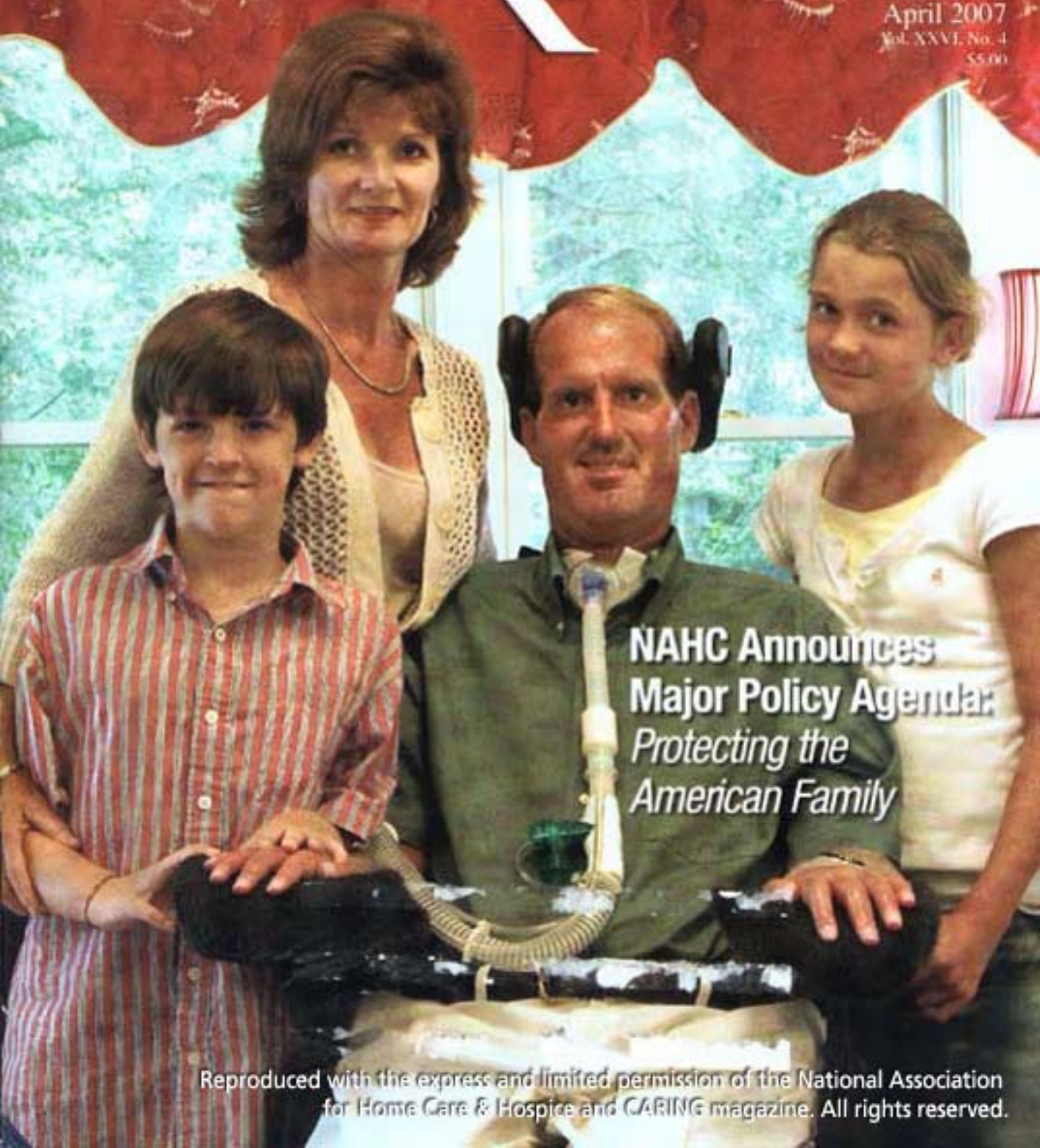


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**NAHC Announces  
Major Policy Agenda:  
*Protecting the  
American Family***

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# A Primer on e-Referrals

By Merrily Orsini



Communications today travel at the speed of Web. This means your home health care company needs to not only have a presence on the Web, but be easily found and contain all the information needed to make a decision or sway someone to use or refer to your agency.

For the home health business, the quality of service provided, the ease of doing business and maintaining a sterling reputation are still the gold standards. Word-of-mouth and traditional marketing are still invaluable, but an agency needs to also use the new online tools in order to stay relevant in this increasingly competitive market.

Who is the target market? Whether it is those who have a care need (like a family member looking for care for her aging parent or a senior looking for resources to get help), anyone who works with seniors or the disabled (from geriatric care managers to elder law attorneys), or traditional referral sources (physicians, discharge planners, or nurses) your agency needs to shine online when they come looking for care. So, how do you appeal to all of these groups?

## Web Site Basics

It all begins with a smart Web site that meets the needs of everyone in your target market. At a minimum, the site should outline your key messages, describe the services offered, and provide an easy way to request and obtain information or make a referral.

**No more than three clicks away is the rule. This means you must plan the Web site so anyone looking for information can identify where it is they need to go within the site to get exactly what they want with no more than three clicks of the mouse.”**

A great Web site is defined first by good design (I like what I see here!) and then by easy navigation (I can find what I wanted!) to make it inviting and user-friendly. If planned and developed correctly, the Web site can serve as a 24-

hour marketing partner, available whenever someone comes looking for services in your geographic area or your specialized area of expertise.

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## Information and Resources

Helpful resources that speak to a wide range of users will make visitors feel your site is worth their while, encouraging them to browse your site for a longer period of time, thus, creating a positive image of your agency even prior to calling or using your service.

Educate your potential new customer or referral source as to how your agency is unique, setting yourself apart from the others. Keep an updated press section highly visible, and post all press releases to showcase what the agency is doing. Include any media coverage to further highlight the agency's credibility and standing in the community. If you do not have press to showcase, include in-

ternally written articles that showcase the agency's senior management expertise or some specialty service. Have someone in your agency repackage information that's already been produced for another purpose. A presentation given at a senior fair becomes content for an article. An industry survey used for market research becomes a whitepaper. People care whether the resource adds value and gives them needed information, not how much time and effort it took to produce. Not a writer? Find relevant articles from reputable sources, and include those on the site.

Include a section with helpful links to industry-related organizations that provide various statistics and studies on topics of concern for patients or their families. If your agency specializes, provide links to other organizations or associations with resources, expanding

the knowledge area a potential inquirer might desire or find interesting. Make certain however, that the Web designer opens each new link within your site, and does not have the user leave your site when reading information or resources from other linked sites.

### Contact Us

One goal of the Web site should be to get the user to take a desired action that will deliver something useful to him. You can use your agency Web site as a means for identifying new referral sources or hooking new business by setting up informational or resource-rich downloads that require the downloader to fill out a form with basic contact information. This makes the Web site even more effective as a marketing or sales-generating medium. Following the downloaded

information, an auto-responder should be emailed to the downloader, and then personal follow-up made as soon as possible. Responding to further requests and sending information promptly will translate an e-inquirer into a new business client or referral source.

Harnessing the immediacy of the Web's power will add one more important implement to your marketing tool belt, and help your home health care business rise above the rest.

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**About the Author:** *Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is Managing Director of corecubed, an integrated marketing communications company that specializes in homecare 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.*