

Managing Your Online Presence

Here are some tips on handling your online marketing.



BY MARK TERRY

It really wasn't that long ago when the dominant forms of marketing for a podiatric medical practice were the local newspaper, the *Yellow Pages* and local and regional presence at events in your town or county. That started to slip away when the Internet became easy and affordable to use. Although probably not something you should ignore, the local newspaper and events as marketing efforts are now only a shadow of their former selves compared to Google and social media. Here's a look at ways to optimize and manage your online presence and tie it into your practice's marketing activities.

It Starts with Your Website

Every podiatric practice needs a website. And not just a static website

that announces who you are, your address, phone number and practice hours, but an active website that is able to ensure that when someone locally is looking for a podiatrist, your practice's site shows up at the top of the list. A professional-looking, well-constructed website is a given, but what else should you consider for your website?



Rem Jackson

Constant Content

Rem Jackson, president and CEO of Top Practices in Las Vegas, Nevada, says, "The one thing that has stayed the same and is important as it has ever been—more important—is that your website must be an informative, well-constructed, current-looking, information-rich, communication-rich online presence. You can't just get a



Dr. Wishnie

website and say, 'I have one.' Within two years, so much has changed that companies have been updating their code, making things much more friendly to search engines, particularly Google. You need to have them updated and refreshed at a minimum of every 24 months. It's not a place to skimp on money."

Content Is King

The key to a good, functional website that helps attract search engine algorithms is content, content, content. Peter Wishnie, DPM, of Family Foot & Ankle Specialists in Piscataway, NJ, says, "We constantly add material on a daily basis.

So, blogs—we have four doctors and every doctor adds a blog every week. Loads of videos. People love quick, short videos for education purposes,

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which helps your search engine optimization (SEO).”

Examples include YouTube videos. These days, going all out and having a professionally-produced video is probably not required. People are accustomed to watching people talking to a screen, although you should dress professionally and make sure the lighting is decent. The key is to be short and focused. There’s no need to put on a lecture, but perhaps address in a general way the areas you focus on. If you want to add some pizzazz, you’d be surprised what high school and college students can do for very little money.

Jackson says, “Put up one YouTube video a week. A short, one to one-and-a-half minute video, nothing special. You don’t need a green screen. It could be something like, ‘Just today I had a patient with terrible heel pain. It’s plantar fasciitis. Here’s what that is....’ And follow that up with, ‘Come in and see us.’ And make sure you then have your phone number and website address on it.”

Blog posts would be structured the same way. Short, to the point, focused; and please, run spellcheck and grammar check before posting.

Wishnie adds, “We put up Facebook ads and blogs. Our marketing director constantly adds Instagram, Facebook posts, pictures, Google+. And I can hear right now the audience saying, ‘What’s the point of all that? How do you get patients from something like that?’ It all drives your SEO to constantly be ranked first or second for everything you can imagine in your location using Google Local.”

When’s the last time you looked up a business in the phone book? The Internet’s where everybody searches now.

Analytics

The goal with the website is so that anyone in your area who is looking for a podiatrist can enter a town or city and “podiatrist” or “foot doc-

tor” into a search engine—typically Google—and your name and/or medical practice shows up at the top of the search results. Part of how you do that is to have plenty of active, fresh content.

Wishnie’s practice hires a full-time marketing director to handle online marketing and presence.



Dr. Tomajan

Craig Thomajan, DPM of Austin Foot and Ankle Specialists, in Austin, Texas, notes that the major areas of his practice’s online considerations are “market demographics, physician and patient cultivation, marketing plan development, social and digital coordination, website development, database marketing, and implementation.”

But it has to be monitored and tracked. Thomajan says, “Social and digital media coordination is monitored through a customized monthly recap provided by our website pro-

very little and that’s what you get—you get what you pay for. Some charge a lot and you still don’t get much. Find a trusted company through a trusted colleague or association, but remember, it’s still about the website. Everything you do, marketing online, is to drive everything back to your website.”

This also goes back to content. There are companies that offer to provide content, and although some of them are undoubtedly good, many will offer generic content that will not personalize to you or your practice. Taveras says, “This can end up hurting you. A lot of places will try to place content for you, but might not be relatable to what you do or how you do it. I think it’s important to set it up yourself or assign someone to do it. You’re the only one who understands your practice. It’s hard to get someone to come in from the outside and do it for you and write it in your own words.”

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and make it as easy
as possible for them to write reviews.**

vider dashboard and Google Analytics page (I use the app on my iPhone), combined with our marketing team at VMD Marketing. I can see highlights from lead generation, trending topics, promoted blogs and webpages, top posts and tweets, unique page views, reviews from Google, Yelp, RateMD and how our drip campaigns and email marketing campaigns are doing through opens and clicks.”

Choose Your Web Developer Wisely

It’s possible to create your own website using WordPress or other services. Unless you’re very tech-oriented, don’t. A website that is optimized for SEO requires some skill and experience. Jackson warns, “When I started there was basically one company, Officite, in 2007. Now there are maybe 50 and they’re all supposedly experts. Some charge

Thomajan agrees, noting, “Look out for spam email in your inbox that promises increased SEO ranking and guarantees for page-one visibility. There are no short cuts here. Google likes new, unique, robust content in mixed mediums, written versus video, blog versus Instagram, so be consistent and persistent.”

