

SESAME PAPERS 2.1

Online Trends and Insights for the Dental Professional

Get Found AND Get Chosen

Unprecedented research reveals keys to creating a web site that engages prospective patients

It is no longer simply enough to place an ad in the Yellow Pages; dental practitioners must have an online presence in order to keep their practices healthy. Even prospective patients who hear about you from a friend are still likely to check out your practice web site before making the decision to call for an appointment. Creating a web site to help new patients find and communicate with you is a serious undertaking. You can maximize your hierarchy in search results with search engine optimization (SEO) and search marketing. However, once your new prospect reaches your web site, it is up to your site to compel them to learn more about your practice and induce them to make that first appointment. A national study conducted by Sesame Communications, in partnership with Resolution Research, revealed key characteristics that determine if the experience a viewer has on your web site will attract them to your practice.

This unprecedented study revealed that you have less than 90 seconds to engage a prospective patient and persuade them to explore your site further.

Based on these eye-opening findings, Sesame's User Experience Team has developed a system to measure the Patient Appeal Rating™ of a web site that evaluates 25 factors the research determined make the difference between your web site bringing new patients into your practice or sending them to someone else's.

The way most web sites have traditionally been built – to appeal to the taste of the doctor – is no longer valid. This whitepaper will examine the key web site features that lead patients to choose one practitioner over another, what to avoid, and simple steps you can take to maximize your web site's appeal to prospects.

Did You Know?

1. You have less than 90 seconds to capture your audience
2. Traditional design paradigms no longer hold
3. Your site may actually be driving new patients away

Research Methods

First, let's take a look at how the study was conducted. Participants were recruited across the United States by Resolution Research using a screening survey to ensure that they were in fact currently searching for a dental professional. Researchers compiled lists of web site addresses in each participant's geographic area based on the order in which the URLs came up on a Google search. Prospective patients looking for a general dentist reviewed sites of dental practices in their zip code, while participants in the market for an orthodontist were provided with lists of orthodontic practices in their home locale.

Each study consisted of the following components:

- An interview to ascertain why consumers were searching for a dental professional;
- An unguided participant review of practice web sites in their locales;
- A participant rating survey for each web site viewed.

The facilitator and participant were connected and recorded via telephone and Internet, using TechSmith UserVue software. At the beginning of each session, participants were assured that the facilitator was not associated with any of the practices they would be reviewing and had no input into the design of the sites. Participants were asked to think out loud as they navigated sites and provide honest feedback, either positive or negative. Participants were further instructed to spend only as much or as little time as they would normally on a site, and to not spend extra time on sites for the facilitator's benefit, since the purpose of the study was to understand how consumers normally behave on practice web sites. Participant decisions to call for appointments were spontaneous and unsolicited.

Key Findings

1. Warmth Wins
2. It's All About the Patient
3. Content Counts

Survey Questions

1. What was your impression of this doctor and this practice?
2. Based on what you've seen so far, how likely would you be to make an appointment with this practice?
3. What words would you use to describe this practice, based on what you've seen and experienced on their web site?
4. What (if any) positive qualities do you associate with the doctor and practice?
5. What (if any) negative qualities do you associate with this practice?
6. Was any information missing from this practice's web site that you were hoping to find?

Warmth Wins

The words used most often to describe those web sites that elicited the most positive feedback from study participants were “warm,” “friendly,” and “family-oriented.” These characteristics applied to all aspects of the most highly-rated web sites. These emotions were evoked by a web site experience that focused on making the patient feel like the most important person to the entire practice. These web sites took great care to ensure all their key attributes were warm and inviting, focused on the patient, and appropriately informative.

Clean Design

The first step in creating a web site that has a high Patient Appeal Rating™ is to use an appropriate design style. A fresh and modern design that’s “clean” and easy to navigate is an important part of ensuring a positive reception. Avoid over-design: study participants spent less than 90 seconds on web sites that were cluttered, gimmicky, incorporated splash pages or music, or took too long to load. The prospective patient is not seeking to be entertained by your site; they want to be informed. Use design to draw prospects in, not send them to your competitor’s site.

Comforting Text

Your web site’s text should convey how much you and your staff care about patient well-being and the premium you place on high quality care and a positive patient experience. Communicate your services and philosophy from the perspective of how they benefit your patients. Ensure your message of approachability and friendliness carries throughout your copy.

Participants were very interested in learning about the doctor and their staff. They wanted to virtually “pre-meet the team.”

“I love it when they have pictures of the staff... That makes it more like family.”

