

# CARING

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**Rep. Shelley Moore Capito  
Visits Home Care Client**

**Alzheimer's: Its Effect on Society,  
and What Home Care Is Doing to Help**

# Window to the World: Are You OPEN for Business?

By Merrily Orsini



Recently while working on a differentiation strategy for a single-site agency, I looked at two dozen local competing agencies' websites and was astonished that a good 95 percent of those agencies were not taking full advantage of this most powerful of marketing mediums available today. Their websites were, for the most part, primitive, direct sales pieces that used industry vernacular and contained little, if any, interactive component.

The websites of the larger companies looked cold and corporate, uninviting rather than caring, and were not sensitively geared for someone looking for the best kind of care for a loved one. One of the sites that was otherwise fairly good had a video of the owner popping up and speaking without a user's requesting it — meaning that anyone in a library or at work or online in the wee hours of the morning would likely immediately leave the site as soon as that booming, uninvited noise (his voice) belched out of the computer's speakers.

Increasingly each day, with broadband Internet access becoming the standard and with computer availability/comfort/usage expanding across the generations, people are searching for answers and resources online. There is still the need to talk to a human and to get a

feeling of comfort prior to selecting and buying, but the initial search for options is occurring, more often than not, on the Web.

## Four items worthy of note:

1. Your agency has to be "findable" on the Web in order to be researched and considered.
2. Your website has to provide the service the person is seeking.
3. Your website has to answer the seeker's questions about care.
4. Your website has to entice the searcher to view more on the site and respond online so your agency is aware of who is viewing the site and can respond accordingly.

The issue of being "findable" means that the website has to be built with search engine marketing, or SEM, in mind. This means creating a site that is not simply the agency brochure plopped online. Appropriate Web text is very different from appropriate brochure text. The site must be easy to navigate, use relevant key words (prior research on these is required), have prominent key messages, make service offerings easy to understand, and use Google Local

Business Center — now called Google Places — so the agency listing is easily found. There are many other tactics that also help in rankings for search engines, and having a website that employs these tactics is becoming increasingly important as more agencies come online striving for the coveted top Internet search rankings.

Most people who are searching for care online have one specific problem, and it is only that problem they want to solve. The beauty and power of the Internet is that if a site is designed and written appropriately, it can lead searchers through a series of ways to answer their questions and confirm that care is available to solve their particular problems. In order to answer a seeker's questions, the agency must have considered what its customers and potential new referral sources might need and want. For example, a question such as "Searching for a nurse to help with diabetes?" can be posed and then answered to show that the agency can provide the user with help. Or how about "Getting discharged from the hospital and need some help at home?" Then the reader can be walked through the steps it takes to arrange home care. Another good question might be, "Want to avoid patient's readmittance to the hospital?" This one would be targeted to the refer-

ral source or to the hospital discharge planner to make his or her job easier.

By understanding what most users are looking for when they visit your agency's website, you can determine which questions are asked most frequently. Google Analytics is free and can help with this dilemma. Once installed on the site, Google Analytics reports who is visiting, what they are looking at, how long they are viewing each page, which terms they are using to find your site, and which sites are referring them to yours.

Enticing the user to respond is fairly simple if the user's questions are answered — and if the site has kept the user engaged while offering resources. The logical next step is to ask, "How can we help you further?" and then to present some options. The user may want to download some information on the topic, set up a time to talk to someone, or just provide contact information for some ongoing communication from the agency. The

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key is to capture the user's contact information so the agency can keep in touch; name, email, and phone number are sufficient. Optionally, response areas can be created for the user to provide details on the person who requires care.

The goal is to get the user to take some desired action that will drive home

the purpose of the website as a marketing or sales-generating medium. Then it is up to the agency to have a fail-safe follow-up and follow-through plan in place to convert that interest into a sale or an admission.

By creating a website that is built specifically to attract and further entice the people who are looking for answers and collecting their contact information for follow-up, an agency can be leaps and bounds ahead of where many of its neighbors in the home care market are today.

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