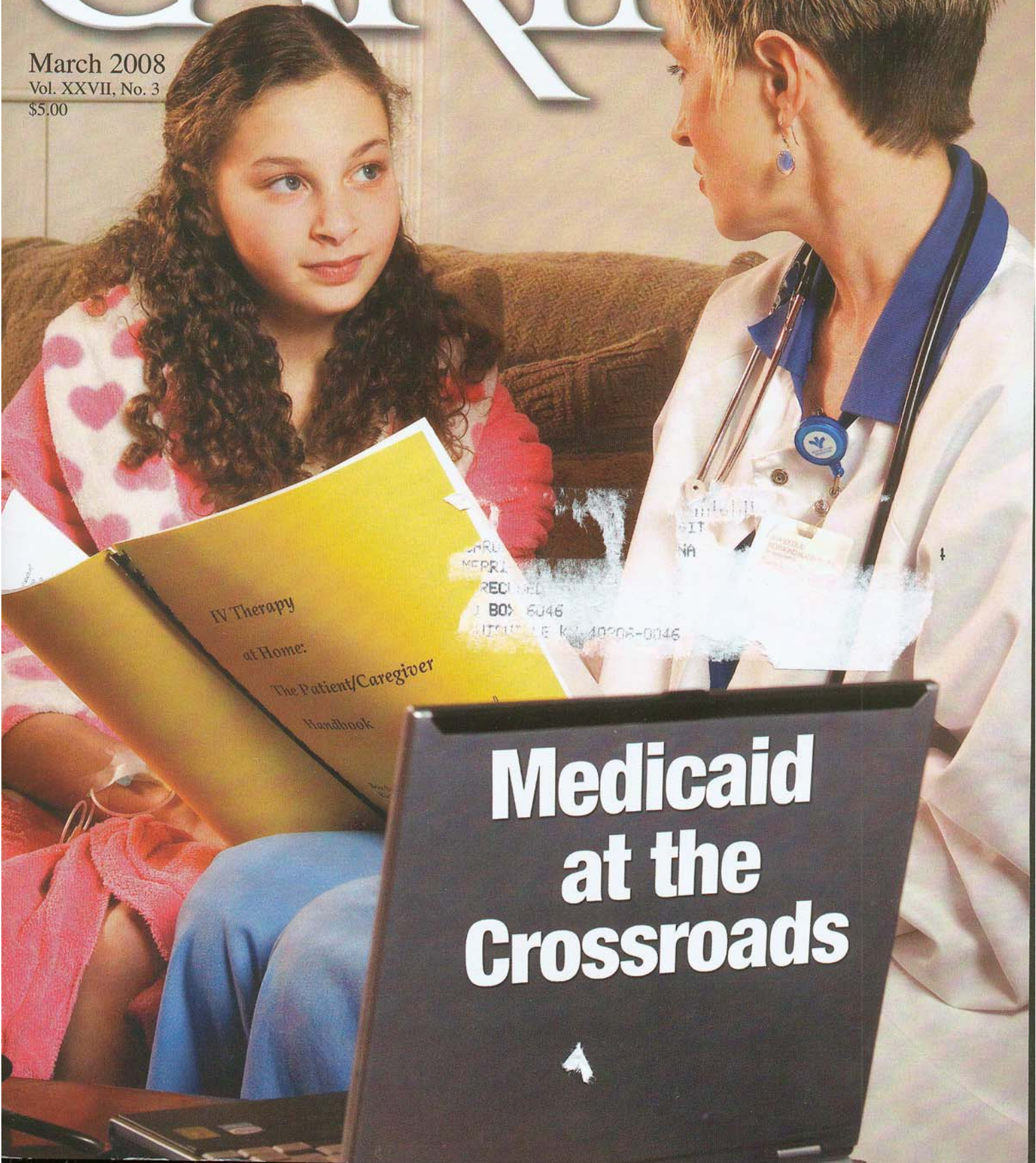


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## Medicaid at the Crossroads

IV Therapy  
at Home:  
The Patient/Caregiver  
Handbook

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# Marketing for More Medicaid Hours? Try the Internet.

