



13 Steps to an Effective Medical Practice Website

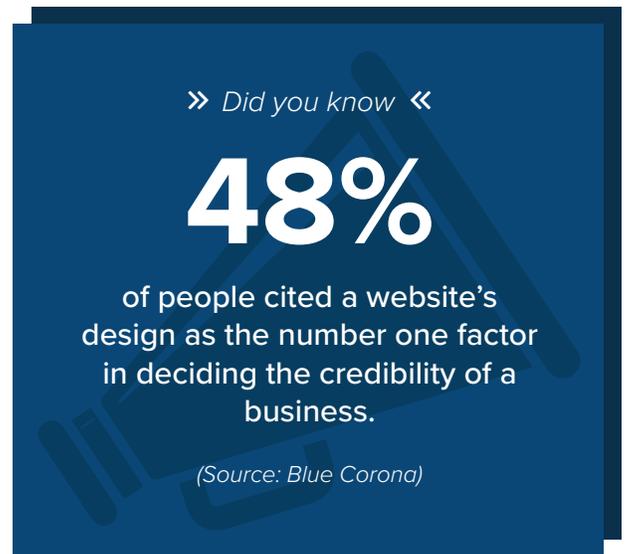


Thirteen Steps to an Effective Medical Practice Website

No matter what your business is these days, your website is the face of your organization and your brand - and yes, this is even true for physicians and their medical practices. Historically, many doctors were great at practicing medicine and helping their patients, but not always so good at the business side of their practice, including marketing. We still see that today, as many medical practices have low end, cheap, and outdated websites that do little to support their practice's success, and even worse, can reflect poorly on them as physicians.

A strong website and online presence shouldn't be an option for healthcare providers. Patients and potential patients are constantly seeking health information and looking for new doctors online. Additionally, having an effective website can help streamline patient check-ins and communication, make a patient portal easily accessible, and help educate patients about your practice processes, as well as important health issues. To support your practice's success, your website should both attract and inform new and current patients.

So, where should you start? If you are a healthcare provider and in the process of evaluating your current site or planning a website design and development project for your practice, here are 13 steps to building an effective website that will support your practice growth, enhance your brand, and improve your visibility to prospective future patients.



1. Build Credibility

You'll immediately enhance the credibility of your practice and your doctors simply by having a modern and professional looking site. But that is just the beginning. One of the main objectives you should have as you plan for your website redesign is to ask yourself, how can we increase the credibility of our practice and physicians on the site? Because if you achieve this goal, you'll also help to bring in more new patients.

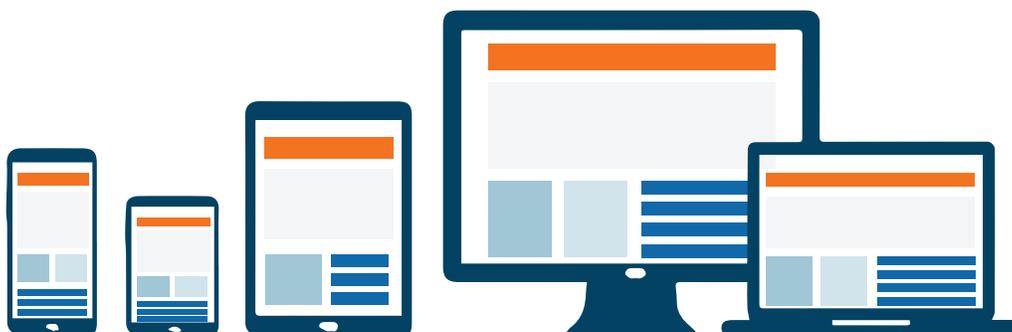


Another way to ask the same question is “What content or information will portray us as quality physicians or experts in our medical field or specialty?” Doctor bios, educational information, certifications and accreditations, membership and leadership positions in respected associations, press releases, local and national awards, patient testimonials, and case studies are all options to consider. Leveraging general reviews (Google, etc.) or top doctor review sites, that are relevant in your area, are another way to instill confidence in your team’s abilities. The more ways you build a credibility story on your website, the more comfortable prospective patients will be in considering your practice for their health care needs.

