



## Simple and Intuitive: Considerations for Website Development

By TDIC Risk Management Staff

In the online world, a website establishes and represents your practice. Just like your brick-and-mortar office, a website needs to be efficient, clean and current.

"Your website serves as a direct reflection of your practice, and many times patients will form their first impression of you based on what they see online," said Melissa Mickelson, brand manager for ProSites, a website design and Internet marketing firm for dental and medical professionals.

"In the dynamic Internet world, websites must be easy to navigate so visitors can quickly find the information they need," Mickelson added. "If your site is not easy to navigate or takes too long to load, you risk losing potential patients."

In attracting new patients to your practice via your website, you may want to include testimonials and photos of your patients, and The Dentists Insurance Company reminds dentists to secure patient permission in writing first. TDIC's website at thedentists.com offers image consent forms.

Whether you already have a website, or are thinking about creating one, website developers, dental practice experts and risk management analysts all weigh in on a number of important things to keep in mind. Here is the short list:

**Site purpose:** What do you want website visitors to do? Make an appointment online? Print forms before arriving in your office? Find out what procedures are performed at your practice? Be able to easily contact your practice? Find an emergency contact number?

**Priorities:** You may want website visitors to be able to do all of the things listed above. Number the goals in order of importance. What information do you want visitors to see first?

**Structure:** Have a basic idea about how you want to present information. Think in terms of "pages" such as your home page and then secondary pages such as about us, contact, general dentistry and testimonials. Then consider the subcategories that can be found under each page, for instance, directions or a map to your practice under contact information.

**Simplicity:** Experts across the board recommend simplicity. Present only the essential information.

**Navigation:** Make navigation simple by keeping tabs and links to key information clearly visible and not buried on the site. Review

your website routinely to ensure that links are functional.

**Content:** High-quality content is important, according to ProSites' Mickelson. It educates your visitors, improves optimization and showcases your expertise. If you write your own copy, recruit a knowledgeable proofreader for accurate, typo-free content.

**Compliance:** Are you compliant with regulations your dental board may require? For example, the California Dental Board requires dental practice websites to prominently display staff names, license types and highest level of academic degree on that site. Check with the dental board in your state to ensure your website is in compliance.

**DIY or hire:** A big question is whether you want to create the site yourself or hire someone. Be aware of the time investment in setting up your own website. Coding, domain name registration, hosting, search engine optimization, site architecture and copyright are important considerations.

**Contract:** If hiring a vendor to create your website, choose a reputable individual or firm, require a written agreement and approve all content prior to publishing on the Internet. Have a good understanding of what the design looks like, the features it includes and the overall functionality of the site. It's also important to find out if you are locked-in to a contract with a vendor, or if you have the ability to cancel at any time.

**Updates:** Keeping a website updated is just as important as having a website. Consider how new information will be added to your site:

- Will your vendor handle upgrades and domain renewal or will you do these things yourself?
- Is the information on your site current? For example, remember to update your website when you change email addresses, office hours or make staffing changes.

**TDIC's Risk Management Advice Line can be reached at 800.733.0634.**

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