Therese C., Hartland, MI

Appealing Graphics

The right photographs and other graphic elements are huge drivers in conveying the warm and friendly attitude you're seeking to communicate. Prospective patients want to see who they'll be interacting with. Therefore, a photograph of you, the practitioner, is critical. Color photographs of doctors in business casual attire versus medical attire or scrubs rated much higher with study participants. The ideal photograph will showcase you as approachable and friendly, with a warm and caring smile. A photograph of you with a family member or child can really illustrate your commitment to treating the patient's entire family.

Most study participants clicked first on the doctor page. Those web sites on which the doctor page conveyed a warm, friendly and family-focused practitioner, along with a photograph, were among the most highly rated. A staff page that included photographs and a brief statement about each staff member's commitment to the patient also rated high. Making prospects understand that you and your staff are people just like them is highly effective in inducing that first visit.

Other color photographs are also very helpful in building your message of warmth and friendliness. Cheerful, upbeat (while also professional) photographs of your staff personalize the web site experience for a prospective patient. Using photographs of smiling and happy people throughout your site helps patients relate to you in a more meaningful way.



"It definitely looks family-friendly... I will call for an appointment."

Jonathan W., Puyallup, WA

It's All About the Patient

Another top-rated characteristic of successful web sites is a consistent approach of "it's all about the patient." Prospects want to know you care about their oral health and their entire experience with you. They want to build an ongoing relationship with their dental professional, and they are seeking providers who will make their experience personalized, compassionate, and high quality. Not only can your web site advocate your philosophy and approach to care, it is also the place to begin building that relationship and engendering patient loyalty.

Most patients, adults and children, are not typically eager to visit a health care practitioner. While the dental and orthodontic communities have been highly proactive in emphasizing a pain-free experience, potential clients still may have some trepidation about visiting a new practitioner. Use your site to allay any patient fears about the dental or orthodontic experience and emphasize your commitment to gentle, comfortable, pain-free treatment.

Patients are interested in your credentials, experience and ongoing education. Framing this information in layman's terms is preferable, versus using institutional and medical terminology. Your background is important to patients in the market, and this is yet another place to relate how your skills can benefit the new patient. Tell prospects how your skills and experience have helped other patients and explain that you are eager to help them. Demonstrate that your investment in ongoing education is part of your commitment to providing the best care and service possible.

Communicating your caring approach and commitment to thorough, gentle care is critical information for the new prospect.

"Sometimes doctors kind of scare me ... they just are really impersonal, so I like the fact that he says something good about his patients."

Susan P., Highlands Ranch, CO

Content Counts

The old adage “Give the people what they want, and they’ll come out for it” is as true today as ever. The content of your web site is no exception. Prospective patients are seeking some very specific information from your web site. They are much more likely to make an appointment if they find the information they’re seeking online.

A page describing what the new prospect can expect on their first visit to your practice goes a long way towards putting the patient at ease and compelling them to make that first appointment. This is a great place to reiterate your commitment to providing your patients with a positive experience at your practice. Don’t underestimate the power of describing your basic services: this is clear evidence of your commitment to gentle and thorough care. If you have any special offers for first-timers, such as first visit free or financing options, include that information here.

Be sure to include your practice’s contact info on your home page. Make it easy for your new prospects to make that first appointment.

- Your web site can be instrumental in beginning and building an ongoing relationship with your new patients.
- This is the place to speak to the new client about what they are interested in. Focus on your services, your approach, and your genuine caring for their well-being.
- Be sure to include even your basic services; clients want to know that you’re interested in their total care needs, not just the add-on services you may offer.

Participants invariably were deterred by sites with too much information on the home page, music, splash pages, or dark colors.

“This is just asking to freeze my computer.”

David L., New York, NY

You Can Stand Above the Competition

The growing migration of consumers to the Internet to obtain information and make purchasing decisions is infiltrating the way customers make health care choices. It is imperative that you maintain and monitor your practice web site to better connect with your existing patients and reach new ones. You can turn your practice web site from a mere information bank to a critical, hardworking member of your team.

Sesame Communications can help you assess your web site's Patient Appeal Rating™ and guide you through ways to improve your current web site's user experience. You invest a great deal of resources in your web site; make sure it is paying you back by helping your practice to thrive and grow.

About Sesame Communications

Sesame Communications is the premiere provider of online products and services for the dental industry. We have revolutionized the way doctors manage their practices by decreasing missed appointments, improving staff productivity, enhancing practice marketing and simplifying patient referrals. We help take your practice to a higher level by providing:

- A consultative approach to develop a comprehensive online strategy;
- An online system that enables patients to receive appointment reminders, pay balances and check their images;
- Online navigation tools to find patients where they spend their time;
- Customized web sites that point patients in your direction, are search-engine friendly, and connected to all the appropriate social networking sites.

Call now for a demo with a Sesame Solution Consultant at 866-592-7572 or email solutions@sesamecommunications.com. For more information please visit www.sesamecommunications.com.

Patient Appeal Rating™

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