2. Make It Mobile Friendly

This should be obvious by now, but your website needs to be mobile-friendly or responsive to the device the visitor is using (phone, watch, iPad, desktop, etc.), so that users can easily browse your site and find what they’re looking for, regardless of the device. In 2018, 58% of all U.S. website visits were via mobile devices, so your site needs to work well on phones. Keep in mind that all mobile-friendly sites are not created equal. A site could technically be mobile-ready, but may not be user-friendly for mobile users or as fast as it should. In addition to usability issues from outdated technology, Google will also penalize sites that aren’t mobile-friendly in search rankings.

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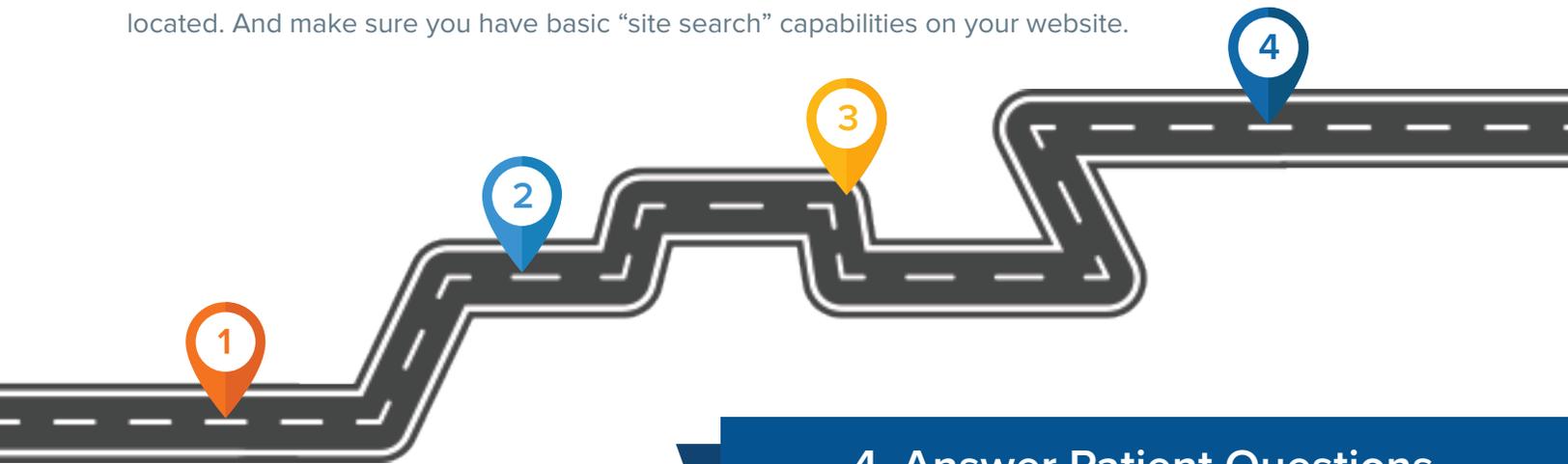


3. Focus On Ease Of Use & Easy To Find Information

More than likely, someone visiting your practice's website, will be looking for:

- General information about your practice (*what's your specialty, where are you located, etc.*)
- Specific medical information (*symptoms, conditions, treatments, etc.*)
- Information related to using you as their medical provider/physician (*processes and policies, day and nighttime contact info, emergency information, insurance, scheduling appointments, medical forms, post-op instructions, etc.*)

Design your site so it is easy to find information, while leveraging technology to improve your customer/patient service. While at the same time, reducing your staff workload and phone time. Consider having a clearly visible "Patient Center" or "Patient Resources" area where everything they need is conveniently located. And make sure you have basic "site search" capabilities on your website.



