

Ten Must-Haves for any Medical Website

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Akaro Graphics (http://www.akarographics.com/Akaro_Graphics_Resources.html)

The website you build for your practice is the face you present to the world. It is the means by which many potential patients will learn about you, and more importantly, choose your practice over another. In the tech-saturated market of today, a web presence is vital. It is an opportunity to communicate your identity, your brand, and what sets your practice apart. It is a token of legitimacy, and for many potential patients, your only opportunity to make a great first impression. Many ingredients must be present to make your website a useful tool to attract new patients and maintain the ones you have. Here are the top ten:

- 1. Professional design and intuitive navigation**
It is impossible to estimate the importance of a polished, easy-to-use site. Visitors decide within a fraction of a second whether they are going to keep reading your site, or move on to the next one. **It's an instant first impression about you, your office, and the services you provide.** If a site looks outdated, has no pictures, or is hard to navigate, visitors will give up almost instantly and go elsewhere. Do yourself the favor of having a site that attracts visitors, maintains their interest, and gives them the information they want without making them work to find it.
- 2. Relevant, well-composed content**
The job of your website is to convince the viewer that you are more knowledgeable, professional, and accessible than your competitors. The content of your site should establish you as an industry expert, one capable of providing the services potential patients are seeking, while also answering basic questions about your office policies and procedures. Relevant content makes your site more useful to visitors while increasing your visibility on the Web. One-way search engines find and display websites by sending "web crawlers" through the sites' content. Keywords, page titles, and credible links imbedded in your content index the site by subject matter and authority. The more pertinent content and keywords you have, the more likely it is that you will end up at the top of the list on search results.
- 3. Credible links**
Along with well-written and useful content, your site should have links to and from other credible websites. Search engines place an emphasis on the authority a site builds over time through linking. **Links are comparable to a reference on your resume – they are an indication of your sites' importance.** Linking to well-established credible resources will boost your web presence and build your reputation.
- 4. Images of the doctor, staff, and office**
The majority of visitors to your website are looking for a doctor in their area and/or doing research about their treatment options. They want to learn about you, and they want to be reassured that you are more than an expert in your field who will provide great medical care. They want to know that your practice is real, and staffed by real people. They want to see that your facility is clean, comfortable, professional, and state-of-the-art. Providing images of the doctor, staff, and office on your site makes your practice memorable, and allows site visitors to connect to you more strongly.
- 5. Phone number, map, and driving directions**
Make it easy for people to find and get in touch with you. It is important to have a whole page of your site devoted to contact information, but your phone number should be on every page. Remember that visitors have short attention spans, and want to find information quickly. Don't make them navigate through your site to find out how to

contact you-- bombard them with contact information. Having a Google map on your site that shows your location is important as well. It allows people to enlarge the map, see multiple locations, and print driving directions. Registering your office with Google Local Businesses is extremely beneficial-- you want to be on the local map when the services you provide are searched by location or city.

6. **Payment and insurance information**

In the spirit of answering your clients' questions before they have to ask, you should provide as much information on your site as possible about the financial side of your office. List the insurance providers you accept, and keep the list current. State the methods of payment you accept and the payment procedure. Do you accept credit cards, cash, or personal checks? Is there a returned check fee? Is payment due before or after treatment? Answering these questions on your site saves time and prepares the patient for their visit.

7. **Appointments: what to expect**

Unless you want your office staff to take phone calls and answer the same questions all day, it is a good idea to provide information on your site about what patients can expect before, during, and after their appointments. Tell them what to bring to the office, if there are any diet or exercise restrictions, the amount of time an average appointment takes, whether they need to plan to have a driver after their procedure, and what they can expect regarding their healing time. Streamline patients' experience with your office by answering their questions up front.

8. **Patient forms**

Another time-saving measure you can take on your website is to make commonly-used forms available to your patients online. **Have patients print and fill out intake forms before they arrive to reduce waiting room time and your office supply costs.** Get important information from them up front, such as allergies, current medications, and insurance information.

9. **Testimonials**

Any smart consumer reads product reviews before deciding which product to buy. The same is true for potential patients. Your site visitors want to hear from others who have experienced your office firsthand and felt the effects of the medical care you provide. Take the time to get testimonials (and permission to use them) from satisfied patients. If applicable to your office, provide before and after photos to show visible proof of your success. Like providing pictures of your staff and office, providing testimonials and before and after photos lends a personal touch to your site that will make visitors more likely to choose you to meet their medical needs.

10. **Bulletin board**

The bulletin board is the part of your site that will change most often. Use it to post your office hours, special holiday closings, and to notify viewers when the doctor is on vacation. Provide coupons as an incentive to choose your office. Notify site visitors when you have an open house or other special event. Keeping this section current conveys that you are an organized and modern office, and site visitors will appreciate the extra information you provide.

With these ten elements in play, you will have an appealing and useful website that will be your most effective marketing tool. It is important to remember, however, that you cannot build a website and let it go. Like the human body, to function to the best of its abilities, a website must be maintained. If your site starts to look dated or has obsolete information or broken links, it will not serve its full potential. Maintain it to keep it useful to visitors and optimized for search engines. Build your website and your practice together.