

Orthodontic Web sites: beyond Yellow Pages of the 21st century

by Bill Fukui

One vital key to effectively marketing your practice is to get exposure to interested consumers during the decision-making or buying cycle. Several years ago, that meant being in the Yellow Pages. Today, it means having a credible, information-rich Web site and being found on the top search engines, like Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc.

Most orthodontists haven't really grasped the full impact of this concept, but need to face the reality that the Web has become more than the Yellow Pages of the 21st century; not only can consumers get a phone number, they can learn more about the latest orthodontic treatments and technology, compare providers, get directions, ask questions and even schedule their initial appointment online. They can even do all of this while your office is closed.

In fact, the number of orthodontic-related searches on search engines has swelled to more than 200,000 each month and continues to increase. Many of these searches

focus on local providers, such as "Los Angeles orthodontist" or "braces Beverly Hills," etc. To leverage this opportunity, your practice needs to address both your Web site design and how to get top listings on the search engines so interested consumers find your site.

Web sites that appeal to consumers and search engines

More and more consumers of high-end dentistry, including orthodontics, locate, research and compare providers through the Web. To be wildly effective at attracting them, your Web site must be attractive in two ways:

1. It must be credible and attractive in the eyes of visitors. It's vital that your Web site look fantastic, project a high-quality image, and create emotional rapport with your practice. It needs to be a first-class example of your office brand.
2. A Web site can only be effective if local consumers find it. Therefore, it must also be attractive to

search engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN that sift through millions of Web sites on the Internet (CNN reported that Internet hit 100 million Web sites with domain names and content on them in October 2006.) Search engines are enormous electronic libraries that filter through and index the information contained in billions of web pages. (It's impossible to say how many pages are on the Internet, as it increases daily. Google boasted indexing more than 11 billion pages in 2005, but no longer publicizes how many pages or documents it indexes.) This is an important point to remember. Search engines don't just index Web sites; they index individual pages within Web sites.

Top 10 tips to build a winning Web site

Since Web site firms must "sell" their designs to dentists, they typically create them simply to appeal to you, the orthodontist. Unfortunately, orthodontists are not one of the two target audiences mentioned above. Thus, most orthodontic Web sites fail to attract and convert qualified prospects. The following are 10 tips to create an effective Web site that appeal to orthodontic consumers and one that is irresistible to search engines.

1. **Develop an attractive design, but make it usable and compelling.**
First, make sure your Web site doesn't just appeal to you, but to consumers likely to make orthodontic purchasing decisions. Most orthodontic Web sites are intended to appeal to women ages 35-45. At the same time, your Web site must be easy to navigate and possess credible information. Your design, like an ergonomic automobile, must be driven intuitively. If visitors have to do too much thinking, they will "crash" (which is equivalent to leaving your site).
Your design must also incorporate compelling calls-to-action on every page that motivate visitors to take action. Strategically designed Web sites convert a high percentage of visitors into leads. Traffic alone is not the goal. A word to the wise: avoid overly flashy, slow-loading animation and fancy effects. They may amuse you and your Web designer, but they will also likely squash the effectiveness of your Web site.
2. **Create attractive original content**
Internet consumers, as well as search engines, are hungry for information contained in Web site

pages. People don't do the hard work of researching orthodontic information simply to be entertained. And search engines, like Google, want to give its users what they want — good information. Basically, they both want the same thing!

Be sure your Web site has well-written and original content. Create your Web site as an information resource, not just an online advertisement. It's also vital that your Web site copy is unique. Search engines are programmed to recognize duplicate blocks of text that can be found on multiple Web sites. Your Web site information loses its appeal to search engines when it has "cookie-cutter" copy found on other orthodontic Web sites.

3. **The more highly organized pages, the better.**

If your practice is in Denver and a woman goes to Google and enters "clear braces Denver," the Invisalign or clear braces page, or pages, of your Web site may be listed high on her computer screen. Now, she can click directly to that page.

Consequently, the more well-written pages you have in your Web site, the more likely one or more of them will appear on the top of search engine results. Cramping too many topics on one page dilutes the focus of your information and diminishes the value to the search engines. Be sure to give each area of your practice and each service you offer its own page. Each page should include important keywords and phrases that are relevant to that page's topic.

