Remembering Dr. Dorothy I. Height, Civil Rights Leader

The Role of Home Care & Hospice in Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness
Meet the Web 2010: Interactive and Informative

By Merrily Orsini

For today as well as tomorrow, when it comes to your agency’s website, “interactive” and “informative” are the trends and the best practices. Consumers, vendors, clients, patients, physicians, and all manner of interested people are using the Internet to find solutions to health care problems and resources to meet their needs. Increasingly, in order to compete in the crowded marketplace, rather than a simple listing of your agency’s services, it is becoming important to transform your agency website into an easily accessible, educational resource for home care and health needs. This will keep those interested in home care calling, referring, or seeking employment with your agency.

Providing helpful, relevant information hits home with current and prospective clients and their families and helps educate about home care as an option, while also working to your advantage by promoting your services. If you create a website as a resource for information on a variety of home care-related issues such as activities of daily living, recuperation, or assistance with end of life needs, the possibility that people will want to bookmark it, return to it, and link to it increases. This, in turn, increases the site’s ranking in the eyes of the search engines. Better visibility for your site is not only beneficial to the end user (the seeker of information) but also to the agency from a marketing perspective.

There’s a good chance that many in your direct geographic service area — or those who have lived ones, relatives, or friends there — are looking for assistance and are not certain where to turn or what kind of assistance they might need. It’s also a good chance that many potential employees who are looking to change agencies or return to work would like some detailed information on what benefits are offered, and what working for your agency means.

A well designed and maintained website can become a portal for those seeking information on home care as well as a portal to attract, accept, and screen potential employees. Use your website to educate potential employees on your agency’s culture and mission, what it means to work there. And the linking/bookmarking aspect works for employee recruitment as well.

Follow these suggestions and your agency’s website will be up-to-date in 2010 and ready for the future.

- Social media is all the buzz right now and does have its basis for success: the ability to drive traffic to your website for more information and assistance. Once you have valuable resources on your website, take advantage of social media tools to promote it, send people back to it, and generate “buzz.”

- Convert your website design into a Wordpress or Expression Engine site, both of which are Web design tools that optimize your site for social media integration and search engine friendliness. These tools also make it easy for you or someone at your agency to maintain and update your site so that your content is current, while allowing for easy integration with Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools.

- Educate readers with your marketing materials rather than simply advertising your services. Readers are likely looking for tangible information they can use immediately, and providing knowledgeable information will help establish your agency as an expert on home care. In turn, this status will go a long way when families you have reached do need outside help. They will naturally turn somewhere with which they are familiar and that’s proven to provide effective solutions: your agency.
Web Connections

- Write and post tip sheets for a variety of commonly asked questions relating to the most difficult care situations.
- Post helpful lists. Lists are a good reference that people tend to find easy to read, and search engines pick up easily as well (for example, "10 Questions to Ask a Home Care Provider").
- Offer an assessment guide to help families decide what type of care/services they need.
- List and link to suppliers of equipment and websites that offer support or information related to home care. Design resources and links in a format that can be printed directly from your site (place a "print" button next to your list of resources). And if appropriate, ask those vendors to link back to you.
- Entice visitors with interactivity on your home page. This is a great place for a video.
- Make it easy for your visitors to locate the information they are seeking. Post a title, graphic, and links to your resource lists or articles.
- Keep your resources organized and create a site map, which helps people and search engines alike find your content.
- Follow up with email contact. As I always recommend, create regularly scheduled e-newsletter campaigns. Add a sign-up on every page of your website and use the already created information in your resource lists, articles, and links — place them as teasers in an email and/or newsletter format. Use your e-newsletter and include follow-through links to your website as well as to all your social media outlets.

You are already an expert on caring for those who need in-home care, and by getting an expert in Web design to help you take these several easy steps you can relay helpful information to potential clients and referral sources. Through some strategic planning, you'll discover how updating your website will serve as an online marketing outreach program — educating, informing and driving more traffic to your site. The end result, of course, will be cost-effective and interactive marketing tools to up-sell to existing clients, connect with new leads, and reach a new group of potential employees.

About the Author: Merrill Oritzini, MSSW, is managing director of greencard, a marketing communications company that specializes in monthly marketing programs for the home care and home health industries. Orzini has been active in Internet marketing since its inception. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry and chair of the Private Duty Home Care Association, and serves on the board of the National Association for Home Care & Hospice. Orzini is a frequent national speaker, and can be followed on her blog at www.MerrillOritzini.com or on Twitter @MerrillO.