5 ways to wake up your Web site

⬋ Your Web site should work for you. Implementing these steps will bring you closer to having a true online patient conversion system.

Ron Romano and Neil H. Baum, MD

Web sites are not like wine and cheese—they don't necessarily get better with age. You may have started your Web page 20 years ago by moving your 3-color trifold brochure onto the Internet. It may have worked then, but to compete today you must have a robust, interactive, attractive Web site that is continuously being updated with new content. What prospective patients are looking for in a Web site has evolved rapidly. How to get these patients to take action and call for an appointment requires a process or a system.

Trying to keep your Web site current can be daunting for most medical practices. If you find that your Web site is not generating new patients and that your existing patients are not using the site in an interactive fashion, then it is time to upgrade. In this article we suggest 5 practical ways to make your Web site a useful adjunct to your medical practice—an automatic patient conversion system.

1. Go mobile

Make your Web site "thumb friendly." Mobile technology has taken over the desktop and laptop worlds. Now nearly everyone is using a hand-held smartphone or tablet for their Internet needs.

To attract patients your Web page must be responsive to the screen size of a smartphone or tablet—very different from your Web site, which is accessed from a desktop

or a laptop computer. The majority of users navigate not with a mouse but with their fingers and thumbs. To ensure they can find their way on your Web page on a mobile device, the screen view should adjust automatically to the mobile device being used. Whether that is accomplished through a mobile responsive design or an entirely different mobile Web site, you do not want the user to have to resize, zoom, or pinch their way through the page in order to read the content. All the buttons must be large enough to be easily pressed without having to zoom in, and the font should be easy-to-read in style and size.

Having your current Web site programmed to be responsive to these devices

Ron Romano is President of www.YourInternetDoctor.com and CEO of Instant Marketing Systems. He co-authored *The Internet Survival Guide for Doctors* (2014, Instant Marketing Systems) and *No B.S. Direct Marketing* (2006, Entrepreneur Press) and contributed to the *Walking with the Wise* series (2004, Mentors Publishing). He is an Internet marketing consultant, speaker, and creator of "The Implementation Blueprint System."

Neil H. Baum, MD, practices urology in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is Associate Clinical Professor of Urology at Tulane Medical School and Louisiana State University School of Medicine, both in New Orleans. He is also on the medical staff at Touro Infirmary in New Orleans, and East Jefferson General Hospital in Metairie, Louisiana. He is the author of several books, including *Social Media for the Healthcare Professional* (2012, Greenbranch) and *Marketing Your Clinical Practice: Ethically, Effectively, Economically* (4th edition, 2009; Jones & Bartlett).

will increase the time a mobile user spends on your site and make it easier for her to make an appointment.

2. Add patient reviews

What others say about you is far more important than anything you can say about yourself. Almost half of prospective patients will check out your online reviews before calling you to schedule an appointment.[1] Therefore, it is very important that you ask for positive feedback from your patients and post it to your Web site. We recommend that you capture compliments from your existing patients when they are in the office. Have a computer or iPad handy for them to create a positive review; patients who "promise" to do it when they get back to the office or home rarely follow through. Testimonials should be visible on your homepage and can link to another testimonial page or review site.

> According to HealthCareSuccess.com, "as many as 8 out of 10 people will look online for information about individual doctors. And all of that happens long before they make an appointment … and what they find—positive, negative, neutral or nothing at all—influences their decision to call or not to call."[2]

Always invite your patients to evaluate you, your practice partners, and the practice online. There are numerous patient review Web sites, including: Google Plus, http://www.RateMDs.com, http://www.Vitals.com, and http://www.HealthGrades.com. And check out what your patients are saying about you on a regular basis. Just type "Reviews for Dr. <your name>" into your search bar to find the results.

Although we hope they will, happy patients rarely fill out these online reviews. However, it takes just 2 or 3 unhappy patients to ruin your online reputation. That could be costing you tens of thousands of dollars in lost billing.

3. Share your videos

What's hot and what's not? To answer that, just take a look at how many people watch videos on YouTube every day! People don't want to read anymore; they want to be entertained and spoon-fed information.

