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Increase Your Business through Internet Marketing

Over the past decade, the Internet has revolutionized dental practice marketing. An ADA study from 1999 reported the percentages of patients finding a new dentist by referral source. The study indicated that 55% of new patients to a practice were referred by other patients. The next largest source of referral was direct mail marketing, which came in at 12%. There was no mention of the Internet as responsible for providing any new patient flow. Let's contrast those figures with the present. Well, over 50% of my new patients report first finding me on the Internet. It has been estimated that less than 35% of dentists even own a website, and this says nothing about how many of those sites are actually optimized for the greatest search engine ranking and visibility.

My practice referral source statistics consistently point to Internet marketing as the leading source of new patients to my practice. Even during this challenging economic period, my new patient numbers have not dropped off because of my efforts to keep my practice website at the top of Google searches for a dentist in my area. It is not uncommon for patients to inform us that they made an appointment simply because our website was the first they encountered, when searching online for a dentist. Another benefit is that the marketing budget is greatly reduced because the return on investment is vastly higher with this form of practice promotion.

This is not to say that I do not continue to strive for patient to patient referral sources, as the referred patient can still be considered the most valuable to have. However, we cannot neglect the overwhelming tendency for patients to search for their doctors online. If we do, we will miss out on the huge numbers of new patients that our practices could be caring for simply by establishing a highly visible online presence. There is a diversity of reasons offered as to why the overwhelming majority of dentists still remain on the sidelines with respect to the greatest marketing opportunity available to their practices.

The most frequently expressed roadblock to Internet adoption is that the majority of dentists simply do not know where to start. Another thought often articulated by dentists is the intimidation factor, fearing that they may be taken for a ride by their website designer. Many dentists feel the cost is too high and they do not tend to value Internet marketing for what it is really worth. The truth is that in today's business environment, you simply cannot afford to forego the practice growth opportunity that marketing via the Internet can provide.

In my practice, we have compiled a list of questions to ask a web designer before hiring this individual to create your website that will represent you to the world. Some of these important questions are listed below:

Website Designer Questions

- Will the designer write any of the content or should all content be provided by your office? Duplicate content that appears on other websites can lead to penalties from the major search engines, including Google. All content on your website should be original, either written by your staff or your website designer's staff.
- What techniques will be employed to ensure your website will have good visibility in online searches?
- What does the designer do to stay abreast of the latest trends in SEO? Does the designer attend seminars, research online, subscribe to newsletters or self-educate? Be aware that some designers do virtually no research, so make use of your questions to ferret out the pretenders.
- Will the site be designed with a Content Management System (CMS) that will facilitate your own additions? This is beneficial in allowing you to make simple updates to your website without paying a web designer for each change or requiring you to learn complicated coding. This may also depend on the capabilities of the web host.
- Will the site be designed in compliance with W3C? This is a list of regulations developed by the World Wide Web Consortium that will help your website be viewed properly by all browsers and devices.
- What is the hourly cost to make changes and enhancements to the site once it is complete? It is an industry best practice to routinely add new before and after pictures and fresh quality content to help your site continue to be recognized by search engines. Therefore, before choosing a designer you need to gain a realistic expectation of the ongoing costs of updating your website.
- Does the designer provide a contract with a completion date?

- How is payment handled? Do not pay for the entire site up front. Unfortunately, some designers become less motivated after payment is received.
- Under our arrangement, who owns the domain name and website? The answer should be that you would own both. If you register the domain name yourself, this is not a problem, but make sure you own the rights to the website as well.
- What is the overall cost of the project?
- When can the designer begin the project? How long will it take to complete?

To learn more and to order copies of Dr Edward Logan's book, Dentistry's Business Secrets: Proven Growth Strategies for Your New or Existing Practice, visit www.DentistrysBusinessSecrets.com.

Edward Logan
President, Dentistry's Business Secrets
7 Matterhorn Court
O'Fallon, MO 63366, USA
e-mail: www.DentistrysBusinessSecrets.com; docloganed@yahoo.com