4. Answer Patient Questions

The more basic questions you can answer for your patients online, the more time your staff will have for more important work or patient care. As a follow-up to #3 above, consider having a FAQ page in your resources area. Start with basics regarding your processes, insurance, and policies. If you have a unique specialty area, you may also want to answer basic questions about what you, as a doctor, do or don't do. Remember to consider the general, uneducated public, when determining what these questions to answer. What better way to figure out what your patients are asking than to ask your staff about the most common questions they get both in person and via the phone.



5. Clearly Communicate Your Specialty

This may seem obvious, but many physicians may not realize is that non-physicians (i.e. most site visitors) do not understand the nuances or breadth of every specialty. For example, many people won't know the specific differences between a general cardiologist, an interventional cardiologist, a cardiothoracic surgeon, and a vascular surgeon. Maybe you're a general surgeon, but you also have expertise in osteopathic medicine and osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). If you feel that differentiates your practice, then use that to your advantage and communicate it on your site. Or what if you are a neurosurgeon, but you also focus on non-invasive treatments or regenerative medicine such as stem cell treatments. You should communicate your focus areas clearly on your homepage, probably leveraging visuals (images or icons) for ease of communicating quickly to visitors.

66%

of all internet users look online for information about a specific medical problem or disease.

(Source: Pew Research Center)

6. Have Both a Pre-Launch and an On-Going Content Marketing Plan

Many components preparing for a new site have been discussed already, but developing your site content plan and sitemap are very important to a successful project and an effective physician website. Start with a sitemap outline, broken down by your main menu items and pages. Then begin to break down your main medical services or practice areas (treatments, procedures, diagnostic tests, etc.). You should also include information about common ailments or conditions you treat, as well as basic symptoms, but whether that content is broken out in its own section or is included under the related "treatment" pages will depend on your website strategy and design/structure. Also make sure to highlight any unique services that set your practice apart – like video galleries explaining procedures, online booking, or virtual visits.



In the "About" section, consider staff bios to personalize your team, listing relevant educational and career accomplishments along with photos. If your practice or individual doctors have been recognized or received awards consider highlighting that on a separate page or as part of the physician bios. If your facility is unique or impressive, including photos would be beneficial.

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And as mentioned earlier, think through what content should be included in your “Patient Resources” area to promote usability and efficiency.

Mapping out your website structure is key before you design your new site. Having an on-going content marketing plan is just as important, as it will promote credibility for your practice and drive site optimization and traffic over time. So as you are planning for your new site, think about areas of your site that you will update over time in an effort to promote your practice or enhance communication with your current and future patients.

I’d suggest starting with a blog or news section, as an effective tool for educating and engaging with patients. Blogging just once or twice a month about health tips, news, or new breakthroughs in your specialty, new focus areas or services you provide, or general practice news (new doctors, awards, PR, human interest, etc.) can be very effective. Sharing blog posts on social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) can also drive additional traffic with little time and effort. You might also consider some form of “Success Stories” (medical case studies) that provide insight into real-life patients and the benefits they have received from your practice. These are especially useful for communicating information about complex procedures or new procedures that many people don’t fully understand and work well for adding over time to your site. Depending on your specialty (think cosmetics), before and after photos can support your results. And if you are in a cutting-edge field, adding videos featuring new procedures can be perfect for content marketing that promotes your work and expertise!

7. Create Visibility with Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Of the items mentioned so far, this is probably the area that is skipped the most, because it takes time and can also add a significant amount to your website development budget. That said, proper search engine optimization (SEO) strategy and execution, can often add the greatest ROI for your medical practice because it can significantly enhance your site’s visibility in search engines (Google, Bing, etc.), while positively impacting traffic, leads, and new patients.

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The first step to successful website visibility in search engines is comprehensive keyword research and prioritization. This process will help you understand exactly how patients and prospective patients are searching for doctors and practices like yours, in your geographic area. This may seem like a simple process, but there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of variations on terms and phrases related to a specific type of physician or medical specialty.

For example, let's say you are a neurosurgeon. Some people will certainly type in that exact term (neurosurgeon) into Google and maybe they'll add their city or state as well. But they might also search for neurosurgery, spine specialist, best spine surgeon, back doctor, or physician specializing in backs. But that is only the beginning. They might also search for medical conditions like lumbar spinal stenosis, herniated disk, scoliosis, or chronic back pain. Or maybe they'll search for related treatments like spine surgery, spinal fusion, stem cell injections, steroid shots for back pain, or platelet rich plasma injections.

