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Home Care and Hospice for the Pediatric Patient

Basic Rules for a “Resource Rich” Internet Site

By Merrily Orsini



Nowadays, it is easy to take the Internet for granted, but only 15 years ago we were obligated to trudge to a library, rifle through a phone

book, or own a shelf full of encyclopedias in order to research most information. The Internet has transformed our lives, becoming an anytime, at-your-fingertips resource for those seeking information, help, support, or guidance on any topic including home health care and health

care providers. The problem is that the consumer has literally thousands of choices when looking for information. So, it's important to make certain that your agency's site stands out by being well designed, properly researched, truthful, and frequently updated. By making sure your Web site follows a few simple guidelines, you can be sure that resource searchers will linger on your site longer and perhaps turn into clients.

Cater to your audience: It is important to understand what information your referral sources and potential clients may be searching for. The purpose

of your site should not just be to serve as a “brochure” for your agency, but also to provide the viewer with helpful and pertinent resources or information. The more that your site meets your potential client's or referral source's needs, the better your chances are of getting them to call and make an inquiry, or discuss a problem.

your site, they will swiftly move on to the next site. For this reason, it is paramount that your site be well organized and your information clearly available. What the site is about and who it targets should be clearly provided on the site's main page. More details can be housed on a link from the main page, and content should be geared toward the specific audience it is targeting. For example, the site should clearly state whether it is directed towards home care consumers, professionals, or both, as well as the best way for those groups to get the most out of their time on your site.

Dynamic Design: Closely tied with easy to navigate, comes the importance of a great overall design. It may save you money in the beginning to have your accounting manager's nephew design your site with clip art, but at the end of the day, a non-professional design will lose you valuable potential customers. A clean look, coordinated color schemes, and general layout all contribute greatly to your viewer's impression. Generally, it only takes 10 seconds for viewers to decide if a site is worth their attention, so it is vitally important to hook them immediately with your design which should include good design principles and support the overall aim of your site. It is also a good idea to consider adding video clips, images, and graphics to support your information, as viewers who routinely use the Web to research information have come to expect this multimedia treatment.

Rule of Three: No more than three clicks away is a standard Internet usage rule. If it is difficult for viewers to find the information they are searching for on

Personalize: Personalizing the site is important for potential consumers as well as referral sources. Establish authority by listing credentials for staff

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and management as well as contributing authors. Certifications or academic degrees, as well as contact information and appropriate biographical information are necessary, and photos make it even more personal. And of course visitors must be able to easily find contact information on your site in order to discuss services or request further information.

Refresh and Renew: A site that is updated frequently lends authority and encourages viewers to check back often for new material. Make certain there are no dead links or links to unrelated content. It is especially important for health-based Web sites to contain accurate information that is current, well-researched and has clearly documented references and resources. Information published from well-respected medical journals, established educational and research facilities, and public health non-profits demonstrates that the infor-

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mation is credible. The site should also strive to be unique, offering information that is not offered elsewhere as well as information that showcases your areas of specialty.

Ad Weary: Advertising on your site suggests a lack of credibility and may shunt viewers away from your site. If users are subjected to too many pop-up ads, distracting Flash animation, or invasive sidebars, they are not likely to stay on your site for long or return later.

Security: Privacy and security are becoming increasingly important. Security and privacy policies should be available and followed by the site with security and privacy policies clearly stated.

Internet viewers have many choices when it comes to finding home care and home health care resources on the Web. In order to bring them to your site and get results, you must be able to fulfill viewers' needs for accurate, authoritative information that meets their needs and is pleasing to the eyes as well. By utilizing a great design team and following a few basic rules, your Web site can become one of your most valuable business tools towards success.

About the Author: *Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is Managing Director of Corecubed, 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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