Reviews

Physicians and their practices get mentioned all over the Internet, simply by existing. Those can be sites like WebMD, HealthGrades and others. But what is particularly useful is to have positive reviews on these types of sites. Not only can positive reviews drive search algorithms, but people do look at them and if all the reviews are negative or there are no reviews, they’re likely to look for another physician.

Jackson says, “Every single one
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of those sites should be filled with 5-star reviews. You're not going to get all 5-star reviews. You're going to get 1-star reviews that are unfair, untrue, and horrible because everyone gets them. There are guidelines

that the different sites have that if someone violates certain guidelines, we've been able to get those reviews removed. It's not that important in the long run. If you have ten 5-star reviews and one 1-star review, that actually reinforces your better reviews because it looks organic."

But How to Get Reviews?

In this case, you need to poke your patients a bit and make it as easy as possible for them to write reviews. Jackson suggests providing patients with a little card with information on how to write reviews. "Send them an email with a link to do it. It all starts with the doctor. When a patient says thank you, I'm so happy, that's the one that trips your mind to say, 'You're welcome. This is our mission, this is what we do. You just made our day. We'd like to work with more people like you. Do you ever do those reviews online?'"

He says the goal should be to get one 5-star review a week. That should be your and your staff's minimum each week. Some doctors get one a day. "That puts you head and shoulders ahead of everyone else. If you get great reviews, and ask people when they come in how they heard about you, they'll say they read a review online about how wonderful you are."

Wishnie says his practice has a program that collects patient emails. They send texts and links that allow simple ratings as well as room to write more if they want to. "We make it easy for patients to leave reviews and it's optimized for mobile."

But a warning! This applies to both checking your online presence and for having patients write reviews—it can't all be done in your practice facility. You can't offer patients a laptop and have them write reviews. The reason is because Google and other search engines note the IP addresses these reviews come from, as well as the searches. If it all comes from your IP address, even if it's on the patients' phones in your office, search engines will record them as being from the same location and it will negatively affect SEO.

Jackson notes that Google Chrome allows for incognito searches although you have to look for it on the browser. He suggests that if you're trying to get a sense of where your website comes up, have friends search on their phones or computers at home.

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Social Media

Social media has grown in power and presence, whether we want it to or not. That can include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and others. Thomajan, for example, says they “syndicate content monthly to Face-

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book, Instagram, Google + , LinkedIn, and Twitter.”

As anybody who spends any time on social media knows, things can get out of hand in a hurry if you’re not careful. If it isn’t obvious by now, if you want to present your most professional self forward, there are certain topics to avoid: politics, for example.

Taveras says, “It’s important for people to realize that all the things you do online are about building your

reputation and showing you’re trustworthy. The more your pages show up, the more they recognize you at the ballgame or at the local market. They see you as a normal, relatable person. That’s good and bad, so that’s why you don’t post politics. But you do want them to feel they know you before they come in the door. As well as being an expert in podiatry, you want to make people sort of see you before they even make the appointment.”

Be Creative

This can be easier said than done, but the Internet and online marketing allows for practices to be creative in how they reach out to patients and potential patients in inexpensive ways. You can experiment.

One of the campaigns Jackson and some of his clients are experimenting with are online quizzes. “What we’ve done is a series of ads that you can put on your website or in emails, that basically say, ‘Hey, you’re having problems with heel pain? Take our quiz and find out.’ It sends them to an actual quiz for heel pain and it’s having remarkable results. Patients take it, it takes them to an assessment—‘Does it hurt here? Does it hurt in the morning? Both times? How?’ Another one just shows photographs with a foot with arrows pointing to different spots. And depending on the results, it will say something along the lines of, “It sounds like you may have a structural problem. You can get a copy of our e-book on heel pain by clicking here.”

Thomajan says they’re experimenting with an online test platform through Facebook and Instagram, with ads targeting potential patients within a 10 to 12-mile radius of each practice location. He says, “Targeting occurs through Facebook’s internal analytics parameters to determine that our potential patient searched currently or in the past about heel pain or plantar fasciitis. If so, an ad is placed on the patient’s feed with the hope that they click the call to action, take the quiz, download our e-book on the subject, and ultimately convert to a patient in our clinics. So far, we are having promising results with this approach and have a better than industry ROI.”

The Internet in many ways has democratized marketing efforts, although it’s brought with it its own set of challenges. One thing is clear, it continues to change. Wishnie says, “People coming into your practice in their thirties, people with young kids, people in their twenties, even forties and fifties, they’re using social media like crazy. The more they see and recognize your name, the more likely you’ll keep building up your practice. It’s an inexpensive form of marketing, which is great because you don’t have to pay a lot of money for a *Yellow Pages* ad like you used to, but you do have to feed it daily, or at least a few days a week.” **PM**



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