

How important is it to have an appealing Web site? According to comScore, a digital analytics company, more than 139.1 million consumers utilize the Internet to seek health-care information from health-care sites on a monthly basis. Remember, even prospective patients who hear about you from family or friends are still likely to check out your practice Web site before making the decision to book an appointment. So, in this day and age, when most, if not all, of your competitors have a Web site, how does your practice stand out? Your prospective patients are online. Once they find your Web site, what will make them choose you?

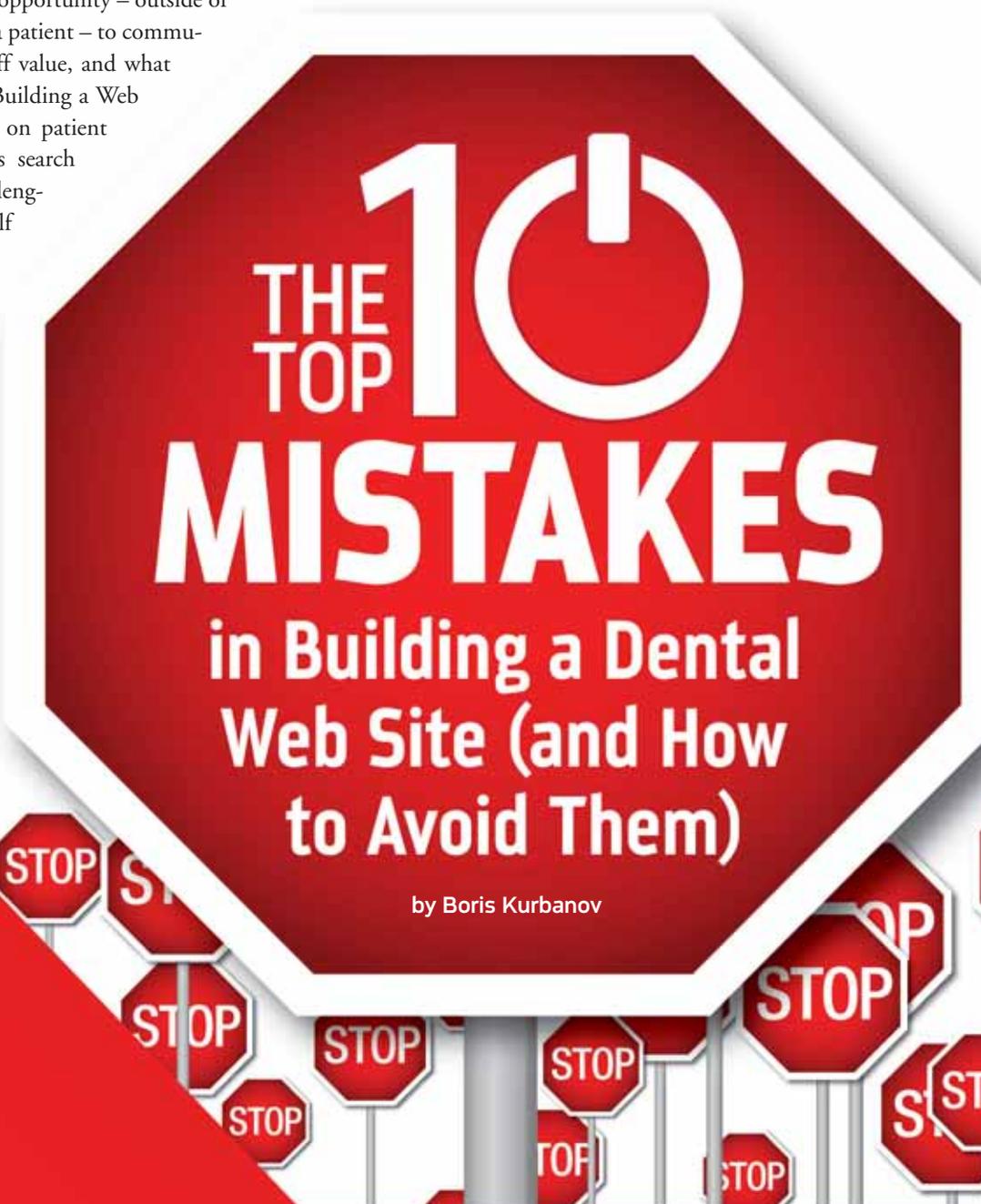
Your Web site is your best opportunity – outside of a face-to-face discussion with a patient – to communicate what you and your staff value, and what makes your practice unique. Building a Web site that is primarily focused on patient needs, is user-friendly and is search engine-optimized can be challenging. It starts by asking yourself the following: “What will prospective patients look for when they visit my site,

and what elements could potentially turn them away?” To help answer that question, here are the top 10 mistakes to avoid when building a dental Web site.

