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**Managing Managed Care:
What has Medicare Advantage
Delivered to Home Care?**

Formula for a Winning Web Site

By Merrily Orsini



It is no secret that in the current health care environment, you find yourself needing a Web site for your agency; or maybe you feel some major improvements need to be made to your existing site, but don't know where to begin. The home health market feels tough to penetrate, with increasingly more companies asserting their offerings online, and you aren't sure how to stand out from the pack. Get it wrong, and your site will be a forgotten shop down a long dark alley, with only a smattering of uninterested visitors. Get it right, and you'll find yourself sitting on a hot commodity, reeling in the clients. Your stress level may be near the breaking point, but in actuality, designing a top-notch leader of the pack Web site is within your reach if you understand a few basic points about branding and design.

A great Web site begins with branding.

Because clients tend to choose companies/products with names they recognize and values they appreciate, branding sets the stage for your Web site to stand out from the pack and increase sales. Along with building awareness of your company and what it stands for, branding can result in increased value of your services, meaning clients will pay

more attention for a strong brand they recognize and associate with quality.

What is branding? Although design plays a large part in branding, that is not the whole picture. Corporate branding is an actual business strategy, which encompasses the principles and values upon which your company is built, and relays to the public what you stand for. Branding is also what the consumer thinks and feels about your product or service based on how it has been presented.

Now that you understand the basics of branding and have nailed down your brand image, you have to convey that image successfully to clients through your Web site. This is accomplished through great overall design, easy site navigation, and rich content that is valuable for your target audience.

Achieving a great overall design.

A poorly designed site can deflate even the soundest brand campaign. In a recent survey, when asked if the quality of a company's design affected a decision to purchase, 89 percent of respondents said 'yes.' Furthermore, 77 percent of respondents replied that the look of a company's materials has actually discouraged them from making a purchase. Basically, people are more likely

to pay attention to a Web site that looks visually appealing to them because the first impression hits the heart, not the mind. Using appropriate color schemes, photos, graphics, and copy will show the client that you are offering top shelf material. A sleek, updated and well-presented Web site makes customers feel at ease, and lets them know they are dealing with professionals.

No compass required.

Your site can't just be another pretty face – it has to be highly functional and above all, user friendly. Every interaction between client and company is part of the branding experience, which translates online to the customer's experience with your site. All information should be no more than three clicks away is a standard Internet usage rule. A user wants to spend their time reviewing information – not searching for it, so if it is difficult for viewers to find the information they are searching for on your site, they will swiftly move on to the next site. For this reason, it is paramount that your site be well organized and information made clearly available.

Rich content.

Your Web site's content should not read like a traditional marketing bro-

chure; online users do not have the patience to wade through a lot of jargon. The content has to be conversational and immediately engage the user. Too much information can distract users from their online experience. On the other hand, if your site lacks the information they want, then their online session will run as short as your content.

Use key messages that clearly state what your business does or what the Web site will do for the visitor. Write your content so as to drive the user to take a desired action such as purchasing a product or service, and be sure to keep the content current and updated often.

Web site content and branding is also about taking care of your clients. The best Web sites provide excellent customer service and support. You can easily post decision trees, FAQs (frequently asked questions), service specific information, and contact information on

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your site. Such information helps assure the client that you aim to provide an excellent customer service experience for them. Plus, you can target specific users, like managed care companies, easily by offering a quick link to information targeted to them.

Overall, your Web site's goal should

be to reach out to clients, build your brand, live up to its promises, and offer helpful resources to those seeking care or to make referrals for care. Writing content and developing a site that attracts online users and turns those seeking care into customers, takes a seasoned Web site developer, someone who understands the language and dynamics of the World Wide Web plus someone who understands the home health care markets, and how to apply all components to your site. Simply replicating marketing literature for Web site content is a nasty trap that leaves online users discontented, and your site a lonely stop in a sea of information.

About the Author: Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is Managing Director of Corcubed, an integrated marketing communications company that specializes in home care and home health industries. Orsini has been active in internet marketing since 1990. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Private Duty Homecare Association of America.



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