Take advantage of this trend by placing videos on your homepage. Post a video that introduces your practice, provides testimonials of satisfied patients, explains some of the procedures you perform, or shows you describing the latest breakthrough in medical technology.

Your videos don't have to be long. One to 2 minutes is plenty. They don't have to feature you talking about medical symptoms or procedures (what's called a talking head video). Use a PowerPoint presentation with voice overlay—and you don't have to be the one talking.

Your Web site isn't the only place you'll want to post your videos. YouTube is second only to Google as the most popular search engine.[3] Just about everyone goes to YouTube to view videos on whatever interests them. See our April 2014 article, titled "Using the Internet in your practice. Part 2: Generating new patients using social media," to learn more on getting started with YouTube.

Videos will improve your Web site rankings and will increase the time visitors spend on the site. When done properly—labeling the videos with relevant keywords, making the videos short, and presenting information in layman's language with reasons why it is important to seek a professional if the viewer is experiencing these types of symptoms—they are a great way to convert visitors to patients.

4. Hook'em on the homepage

If you want your Web site to create a favorable first impression, your homepage should reflect that positive impression. Remember, the homepage, as the face of your practice, is the first thing that

a patient will see long before she picks up the phone or comes to the office.

A potential patient visiting your site will make a snap judgment within a few seconds. Think of your homepage as a highway billboard. There are about 3 seconds to make an impression and for a driver to decide whether or not she will exit the highway to buy gas or eat at a restaurant or even contact a business in the future by telephone or, most likely, online. A visit to your Web site has the same attraction timing.

Your homepage must be attractive; provide useful, current information; and have pleasing graphics—all without requiring the visitor to scroll down too far. Your Web site is your opportunity to create a good first impression—an opportunity that won't happen again.

Use compelling headlines with keyword-related content. You want to make sure you use keywords that a prospective patient might search for in a main headline and in the main body of your homepage. But patients are not the only ones who spot those key terms. Search engines also crawl your Web site for keywords that prospective patients may type into the Google search bar—words like gynecologist, ObGyn, urinary leakage, breast lump, pelvic pain, menopause, etc. Using those keywords helps your site to be found more often by patients and helps those prospective patients find information relevant to their medical needs.

5. Place calls to action on every page

CONTACT US!

Contact us! This is so rudimentary, yet many Web sites do not have easy-to-find contact information on their homepages. Be sure to include your phone number (which could be different than your regular phone office number so you can track how many calls you get from your Web site).

Add a "schedule an appointment" icon in a prominent position on the homepage so the visitor does not have to scroll down to search for it. But don't just stop at the homepage. Your contact information should be on every page so that, when the visitor is on a page reading about a condition or procedure, the "schedule an appointment" button is right there for her to click.

Be sure to evaluate your contact page. Make sure it's easy for patients to find multiple ways to connect with you and your office: phone, fax, email, and snail mail.

Interactivity is important. Why not have

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an "Ask the doctor your question" field? It makes the site interactive and gives you the opportunity to communicate and develop a relationship with your patients.

Additional interactivity

Social media is the new buzz word-of-mouth. Your patients use Facebook, You-Tube, blogging, and Twitter every day. It is the easiest way to stay connected and make your practice and your brand part of their daily lives. Social media builds loyalty. Integrating social media into your Web site provides new opportunities to engage your existing patients and to attract new ones to your practice.

Connect to medical records. Your Web site should have an easy portal for patients to connect to their medical records and laboratory results in a secure, encrypted fashion to comply with HIPAA regulations.

You can do this yourself!

You and your staff should be able to make changes on your Web site without having to contact your Web developer, even if you do not have full-time IT assistance. For example, in Dr. Baum's practice, his support staff can add testimonials, content, and pictures without contacting the Web developer or knowing code.

Make sure that function is designed into your site and that your Web developer teaches you and your staff how to keep your site updated.

The bottom line

Web sites are like a farmer's fence, they are always under construction. Merely having a Web site, regardless of the size, specialty, or location of your practice, is not enough. Be sure your site attracts, holds, and converts viewers into paying patients. We hope you will consider these 5 suggestions as a roadmap to develop a robust site, so that when you ask a patient who referred her to your practice, her answer will be "your Web site" or "the Internet." This will bring cockles to your heart and bucks in your bank account. ✪

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