1. Irrelevant Content

What makes new patients browse your Web site in the first place? They visit to learn about the treatments you offer, as well as learn more about you as a doctor and your practice, not to learn about your hobbies or things that are unrelated to the dental industry. Dental health is a great topic to discuss, but

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THE TOP 10 MISTAKES

in Building a Dental Web Site (and How to Avoid Them)

by Boris Kurbanov

Because I Am A **TOWNIE**



Name: **Richard Chi**

Townie Name: **richardchids**

Member Since: **07/30/2008**

Occupation: **General Dentist**

Location: **Chicago, IL**

I went to my first-ever Townie Meeting in Las Vegas because I'm a Townie! When I renewed my subscription to *Dentaltown Magazine* at the Chicago Midwinter Dental Meeting I won a trip to the best party in dentistry. Now, after being a part of the education, entertainment and camaraderie of the Townie Meeting, I can't wait to come back.

remember not to get carried away with general health topics as that might cause people to tune out.

Think about it this way: You have less than 90 seconds to engage prospective patients and persuade them to further explore your site. Having more than 25 pages on your Web site can be overwhelming for prospective patients.

The content on your Web site should emphasize how much you and your staff care about your patients and their families' well-being. A positive attitude such as, "I love my patients!" or "We love our community!" can go a long way in building trust with patients. Having text that accentuates your warm, caring feelings toward patients or listing your continuing education credentials and how they benefit the patient in a compelling manner are all-powerful. Mobile Web sites with condensed versions of this content also present a short and sweet version of this important content. Lastly, reinforcing how much you love your job as a dental professional is part of conveying how much your practice cares about patient wellbeing and the premium your staff place on high-quality care and a positive patient experience.

The pages you *should* have on your Web site include "meet the doctor" and "meet the staff" pages, information on what to expect during a patient's first visit, before and after photos, frequently asked questions, financial information and directions to your office.

2. Impersonal Doctor and Team Member Bios

Patients love getting to know their doctor, and spend a lot of time finding out "who you are." When getting ready to compile photos and bios for your staff, think about someone who has never stepped foot in your office, or perhaps feels nervous about visiting a dental professional. Most patients are typically not eager to visit a health-care practitioner. Your bio gives you a chance to show them, not just tell them. A photograph of you with a family member, child or pet can reinforce your commitment to treating not just the patient, but the patient's entire family as well. Instead of merely listing credentials and using medical terminology, tell patients in easy-to-understand terms what your credentials, experience and continuing education means for them and their family.

Doctors also love individual photos because they are easy to update (they don't require re-taking group photos) and are more personal than group photos; just add a new photo or swap one out. Simple.

3. Clinical Photos and Images

In other words, less photos of a hygienist reaching into a patient's mouth... Tools, scrubs, blood or masks might scare off someone who is already apprehensive about visiting a dentist. When choosing photos for your bio, it's important to keep it personal, but not too personal. Since patients will be spending one-on-one time with your staff, they like to see who they will be working with – they want to "pre-meet" you and your team before booking their initial visit.

Including happy, cheery photos of confident people throughout the site, and especially on the home page, underscores the office's warmth and approachability while helping your patients relate to you. In fact, featuring actual patients or photos that feature people who look like your patients, gives a personal, unique touch. Photos of actual patients not only show off your work, but also show a strong relationship between you, your patients and the community. Warmth always wins!



"What will prospective patients look for when they visit my site, and what elements could potentially turn them away?"

4. Buried Contact Information

Imagine visiting a Web site and being unable to find the phone number or other contact information. Remember, the name of the game is to get patients to call you. Make sure your office's contact information is readily available for new patients to be able to book that first appointment. Put it this way: If you're visiting a Web site for the first time and are interested in its products or services, you'd probably want a phone number prominently displayed on the homepage and throughout the site, right? Research shows patients are more likely to call rather than e-mail to schedule their first appointment or consultation, and they're more likely to do so if they find the information they're looking for on your Web site. And what's more helpful and convenient than having the number available to them displayed at every click? Another option is a mobile Web site with a phone number and map to your office readily available.

