁴ This fact underscores the towering significance of SEO over paid online advertising.

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