

The Internet for Dentists

PROMOTING YOUR DENTAL WEB SITE

© J Can Dent Assoc 2000; 66:536

Last month we discussed some issues related to the creation of a Web site. Once you have a Web site, it is important to consider how your patients will find it. The Internet is one of the biggest, most unorganized collection of information in the world, and its exponential growth has left a number of sites buried in cyberspace. Understandably, it can be difficult for patients in your area to find you. This month, we will discuss some tips on how to publicize your Web site.

Search Engines

When people are looking for information on the Internet, they go to a search engine and type in keywords to find specific Web pages. Search engines, however, do not cover all the sites on the Internet. You must submit your Web site to a search engine to be included in the search function. When you do so, you will be asked to describe your site using words that people would choose when trying to find you. It is important, therefore, that the keywords or phrases listed on your site match those used by searchers.

Since there are millions of sites with the word "dental" in them, it is crucial that you choose proper keywords. Ask your patients for their help in making a list of keywords. Some useful keywords

include the name of your city, your telephone number, your name and your street address. Once you've chosen your keywords, you can submit your Web pages to different search engines by going to www.submit.com. Search engine sites include: www.altavista.com; www.yahoo.com; and www.37.com.

E-mail Signature Files

One of the best ways to publicize your Web site is to use an e-mail signature file. This file allows you to add information at the bottom of every e-mail you send. If you include your Web site address in the signature file, the reader can click on it and automatically go to your site. To set up a signature file in the Microsoft Outlook Email Program (version 5), go to "Tools" and choose "Options." You will then see a "Signature" tab; simply type in your Web site information with your office and e-mail addresses. Other e-mail programs are very similar and just as easy to set up.

Office Supplies

Next time you order business cards, appointment card reminders, letterhead or any other office material, make sure they include your e-mail address and your Web site. You can even have some stick-on labels printed for the brochures you give patients.

Yellow Pages

Many dentists choose to list their Web sites in the Yellow Pages, which allows local patients to conveniently find them.

Mailing Lists

You can create a mailing list of your patients using most e-mail programs. This feature is handy if you update your site and want to let your patients know about the changes.

Web Advertisement

Many companies offer Web advertising for a fee. Be careful about paying for online listings, since your site will probably be used more as a tool to enhance your communications with your current patients than as a tool to attract new ones.

In-office Marketing

Print out a copy of your main Web page and leave it at the front desk for patients to take. Print your Web site address on pencils, magnets, colouring pages and stickers for children. Organize a colouring contest on your site to attract young visitors. Develop how-to cards for your patients with information on how to make payments via the Internet or the telephone. Refer them to your Web site for more information on how to do this.

Dental Association Listings

Some dental associations are starting to keep a list of all the Web sites in their province. The cost of advertising on these listings is shared by the entire membership. One advantage of this type of advertising is that patients often feel more comfortable going to the non-biased association listings to look for a dentist.

There are many ways of integrating your Web site into your practice. Regardless of which marketing plan you adopt, however, remember to keep your site professional and to follow the advertising guidelines in your area.

Dr. Scott MacLean maintains a private practice in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His e-mail address is maclea@ns.sympatico.ca.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or official policies of the Canadian Dental Association.
