

CARING



November 2008

Vol. XXVII, No. 11

\$5.00

The Future of Hospice:
Crisis and Opportunity

Holiday Dress-up for Your Web Site

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The hustle and bustle of the holiday season is a special time of year, albeit stressful, and particularly so for those who provide in-home care. Adding more to-do items on the list of work duties can seem overwhelming. Coupled with the additional demands outside the office, the ho-ho-ho's can quickly turn into the ho-hum's. That aside, the holidays still remain an excellent time to personalize an agency's Web site, capturing both the interest of current clients, potential clients, and referral sources.

To ease the burden some may feel during the festive months, there are a number of lighthearted ways agencies can enliven a Web site. One of the best ways to maintain frequent visitors to a Web site is by offering dynamic (changing) content. Frequent visitors equals interest in your agency, which will hopefully result in a new admission or a new referral source. Take the extra time to update a Web site and use the holiday season to offer fun, meaningful takeaways. The following are a handful of specific suggestions and ideas that will put the holiday spirit on an agency Web site for all to share and enjoy.

Meaningful Client Stories – Poll the agency's caregivers and pull together some meaningful and heartwarming stories between clients and caregivers. (Remember confidentiality, so disguise anything that could be patient-specific). Feel-good stories are particularly nice during the holidays when many are wor-

ried about their loved ones being alone. Post these on the Web site for people to read and to offer encouragement. Other caregivers may get ideas from these stories as to how to make this season more meaningful for homebound patients.

Favorite Recipes – Ask caregivers and clients to submit their favorite recipes for the holidays and post them on the Web site. This is a great way to get clients involved in something fun for the holidays. Perhaps suggest that caregivers and clients submit favorite recipes they have prepared together, promoting the strong bonds that caregivers and clients form. Family members can also get in on the activity, and even those from afar can submit favorite recipes they enjoyed as children and thus celebrate one of the impacts that a family had on a distant relative.

List of Local Events – With so many wonderful community events during the season — plays, musicals, craft fairs, bake sales, etc. — it can be hard to keep track of everything. Act as a community calendar and post holiday-related activities that would be of interest to seniors and/or families of seniors. Promote doing activities together. Provide a forum to respond to listed activities and to provide input if desired.

Create a List of Gift Ideas for Seniors – Create a short list of gift ideas that will help seniors maintain their independence. It is often difficult for people to think of unique yet meaningful gift ideas for elderly loved ones. Include items such as telephones for the hearing- or sight-impaired, junk mail reduction services, and a gift certificate for respite care. Encourage those who provide care to seek out interests from past active times, and to assist the frail elderly in recreating some meaningful activity that was once enjoyable.

Create Advice Articles – Nobody knows more about the loneliness the season can bring than agency owners/administrators who have watched their clients during the holidays. Write a few how-to articles for families of loved ones, explaining simple things that can be done during the holidays to allow their loved one to feel less isolated and more involved; for example, having a family dinner centered around old family stories, putting up holiday decorations together, getting involved in community events together, taking them shopping, and spending time together, rather than just buying and giving gifts.

Post Photos – People are naturally curious and love to put a face to a name. Post photos (with permissions of course) of caregivers and their clients together. Get quotes from your clients about their caregivers such as favorite activities to do together or favorite attributes. Create a fun game of using old childhood photos and seeing who can match the current face with the childhood image.

Dress up a site in holiday cheer – Spice up a Web site by adding a holiday banner or a virtual holiday card; or don the agency logo with a wreath or holiday hat, or have presents spilling out of the letters. Snowflakes decorating a site may also be a good choice. This Web site "merriment" creates a feeling of holiday spirit from the very first glance. These graphics, once created, can be archived for future use, so annually the Web site can put on its holiday best!

Activity Suggestions – Many clients and potential clients will find themselves trying to please their children, grandchildren, and extended family with holiday activities. As this proves to be a daunting task for most, provide suggestions for activities everyone will enjoy, spanning the intergenerational gap. Pull from advice

articles as well as the local event listings to provide sample activity plans for all sorts of family get-togethers.

Volunteer Opportunities – What really matters during the holiday season is the spirit of giving. Another way to give is to offer one's time. While many seniors need help with daily living tasks, that is not to say they are unable to give of their time with some special talent. Many homeless shelters need blankets (perfect for knitters). Many churches hold dinners for the homeless (perfect for bakers). Create a list of volunteer opportunities in the community which would be appropriate for seniors with supervision, or offer help with transportation. Keeping seniors active and feeling like contributing members of society is a great gift for the holiday season.

Taking the time to update an agency's Web site with fun, meaningful, and festive ideas will go a long way towards making an agency feel warm and familiar to those seeking care. It not only humanizes a site, but educates potential clients as to what the agency is about, helps them to get a feel for the people at the agency, and generally allows them to walk away with a good feeling. So avoid letting the bah-humbugs attack a site during the holidays with bland, everyday content. After all, perhaps an unexpected gift an agency can give is a helpful hand to those in need of care assistance over the holidays.

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. She was recently elected to the NAHC Board of Directors.*