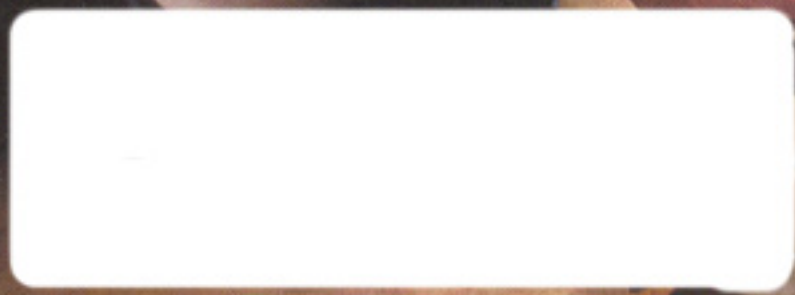


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**Joint Disease:**  
Home Care Responds  
to this Health Care Burden



# Looking Toward the Future: Modernizing Marketing

## Internet marketing is the wave of the future for home care agencies

By Merrily Orsini



Agencies nationwide are doing the planning and strategy for their next 12 months. Marketing, as always, needs to be at the top of the priority list for garnering new clients. What's new for 2009? Home care agencies need to look at marketing in a whole new way: incorporate Internet marketing heavily into the strategy and plans in order to surge ahead of the competition.

A recent article on Internet marketing for senior care reports the increasingly common usage of online resources among older Americans. Each year the Pew Internet & American Life Project tracks and analyzes how computers and the Web are changing today's world, and the reports show Internet usage increasing across all categories, including searches for health-related information. This trend should prompt agencies to seek out ways to market online, as this is one place where potential clients are increasingly seeking information.

So how does one integrate Internet marketing into the overall agency strategy? There are quite a few areas that fall under the Internet marketing umbrella. Here are a few that can jump-start an on-line strategy:

**1. SEO** – Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process which allows a Web site to be more visible on search engines, so that for example, when

someone types a term such as "home care" into Google or a related search site, your agency shows up on the first page of results. Comprised of keywords, design tweaks, and other technical items, SEO is best left to the professionals. However, it is something that all agencies should look into. Imagine a potential client searching for an agency in your regional area. Wouldn't you want your agency to show up on the list of search results a page or two before your competition? SEO really is a science, but suffice it to say that if the IT department is in charge of the Web site rather than marketing professionals, the site is most likely not a good candidate for effective marketing.

**2. PPC** – Pay-per-Click (PPC) advertising, which is implemented through search engines such as Google and Yahoo, is a fabulous way to direct traffic (potential clients) to a Web site. PPC ads are small but mighty. They focus on a specific key phrase such as "New York home care" and link to the agency's Web site. Creating effective PPC ads takes a lot of learning, measuring, and tweaking, but the rewards are great when the agency's ad pops up on a Google search. Cost for this type of advertisement is determined by the number of "clicks"

that goes through to the agency Web site itself. An added bonus to PPC is that the specific words or phrases people are using to find the agency are immediately apparent. From the moment PPC is started, reports are available that show how many people are clicking through, and on what ads and what words. The smart marketer takes this knowledge, applies it to SEO, and gets a double bang for that buck.

- 3. Links, links and more links** – The more visible an agency can be online, the better. Just as a business would network with other local businesses to display their brochure or agency information in their offices, agencies should do the same with online outlets. The more an agency shows up on other Web sites, the more times it will appear online to potential customers. Local/regional businesses can be asked to link to the agency's Web site from their own. Most cities and localities have directories of services. Agencies should be certain to have a listing that includes a link to the agency Web site. All associations in which an agency has a membership should also be reviewed to see if there is a listing of members with a Web link.
- 4.** Whenever the agency has a media hit, the link or the entire article should be

added to the Web site. This not only creates third party credibility, but also adds to the stature of the agency, and could be what sways a potential client to make that call for assistance.

5. Using the Web site as an interactive educational resource and adding and changing helpful resources as often as possible will assist in SEO as well as keep viewers on the site longer. The Web site should be considered as an ongoing message board for posting changes, information, and educational materials.
6. **Webcasts** – Many laptops and desktop computers come equipped with built in Web cameras. Take the time to create a short Webcast starring the agency director discussing what being in this industry means to him/her, how the agency is special to clients and patients, and why the agency is the best choice for care. A Webcast can make it feel as if the director is personally addressing the viewer.
7. An email signature that includes

the Web site URL should be used: for example, Susie.Q.Nurse@TheBestAgencyInTown.com instead of homecarenurse@comcasting.net. By using the agency URL in the email address, anyone who gets an email will immediately deduce the location of the agency Web site, and be able to easily visit without searching for it.

8. The agency Web site should be updated and maintained on a regular, frequent basis. The spiders that parse through sites to rank them give brownie points to sites with updated relevant information. Live human Web searchers also appreciate a site that is obviously updated with all links working properly.
9. The Web site should be branded to match the entire agency's marketing material. When someone looks at a brochure or sees a refrigerator magnet and then goes to the Web site, there should be a strong visual commonality. Colors, logo, and key messages should all be consistent.

10. By thinking of the Web site as part of the marketing collateral and not merely as a technical tool, the agency site will soon unearth a treasure trove of marketing opportunities.

The world of online marketing can appear to be scary and overly technical, but is a necessary part of marketing for 2009 and needs to be given priority. Internet marketing is extremely cost-effective and can have a large impact on an agency's image and traffic to its Web site. Done correctly with the assistance of smart professionals, the world of Internet marketing can do wonders for the agency's bottom line. Beginning with simple linking strategies and working into SEO, PPC, and Webcasts can result in gaining an edge over the competition in 2009!

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*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.*