

How to Take the Mystery Out of Your Healthcare Website and Own It!

☒ The healthcare website that had its humble beginnings as a digital brochure has morphed into one of the most important resources a practice has. Your website must be able to:

- attract and capture new patients,
- retain and engage existing patients,
- provide a platform for information and education,
- gather consumer feedback,
- be a two-way communication tool, and
- distinguish your practice as an authority.

Here's how to manage this very important resource, choose the right professionals to be your practice's partners in success, and spend your financial resources wisely.

Let's define the professionals.

Web Designer: A web designer focuses on the look and feel of a website and leverages good aesthetic sense to make a website enticing and visually pleasing.

Web Developer: A web developer is focused on the way your website works. Web developers have strong programming skills and are responsible for maintaining your website and ensuring it functions well. This person may also be called a Webmaster or Site Administrator.

Web Host: Web Hosting providers give you storage in their data centers for web pages, files and databases that make your website an interactive experience for your patients, employees and stakeholders. Your web host is responsible for keeping your site secure and available 24/7.

Website Software

You can have a web professional custom code a website for you from scratch, but that is not necessary, efficient, cost-effective or smart. We've been advocates of using blog software for websites for years for two reasons. One, the cost of using a blogging platform as software for your website is **free**. Two, you have control of the site and can make simple changes and post content with ease yourself. The most popular blog software, and the software we use at Manage My Practice is **WordPress**. With blogging software, even beginners (the manager or a staff member) can learn the basic process of tweaking information and adding information, keeping the practice website current.

Website Design

Do you need a website designer? Absolutely not!

Should you use a website designer? Absolutely!

The look and feel of your website will create an impression that reinforces what your practice and your brand is all about. There are some places that I am all for saving money, but this is not one of them. Take the time and spend the energy to have a professional design a logo and a webskin (the color, style, font and visuals) for your practice, or translate your current logo into a cohesive website look. Sit down with an experienced designer who can guide you to a logo that will translate well to small pieces (appointment cards) all the way up to large pieces (print advertising or billboards) and reflects your brand and your business.

Website Functionality and Usability

Is it easy for visitors to your website to:

1. Find basic information about your practice, your services, your providers and your location with ease?
2. Find information quickly about becoming a patient and scheduling a visit?
3. Discover in-depth information about services, procedures, and diseases and conditions that your practice manages?
4. Move around your site and understand how to find exactly what they are searching for?
5. Communicate with your practice via phone, email or chat?

These are the concerns that your web developer will address with you. The web developer is responsible for translating your ideas into reality on your site, as well as counseling you on what will and will not work and why, and what functionality and features will give you the edge over your competitors.

Hosting

Hosting is the service of making your information or files available to the rest of the world via the Internet. Hosting a website is very reasonable, costing \$10 – \$20 per month.

A host should provide you with **flexible**, **secure**, and **robust** service that empowers you to control your own content, gives you strong performance with high availability and quick access. Availability is measured as the percentage of total time hosted that the site is available to be accessed by the rest of the world. For example, if a Host says he can guarantee 99% uptime in their hosting agreements, then your site should only experience less than four days of downtime per year.

Your web developer may also recommend and/or resell hosting services.

Analytics

In order to maximize the value and impact of your website, you'll have to track the site's performance and progress toward your group's goals. Web analytics is the study of the statistics and measures of usage that guide webmasters and site administrators to make choices to improve the site. Questions like *"How many people visit your site everyday?"*, *"Where do your visitors come from?"*, and *"What pages are most popular?"* are answered by using software to track information about the people who view your site. Software that tracks and tabulates basic information about your visitors is one of your greatest tools in growing your site by responding to your audience, improving your weaknesses, and maximizing your strengths.

One of the most popular solutions for monitoring your site's analytics is available free of charge from Google. **Google Analytics** is available to all site owners, and offers powerful tools to monitor your stats. Google Analytics can be intimidating when first approached because of how many different features and tools it offers. Learning to create custom reports and graphics for Google Analytics could be a job all in itself, but the service is certainly a great value for the price (**free.**) Google provides you with a snippet of computer code to attach to all pages that will instruct your web host's server to send info about your visitors to Google for tabulation. Once installed, all you have to do is tell Google how you'd like the information presented- and they have an almost dizzying array of options.

There are other analytics software available. Manage My Practice uses **Web-Stat** (about \$10/month) for analytics. It is easy to use and customizable, and independently monitors site downtime.

If you have an outside Web Developer, Administrator or Host,

they might offer their own analytics package to help you track and analyze your data, or may crunch some numbers for you to offer insights or guidance on how to improve your site's impact. Be sure to find out if your vendor offers software or assistance.