In addition, highly organized information is essential for providing information to consumers in a manner they can easily read and digest. Long scrolling pages will kill your Web site's readability and usability.

4. **Add new pages every month.**
Search engines and consumers not only look for good information, they want it to be "fresh" and timely. Search engines reward Web sites that continually get updated with new, fresh, original content. In addition, this gives you more pages to optimize with key words and phrases for the search engines to attract qualified visitors.
5. **Add a blog to your Web site.**
The term "blog" was originally coined by combining the words "Web" and "log." Basically, blogs are nothing more than online journals where you can easily add words and photos instantly, all without the need of a Webmaster. This is another means to add new,

original content to your Web site.

On a side note, your blog can also be your most effective section in building rapport with your visitors. Entries and photos are written and presented in a more personal style than traditional Web site content, and allow visitors to get to know you better.

6. **Get more inbound links.**

Search engines are tremendously effective at locating a large quantity of information. Unfortunately, most do not have human editors or intelligence to determine the quality of that information. Therefore, they have to rely on other means to accomplish that. One of the primary means is incoming links.

When credible Web sites have a link on their page that points to your Web site, the search engines see that as a vote of confidence for your information. Therefore, the more incoming links you establish, the better.

Contact your colleagues in non-competing practices, other medical professionals, dental vendors, and alumni associations and ask to link to your Web site. Ask for links on Web sites of charities and community organizations that you contribute to, and on media Web sites (newspapers, radio stations and TV stations) that you purchase advertising on.

7. **Purchase links.**

Another means to build your "link popularity" is to carefully buy links on Web sites from reputable and relevant Web sites. There are lots of these types of Web sites, but finding the right ones is the real challenge. The key is to be sure that these Web sites are relevant to your industry or market, and that the links are found in the body of content, rather than on a page that with lots of other paid links.

8. **Obtain listings on Web site directories.**

Find relevant directory Web sites and have them linked to yours. These may be national "find an orthodontist near you" directories, or local directories indexing other services. Some links cost money, but many are free.

9. **Online public relations — substantive articles.**

Well-written articles and newsworthy press releases can be another means to significantly increase your link popularity. Online informational Web sites want good, credible articles and information for their Web site and will post your article or release on their Web site (each article is written with strategic links to your Web site).

10. **Get some help.**

If you are like most orthodontists, you don't have the time, expertise or personnel to effectively implement many or most of the tips listed above. Thus, it is important to form a win-win relationship with a Web marketing company that specializes in creating attractive Web sites that

dominate the search engines. Since so much of your Web site marketing is focused on custom copywriting, it's also to your advantage to work with a company that has extensive experience in the orthodontic profession.

Conclusion

The Web has become more than just the Yellow Pages of the 21st century and continues to have even greater impact on how consumers research, compare and purchase everything, including orthodontic services. The above top 10 Web marketing tips only scratch the surface of what it takes to create an effective Web site that gets lots of quality, local visits from upscale consumers. But you have got to start somewhere — and soon. A great place to start is to identify where

your Web site is currently positioned on the search engines and which competitors consistently dominate your market. To get free reports, go to: www.page1solutions.com/dental_contact.html.

If consumers can't find your Web site or don't contact you through the Web, take action now. If you don't, hundreds of potential patients will continue to pass you by.

OT Contact

Bill Fukui
17501 W. Colfax Avenue, Suite 275
Golden, CO 80401
Phone: (800) 916-5886
E-mail: BillF@Page1Solutions.com
www.Page1Solutions.com

OT About the author



Bill Fukui has been a consultant for marketing professional services (dental, medical and legal) since 1995. He now serves as the Chief Operations Officer (COO) for Page 1 Solutions, LLC, a dental/medical/legal Internet marketing firm specializing in strategic Web site design, search engine optimization/positioning, and online sales strategies. He has presented courses at numerous professional meetings, has been published in various industry journals, and has consulted with practices across the country. He is a graduate of the University of Colorado, Boulder with a degree in Public Relations/Journalism, 1985.

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