You get the picture; there might be hundreds of keywords terms or phrases related to your specific practice. In a perfect world you'll want to show up for everyone one of those terms - the most relevant ones to your practice and the terms people search most for (with the highest search volume). But to really be successful, you'll want to prioritize which terms are the most relevant and important for your practice. Only then can you create a website and content that can achieve your goals.

Once you have done your research and prioritized the SEO keywords you hope to show up at or near the top of the search engine results pages (SERPs), then on-site search engine optimization (SEO) can begin. This includes all the strategy related to your site structure, pages included in your sitemap, and on-going content marketing strategy. It also includes what we call the blocking and tackling, or best practices, including the creation of browser title tags, meta descriptions, blog structure, and more. I wouldn't expect many medical practices to be experts in search optimization strategies and tactics, but you should know enough to ask potential vendors about their proposals and what is included related to SEO.

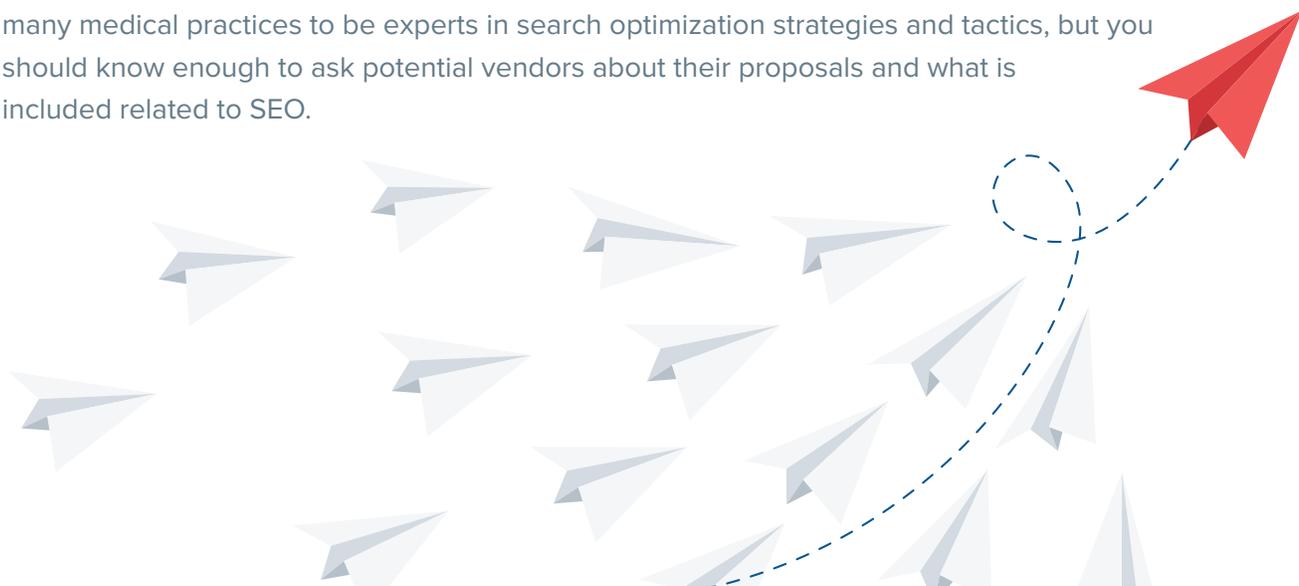


» Did you know «

77%

of potential patients are using search engines prior to ever booking an appointment

(source: Think with Google's The Digital Journey to Wellness: Hospital Selection.)