5. Lack of a Call to Action

Once a prospective patient reaches your Web site, it's up to you to compel them to learn more about your office and pick up the phone to schedule an appointment. Adding a "free consult" or "schedule your regular checkup" button on your homepage or

one that is prominently displayed within your Web site compels patients to make that first move. If your office targets the working demographic or a particular area, a button that reads "We're in the heart of Manhattan!" might also be a good idea.

Again, the point of your Web site, besides your virtual introduction to a potential patient, is new patient acquisition. *It's all about the patient.* Avoid sounding "salesy" or gimmicky with text such as "Purchase one tooth whitening, get the second free!"

6. Splash Pages and Animated Introductions

Splash pages, or the pages the user sees before they actually visit your Web site, are typically built in flash (an outdated animation platform) and offer some kind of introductory animation. Not only are splash pages outdated, they are also terrible for your Web site's search engine optimization (SEO). Search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo look at the content on the homepage to determine what the site has to offer. If your page is designed entirely in flash or includes other animated introductions, chances are search engines will not be able to spider, or crawl, any text on it.

The bigger problem, however, with splash pages, sometimes called landing pages – or any kind of animated introductions –

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is distraction. In this day and age, people are looking to save as much time as possible. Remember, most visitors to your site want to be informed, not entertained; they are looking to solve a problem like crooked teeth or schedule an appointment to relieve tooth pain. Any animation on your site is a major barrier to getting people to pick up the phone and call. A simple distraction like a splash page can turn a potential patient into a mere passerby.

7. Music

Again: distractions, distractions, distractions. Prospective patients might want to visit your site privately, without anyone else being within earshot of your Web site's music, such as at work or at a local Starbucks. So, unless you sell music, it's best to stay clear of music on auto play. If music, which makes your Web site look dated, absolutely *must* be present, give viewers the option to opt-in. In other words, give visitors the option to turn the music on manually. But, by default, keep the music off.

8. Thematic Web sites

Patients visit your Web site to learn more about dentistry, so your marine- or golf-themed Web site might not necessarily appeal to a mom in search of a dentist for her pre-teen daughter. No matter what, all content must be patient-focused and appealing to women. After all, marketing research tells us that women make the majority of health-care decisions in their households.

What you should be focusing on are teeth, not your hobbies. Besides being confusing and looking out of place, your themed Web site might also inadvertently cause a potential patient to scratch their heads and ask, "Am I paying for his ski trips?"

9. Broken Pages and Bad Links

There's no way for patients to imagine what you might have said about a service you offer or a current promotion. Broken links, or dead links, provide a bad experience for anyone visiting your site. Search engines tend to send visitors to sites they know are maintained and trustworthy before sending them to a site that hasn't been maintained in months.

Bad links or pages that are labeled "under construction" or "coming soon" not only prevent potential patients from accessing pages on your Web site, they might also annoy them to the point of moving on to a competitor's site. Missing and broken links also send a bad message to prospective patients: If you can't take good care of your Web site, why should people believe you can take good care of their teeth?

10. Slow-loading Web Pages

Because Google wants to provide a positive experience for its users, the search engine will try to send users to Web sites that load quickly. Currently it's a moderate ranking factor, but Google and Bing have both declared that this will be a metric they will be placing more focus on with each update.

Again, anyone who is visiting your site will want to find what they're looking for pretty quickly. Avoid any distracting elements, such as pop-ups, at all costs. In fact, avoid pop-up-unders as well. These days, popular browsers like Firefox block pop-ups by default, but when in doubt, remember: pop-ups are dead. Patient-appealing elements include having a clean, modern design with alluring graphics, clear and consistent navigation, as well as easy-to-find contact information.

Conclusion

Avoiding these 10 mistakes will help you design a successful Web site – one that helps you better connect with current patients, reach new patients and stay relevant on search engines. It is essential, however, that you continue to monitor and maintain your Web site to better connect with patients. In fact, by steering clear of the aforementioned mistakes, your Web site might even act as its own independent team member.

Sesame Communications recently launched Website Evaluator, a free online tool designed to help dentists, in a matter of minutes, determine the overall effectiveness of their website. This tool provides practices with general guidance and a customized report showing their website score, along with specific recommendations for improvement.

Visit: sesamecommunications.com/web_eval ■

Author's Bio

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