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Bouncing back: How to troubleshoot a high bounce rate on your dental website

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Once you get visitors to your dental website, you want them to stay, learn, and ultimately make an appointment. How do you accomplish this? By learning about your website's bounce rate.

A patient's experience does not begin when he or she walks through your door, or even calls your office for the first time. It most often begins with a visit to your website. Unfortunately, many potential patients begin, and then end, their experience with you on your website.

On average, about half of all visitors leave a website without taking action or viewing more than one page. Of those who stay, only a small percentage actually contact your office. These two metrics, known as bounce rate and conversion rate, describe the flow of patients from the Internet to your door.

Is your bounce rate too high?
Google defines website bounce rate as the percentage of visitors who leave after viewing only one page. This definition is a bit oversimplified; the metric actually measures several types of user actions. If a person lands on your website and quickly leaves without engaging or taking action, it is a bounce.

A bounce rate of around 40% or 50% is considered average. A rate of 70% to 80% or higher is excessive and a sign that something is wrong. What could be the problem? There are several possible answers, including the accuracy of Google Analytics.

Before you troubleshoot your website, make sure that your numbers are reflective of user engagement. There are several reasons that the Google Analytics bounce rate may be inaccurate.

1. **Bot traffic**—Much of the traffic on the Internet is not human. Bots, some malicious and some helpful, probably account for a significant number of your recorded page views. This can artificially increase your bounce rate, because most bots hit only one page. It can also skew other metrics in Google Analytics. Fortunately, you can easily filter most bot traffic. There is a check box in Google Analytics (admin view settings) to exclude hits from all known spiders and bots. Make sure it is checked.

2. **One page websites**—Longform landing pages, and even one page sites, are becoming increasingly popular, especially among dental practices that maintain their own websites. If this design is effective, it gives visitors all of the information they need in one place. There is no need for additional clicks. People who visit, read, call, and make an appointment are being counted as "bounces" because they did not take action on the site. To eliminate this problem you can add an event to your Google Analytics code specifying a timeout. This makes Google record an event once the person has visited your site for that length of time. For example, if a person spends five minutes on your site, he or she is probably reading your content or making note of your phone number.

3. **Unrecorded events**—This is one of the most common issues with bounce rate accuracy on dental websites. By default, very few engagements are counted as events. Your landing page most likely includes video testimonials, contact forms, Adobe Flash content, and similar elements. Engagement with your interactive content is not counted as an event unless you alter your Google Analytics code to include it.

4. **External links**—Your goal is not actually to increase traffic to your website. You want to increase patients in your office, but Google doesn't know that. If your landing page drives traffic to a third-party patient portal, your social media accounts, or other external links, those clicks are counted as bounces. Also, check your Analytics configuration. If it is set to specific pages within your site, then the rest of your own site is treated as external.

Troubleshooting your website
You've adjusted your bounce rate for potential errors, and it is still high. Something is actually causing people to leave your page right away with no engagement. In this case, your website is failing to catch or hold their interest.

According to psychologists, we form a first impression within seconds of meeting someone new. The same holds true for visiting a new website. No matter how impressive your text and videos may be, visitors aren't likely to stay long enough to see them if your site doesn't make a good first impression.

Some of the most common causes of excessive bounce rates include:
1. **An unappealing header**—People look at the top of a page first. Your header should catch reader attention but not be too cluttered. This is where your most important elements go, so keep it clean enough that they stand out. The eyes naturally scan from left to right. Put your logo on the left side and your contact information on the right. Graphics and text should be minimal, yet impactful.

2. **Confusing navigation**—Another element usually found at the header (or footer or sidebar) of a webpage is the menu. If visitors find what they're seeking on the landing page, they will look around for a link. Intuitive navigation with descriptive link titles helps visitors quickly find what they need. If navigation is difficult, they're likely to leave.

3. **Poor visual design**—Creating an appealing webpage is more challenging than it may seem. If the page is cluttered with excess animation, graphics, buttons, forms, and other elements, it can be hard for a visitor to find what he or she needs. Also, it's difficult to attract attention to your call to action and other essential elements if they do not stand out. However, if the design is not interactive or lacks photos and other visually appealing elements, it will look bland. It's important to find a balance and wrap your quality content in an appealing, user-friendly design.

4. **Technical problems**—Make sure your site loads quickly, works smoothly, and contains no broken links. Busy Internet users quickly lose patience with a malfunctioning website.

Conclusion
An accurate bounce rate can be a valuable measure of website performance. If you optimize your landing page you can increase user engagement, giving you more opportunities to convert online visitors into patients.

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