8. Find a Website Partner With Expertise In Both Marketing & Technology



When searching for the best vendor or digital agency to design and develop your website, you should try and find one that has both marketing and technology expertise. This may seem obvious, but you'll often find agencies, especially when they are small, that are only strong on one side of the equation, but not both. On the marketing side, make sure they understand both website and broader digital marketing, including SEO, social, and content marketing. On the technical side, make sure they have resources on staff to handle your current project, as well as support. Hiring an agency with a limited skill set, may result in a site that isn't as effective as you'd like, or it may result in you needing to bring in additional, costly resources down the road.

9. Find a Partner With Experience Developing Medical Practice Websites

This isn't a requirement, but having a partner that has built medical practice websites and understands marketing physicians and their services certainly is a plus. If they have experience with your specialty and understand your practice differentiators (osteopathic manipulative treatment for example) that is even better.

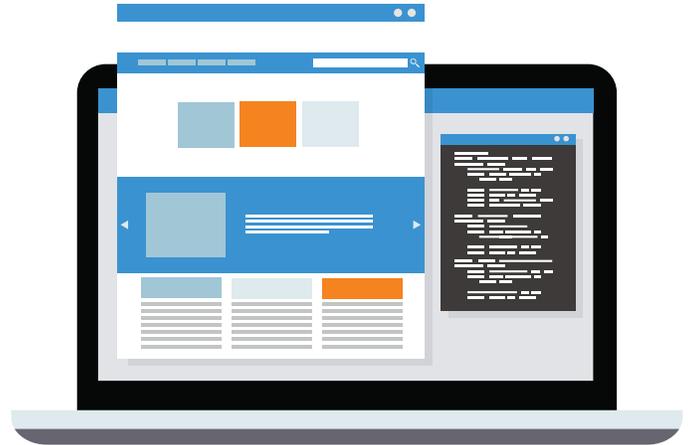


10. Find a Quality Content Management System (CMS)

Often, your design and development vendor will recommend a content management system (CMS) to use for your new website. If that is the case ensure the CMS is easy to use for non-technical editors - whoever on your staff will make website updates. Also, make sure you understand what's included regarding on-going hosting and subscription plans. If you are paying a monthly or annual fee, ask if the following items are included:

- ▶ Technical support
- ▶ Software updates / upgrades
- ▶ Data backup
- ▶ Security
- ▶ Uptime and speed monitoring

If they ARE NOT included, be sure to ask how the vendor will handle those issues and what their fee structure is. This will help to ensure you understand both current and potential future costs, so you aren't surprised down the road.



11. Leverage Other Tools



Think of your website like a hub for your medical practice – linking patients, partners, and prospects to other useful information and tools they may need. As you plan for your site, consider linking to useful tools like your patient portal, or your practice management, EMR, or EHR software. If you don't have any tool currently, you might also consider a scheduling software, so patients can easily schedule and change appointments at their convenience. Regardless of what you use, you'll want your website designed, so that your patients can easily find and get access to information and technology that make it easier to work with your team.

12. Make Someone Accountable



Many small organizations do everything correctly, right up until their website launches, and then they forget about it. **DON'T BE LIKE THEM!** If you want your website to be a long-term success and an asset for your practice, this step is critical. You need to assign someone on your staff to be responsible for your website, not just during the project, but also moving forward. They should be accountable for on-going content changes, any updates needed over time, support issues, and its ultimate success, which should be to add value for your practice. Depending on their time and skill set, your staff website lead could be the actual person updating content, or you might choose to outsource that to your vendor/partner. Regardless of who does the tactical execution, someone on your staff should be looking at the big picture, as to how your site can add the greatest value. Without ownership, you'll probably fail to maximize your sites long-term ROI potential.

13. Measure Results

Last, but certainly not least, make sure you are measuring what is happening on and with your website. As Peter Drucker once said, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." In relation to your website, that starts with high level stats like visits, time on site, pageviews, bounce rate, as well as which pages and content are being viewed. But you should also consider measuring web form submissions, website leads, and SEO keywords rankings, so you understand and maximize traffic and visibility for your business. At the very least, you should ensure your site is connected to Google Analytics, which is free and provides a significant amount of information. The more you understand about your site and visitors, the easier it will be to make changes over time that add value for your patients as well as your practice.

