

Your Eye Care Website: Get in the Game!

It has been reported that 80% of all Internet users in the United States are searching for information on specific diseases or treatments.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH WITH VIKAS VIJ

The importance of a business website as a critical tool for marketing and publicity is well understood. The number of businesses, professionals, and service providers that take their websites seriously, however, continues to be surprisingly low.

According to an ongoing research project from Conductor Inc., more than half of Fortune 500 companies have almost no search engine visibility, with their targeted keywords not ranking in the top 100 search results.¹

THE OPPORTUNITY

We believe that an overwhelming majority of eye care professionals have yet to realize how much their practices may benefit from a powerful website and a well-orchestrated search engine optimization campaign developed around the website. This creates an opportunity for others who can seize the advantage and reach out to the largest number of potential patients in their local area at the lowest possible cost with online marketing.

Potential patients are increasingly relying on the Internet to find the best eye care professionals in their area. With more than 80% of all American Internet users looking online for information on specific diseases or treatments,² an informative and user-friendly website becomes the most effective means of connecting with these potential patients.

KEY SECTIONS OF THE PRACTICE'S WEBSITE

A comprehensive website must provide information in distinct sections. It is quite like a well-organized library, where the reader should be able to access the exact information he or she is looking for with minimal effort. A few critical sections are listed herein, which should be a part of every eye care professional's website.

Procedures Offered

The eye care provider's website must include a prominent section detailing the treatments and services

offered at the facility. Potential patients are looking for information about the latest procedures, how they are performed, their effectiveness, the recovery period, potential risks and side effects, and the estimated cost. It is also pertinent to include information about the latest technologies and equipment available at the facility.

Eye Care Professional's Profile

Most new patients want to know more about the eye care provider before they decide to seek an appointment. This section should provide all the relevant information about the qualifications, certifications, experience, specialty areas, awards, honors and achievements, media features and ratings, community involvement, and family background of the physician. If there is a team of practitioners at the facility, the website should include information about each member.

Patients' Testimonials

A testimonial section is a valuable part of the practice's website. Appreciative comments and recognition from past and present patients is the strongest endorsement available from the perspective of a new patient. It helps address his or her concerns in the most authentic manner and enables the patient to make an informed decision regarding their eye care provider.

News and Blog

Another informative section of an effective website is a news and blog section, which offers excellent value to readers. These can include announcements of new procedures, equipment, and additions to the practice's team or information about the latest developments in the ophthalmic field. A news and blog section can also include comprehensive articles related to the specific treatments and procedures offered. A content-rich website with reader-friendly information encourages people to spend more time on the site, which brings them closer to the practice.

Videos, Images, and Reviews

A recent Pew Internet survey revealed that more than 25% of all adult Internet users have watched an online video about health or medical issues.² Furthermore, 16% of all adult Internet users have consulted online reviews or rankings of doctors.² Keeping these facts in mind, the practice's website should have a section that includes relevant videos, images, and positive reviews about the practice. These elements are an eloquent testimony that says more than what words can convey about the practice.

TIPS FOR A SMART WEBSITE

Sometimes, even a great website can lose its impact if the architecture and design are poor or if it is not easily navigable and user-friendly.

Quick Page Download

The attention span of the average Internet surfer is limited. Therefore, make sure that the website's homepage and every other page download quickly. The faster the website, the more it will be explored. To ensure speed, the pages must be short, but not so short that they omit key content and continuity. The pages can include hyperlinks for readers who wish to access more detailed information.

Easy Navigation

The reader should be able to navigate through your eye care website easily. Anchor links and tables of contents should be available on each webpage, so that the reader does not have to go back to the homepage each time. A site map should also be a part of the website to provide a quick overview of the entire site. A site "search" feature can also add to the user-friendly quality of the website.

Optimized Images and Videos

Of course, images are an important part of any website. It is equally key to size the images optimally so that a balance between the speed and beauty of the website is maintained. Videos should download only when the reader gives a command for the video, not automatically.

Error-Free Content

Even the greatest of website content can fail at its purpose if the reader is confronted with typographical and grammatical errors. Even a single glaring mistake is nothing short of a disaster for the professional image of the website, and in effect, the practice as a whole.

Current Links

If the website includes broken links, it will not only frustrate the reader but lower the search rankings of the website. Broken links are a clear indicator that the website is poorly updated. Regular updating of the website is critical for maintaining its quality and freshness and to deliver new value to readers regularly.

Minimal Special Effects

A medical website should be differentiated from a typical commercial or product-oriented website. Frills must not overshadow the content, and they should be used only where they enhance the content. Spinning graphics or logos can slow down your website, and a new visitor may leave even before the special effect finishes downloading.

Background, Text Colors, and Fonts

The goal of a practice's website is to provide information to the reader in the most effective and pleasing manner. Busy backgrounds with light text colors or complex fonts can make it difficult for the reader to go through the content. Each page must be attractive, but at the same time, it must be easily legible.

Contact Information

Contact information is the most important element of a practice's website. It is a subtle call to action for a potential patient to get in touch with the office. The contact information must be placed strategically at various points in the website where the reader is most likely to feel the need to make an appointment or seek more information from the office.

CONCLUSION

A great website is like a football stadium. The ticket holders will enter the stadium through a different door as per their seat location. Once everyone is inside the stadium, they can all enjoy the game from their vantage points. A great game must be played in a great stadium; that stadium, in the world of virtual marketing, is the practice's website. ■

Naren Arulrajah is the president and CEO and Vikas Vij is the marketing manager of SEO services at Ekwa Marketing. Contact Ekwa Marketing at (877) 249-9666; naren@ekwa.com.



1. Conductor, Natural Search Trends of the Fortune 500-Q4: 2009. <http://www.conductor.com/resource-center/research/natural-search-trends-fortune-500-q4-2009>. Accessed December 20, 2012.
2. Fox S. The Social Life of Health Information. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. May 12, 2011. <http://www.pewinternet.com/Reports/2011/Social-Life-of-Health-Info/Summary-of-Findings.aspx?view=all>. Accessed December 20, 2012.