By Merrily Orsini



As a Medicaid provider, expanding your marketing efforts might not be on the forefront of your mind. After all, as part of the Medicaid system, many times assignments are provided from a regular source with whom you most likely have a good relationship. However, having a larger marketing presence might just allow you unexpected opportunities to promote a niche in your business services: use of the Internet.

The Internet has long been used for promoting companies and their services, but is really just coming of age in the home care industry. Why should your agency be interested in Internet marketing? The Internet is now officially the first place people go when seeking information about companies. If a company has no Web presence (i.e. no Web site) then in today's consumers' minds, it is almost as if the company does not exist. In the home care industry, reputation is the key, and if you are not using the Internet, your reputation will not be as strong as those that do.

## Directory Listings/Link Exchange

There are a myriad of health care industry Web sites, directories, and communities that list providers. Becoming listed in as many as possible will provide

great exposure and assist those who are looking to find your agency. Most are free, and all you have to do is send an email asking that your Web site be added. Since it is customary to allow a reciprocal link on your Web site, it is also a good idea to set up a "Useful Links" page on your site. This will, in turn, provide a great resource for visitors to your site, and as an additional boost, links to your Web site have a positive effect on your search engine rankings.

The Internet has many different advertising opportunities, but the one that is most scalable and affordable is PPC (pay-per-click) advertising.

## Advertising

The Internet has many different advertising opportunities, but the one that is most scalable and affordable is PPC (pay-per-click) advertising. For a

Medicaid provider, the only place that PPC would make sense is if there was a specific type of contract that targeted a niche market, and you could grow that market through potential clients contacting your referral gateway. All of the major search engines like Google and Yahoo offer a PPC service. Basically, it works like this: you choose a daily budget (from \$1 to \$1000), and then create advertisements filled with keywords that your potential customer might be searching for (i.e. pediatric ventilator in-home care, diabetic wound care, IV at home, to name a few). When they search those phrases, your ads pop up in their search results. If they click through to your site, you pay. There are other factors such as competitiveness and number of clicks, but that is a simplified overview.

## Newsletters and Informational Bulletins

If you have a newsletter, or provide informational bulletins and are still sending them out via snail mail, you are missing a great opportunity to communicate more quickly and more cost effectively. Consider sending communications via email and then posting all on the Internet on your Web site. There are many online newsletter services available, and switching to email cuts down

on printing and mailing costs. Once distributed, hosting your newsletter and informational bulletins on your Web site provides visitors with valuable content and a history of news and information that may be helpful to them.

**Public Relations**

Have local newspapers done a story on your agency? Do you put out press releases about newsworthy events? If so, you should make certain that you take advantage of the Internet marketing aspect of public relations. Simple steps can be taken like posting the news article on your site, or sending out your news over a free wire service. Many times search engines will pick up on these articles and allow people to more easily find you on the Internet.

**Employment Portal**

Although marketing for employees is not traditional marketing, many agencies are finding that accepting applications and doing first screenings of new

Although marketing for employees is not traditional marketing, many agencies are finding that accepting applications and doing first screenings of new hires is a potential gold mine on the Internet.

hires is a potential gold mine on the Internet. The benefits of 24-hour access to your agency information regarding benefits and employment needs means that job seekers can get what they need without taking up valuable office staff time. Plus, taking advantage of the niche market angle, job seekers who wish to move to your area or who are looking for

a specific kind of job placement can find you easily.

**Conclusion**

The beauty of marketing yourself using the Internet is that you can start slowly and build up speed gradually. Additionally, much of marketing on the Internet is so cost-effective that you will see a great return on your investment. Even if you are completely happy with the client flow you are seeing as a Medicaid provider, it is still important to use the Internet as a viable marketing tool for building reputation and exposure of your company.

**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. Merrily 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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