



PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Are Prospects Choosing Your Practice Online?

by John Sullivan, DDS, AACD Vice President

Like many AACD members, I put a lot of thought (and money) into the design of my Web site. A recent study presented by Sesame Communications at our annual scientific session in Hawaii about how prospective patients choose cosmetic dentists online made me stop and ask: Is my Web investment paying off in new patients?

The hardest part in designing a Web site is knowing what is effective in attracting new patients to the practice. It seems that there are as many ideas about how to create an appealing Web site as there are cosmetic dentists. Until now, there has been no scientific data on the Web site factors that actually lead prospects to call for appointments. The Sesame research shows that some strategies commonly used by cosmetic dentistry Web sites are *likely to drive patients away*. Indeed, of the 88 cosmetic dentists' Web sites reviewed by prospective patients, *80 percent failed to persuade prospects to make appointments*.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in individual sessions with prospects actively looking for a cosmetic dentist online. A national market research firm, Resolution Research, recruited prospective patients using a survey to blind respondents to the purpose of the study, and only consumers whose answers demonstrated that they were currently searching for a cosmetic dentist and looking to make an appointment in the next 60 days were contacted.

Then, each prospective patient was asked to review cosmetic dentists' Web sites in his or her geographic region of the country, thinking out loud while on each site, and the individual sessions were videotaped. Prospects also rated their likelihood of making an appointment with the practice after each review. The videotapes and ratings were later analyzed to compare factors of the successful sites (where prospects said they were very likely to make an appointment) with the unsuccessful

Web sites.

Participant eligibility requirements included:

- Currently searching for a cosmetic dentist online
- Between the ages of 21-59 (90 percent over the age of 30)
- Household income of at least \$60,000 (USD) (majority with \$80,000 (USD) or more)
- Expect to make an appointment within 60 days (majority within 30 days)

WEB SITE FACTORS THAT DRIVE PATIENTS AWAY

To me, the most illuminating findings from the study are the ways in which many cosmetic dentists' Web sites actually turn prospects away from the practice.

The study found that prospects' number one goal on cosmetic dentistry sites is to find information about the procedures available and how these procedures can help them with their cosmetic dentistry needs. Consumers care far less about how the site looks than how quickly the site design gets them to the information they are seeking (although a professional design is, of course, still important). Sites with a simple design and prominent navigation menu were far more likely to gain calls from prospects than sites that devoted large amounts of real estate to large photos, slide shows, and interactive features. Sites that bury the navigation lower on the page frustrate consumers and make a bad impression.

Factors that consistently turn prospects off:

- Intro pages – Force prospects to cross a hurdle to get to your site
- Flash sites with small page size – Don't provide enough space for information
- Pop-ups – Annoying and perceived by consumers as desperate

- Auto-play music and video – Send prospects scrambling to mute
- Hard-to-use menus – Make the practice seem disorganized and unengaged
- Overly-'glam' sites – Perceived as smoke and mirrors, and leave prospects suspicious
- Advertising images – Make sites seem more fluff than substance
- Photos of models – Leave prospects questioning the dentist's expertise
- Hard-to-read pages or overwhelming content – Send prospects on to other sites
- "Coming soon" signs – Suggest that the dentist lacks experience with the thing that's missing
- Coupons – More likely to be perceived as negatives than positives
- Too many "contact us" forms – Evoke a desperate, less-than-reputable practice

WEB SITE FACTORS THAT ATTRACT NEW PATIENTS

The study found that what cosmetic dentistry Web sites really need in order to attract new patients is not a lot of flash and glam, but rather good content presented in a clear, easy-to-read format. Cosmetic dentistry prospects are most interested in finding a dentist who has experience in solving their particular types of problems, demonstrated by the amount of information the site provides on *procedures* and by the *quality of before and after photos* of the dentist's own cases.

Research participants usually went first to the procedures or services page. There, they look for specific information on what problems a procedure solves, what the procedure involves, and how long it takes. A lack of specific information translates to a perception that the dentist lacks expertise and typically sends the prospective patient on to another cosmetic dentist's Web site.

continued on page 15

AACD Affiliate Courses

THE TEXAS ACADEMY OF COSMETIC DENTISTRY

The Porcelain Cases Required for AACD Accreditation

Case Type I, Case Type II, & Case Type III

Dr. Ken Hamlett, Dr. Michael Reece, Dr. John Boyd,
and Phil Watkins, CDT

Friday, July 10, 2009 • 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

Location: The Dallas Cowboys New Stadium, Arlington, Texas
Registration and contact information: Mary Anne Gresham at
972.874.3957

ADVERTISING

If you are interested in placing a classified or display ad in the *Academy Connection* and on the AACD Web site, please send an e-mail to advertising@aacd.com.

ZERO SENSITIVITY WHITENING IS ABSOLUTELY POSSIBLE.



Just pre-whiten with Power Swabs as recommended by Dr. Marty Zase, Accredited Member, AACD. Order using code "AACD." 1-866-966-SMILE or at www.PowerSwabs.com. Free Ipod with full case order (5 kits). Protocol included with every order.

Are Prospects Choosing Your Practice Online?...continued from page 9

Consumers use before and after photos as a primary means of assessing the dentist's expertise. Practice sites are far more likely to attract new patients if the site includes before and after photos that clearly show the dramatic results achieved by the doctor. Before and after photos are most effective when combined with easy-to-read information about the problems solved. However, it's better to omit photos entirely than to show photos that don't clearly demonstrate excellent results.

Once persuaded of the dentist's expertise in solving their specific

problems (via procedure descriptions and photos), prospects typically check out the bio page. Here, they are looking for confirmation that the doctor graduated from good schools, has a wealth of experience, and is up on the latest advances.

MAKE SURE YOUR WEB SITE IS WORKING FOR YOU

Having a Web site is no longer just an option in helping new patients find cosmetic dentistry practices; it's a necessity. The *wrong* Web site design,

however, can turn prospects away. A *great* Web site works 24/7, persuading new patients to contact your practice for an appointment. This study has inspired me to take a new look at my Web site to make sure it's working for my practice, not against it. I'll bet you will want to do the same.

If you missed the Sesame whitepaper or video in Hawaii, you can see them (and get a copy of the whitepaper) by visiting www.cdpatientappealrating.com/aacd. ♦