



THE IMPORTANCE OF WEBSITE DESIGN IN AN OPHTHALMIC PRACTICE



Where does your site fit in with your other online marketing?

BY BILL FUKUI

Not long ago, your online marketing was limited to simply building a professional, informative website. Even organic Google exposure was driven largely by onsite optimization and content.

But as technology and, more important, online consumers' user habits have changed, eye care practices now have a growing number of digital marketing assets, channels, and platforms to manage in order to brand their practices and reach their target online audiences. This includes maintaining and monitoring a variety of social media profiles, review websites, and content (text, graphic, and video) distribution sites.

There is no question that eye care marketers are now faced with a more fragmented online audience. But one thing that hasn't changed is the importance of having an effective website that works not only throughout your marketing process but also throughout the decision-making cycles of your potential patients. Your website should still be the hub of all your marketing investments and the primary destination for your internet audience.

What has changed is that the role of your website is expanding.

No longer can it solely serve as an online brochure or digital reception area. Your website now serves multiple yet integrated functions, from brand-building to patient education to converting leads to patients.



BRAND-BUILDING

Helping build and establish the image of your practice is a crucial role for your website. According to one widely quoted statistic, 75% of website visitors indicate that they judge a business and its brand credibility based solely on the website design.¹

The look, feel, and engagement of your website design has a tremendous and immediate impact on that all-important first impression of your practice. The bottom-line impact of all your marketing and advertising investments can either be accentuated or undermined by the experience your prospects (even referrals) have when they get to your website.

This impact is compounded when your practice is located in a competitive online marketplace. Sophisticated, marketing-savvy practices continually raise the stakes when it comes to differentiating a practice's online brand. In earlier times, it was not unusual for eye care

practices to have the same website for 5 to 10 years or even longer. Today, practices must make substantive improvements every 2 to 3 years.



RAPPORT-BUILDING

In addition to projecting a high-credibility brand, your website also must establish a connection with visitors. The ever-expanding influence of social media affects consumer expectations when they come to a website.

Studies have shown that rapport-building and engagement are increasingly important strategies for business-to-consumer websites.² Stock photography and generic industry-produced content will not have the same impact it once did. Today, online consumers' expectations demand that practices develop engaging designs and incorporate customized, personalized photography, videos, and content messaging.



EDUCATING

Unlike retail- or commerce-based websites, medical websites must provide useful, easy-to-understand information. Websites that perform well are those

that continually focus on providing updated information and patient education resources.

Developing customized messaging, including video answers to frequently asked questions, can go a long way toward improving comprehension of the information you want to convey. At the same time, it also builds credibility, trust, and rapport with your patients.



INTEGRATING

As mentioned earlier, your practice website is now part of a much larger network of marketing platforms, apps, and industry consumer resources. Your website needs to integrate with all these resources, from your social media profiles to a variety of patient review portals and industry websites.

There was a time when practices looked at each of their online marketing platforms separately and even had different people or agencies managing them. Effective online marketing today is not executed within silos. Collaboration and integration are essential to maintain a consistent brand and maximize your investment of time and money.

Your website should be the common denominator of all of these online assets. We have found, through Google Analytics and website heat map software, that when it is done right, consumers gravitate to these resources. In many cases, links to social media profiles are some of the most often clicked elements on an integrated website.



OPTIMIZING

Another role for your website is to earn valuable exposure and traffic. Although Google incorporates a number of ranking factors into its algorithms, websites still play a starring role in earning visibility on organic search results.

"BY TAKING A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT

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Websites that are highly organized by commonly searched procedures, questions, and topics with high-quality content continually secure top listings.

Other features found on today's top-performing websites include user-engagement elements such as educational graphics, videos, infographics, and downloadable resources such as guides and checklists. Google also rewards websites that load quickly because this enhances the user experience. You can test your own website's mobile speed with Google's Test My Site feature.



CONVERTING

Last but certainly not least, your website must convert visitors to conversation and engagement with your practice. Generating a high return on marketing and advertising investments is a primary role for your website. Regardless of the referral source of your visitors, your website must contain compelling calls to action that encourage visitors to take the next steps.

Further, your website should also be focused on telephone-based leads. These leads convert to patients at a much higher rate than other digital text leads by giving your patient care representatives direct opportunities. Having a touch-to-call phone number as the primary action element on every page (including your *Contact Us* page) is key to maximizing conversions to scheduled consultations.

For websites that generate substantial after-hours or weekend traffic when your practice is closed, instant communication engagement

elements, such as 24/7 live chat and text messaging services, can increase your lead generation. We have found among our clients that these features can increase lead generation by 25% or more.

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is that each of these roles of your website can have a positive, synergistic impact on the others. Your brand will help with your search engine optimization, and branded audiences convert to patients at a higher rate. Sharing your social media audience with your website will improve your optimization impact and ranking with Google. Having more effective educational resources and information will increase user session duration, boosting your search engine optimization results, website engagement, and conversions.

Your website plays a key role in the brand, reputation, and health of your practice, as it has for many years. By taking a more comprehensive look at how your website is built and utilized, you can continually elevate your website's effectiveness and increase your online marketing return on investment. ■

1. Georgiou M. 10 Tips for web design that drives sales. *Entrepreneur*. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/307165>. February 5, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2020
2. Demangeot D, Broderick AJ. Engaging customers during a website visit: a model of website customer engagement. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 2016;44(8):814-839.

BILL FUKUI

- Director of Sale and Business Development, Advice Media, Melville, New York
- Bill.Fukui@AdviceMedia.com
- Financial disclosure: Employee (Advice Media)