

by Rex Lei and Diana P. Friedman

Over the past decade, Web sites have become a must-have for the modern orthodontic practice. In the new brave world of the Internet, patients are online 24 hours a day, seven days a week seeking, choosing and connecting with their orthodontist. Twenty-six percent of patients surveyed report that a factor in their choice of orthodontist is that the practice is up to date on technology, including its online presence. Securing visibility online requires first and foremost an effective Web site, which attracts the right patient. Not surprisingly, in a November 2009 Sesame Communications survey of 251 orthodontists, 99 percent stated that their Web site is important to the success of their practice.

The bar has been raised for effectively differentiating and branding your practice online. You're seeing escalating competition from more orthodontists investing in web sites with increasingly more extensive content. Standing out from the crowd has become more challenging. Until 2008, no organization had studied the preference and behavior patterns potential patients display when going online to select an orthodontist. There simply was no solid data to guide you in what qualities and characteristics can make your Web site win in the online marketplace.

The bottom line is that the significant investment made by orthodontists in Web sites has not always yielded the well-branded, differentiated and effective entry point to bring patients into the practice.

What do Patients Need to See in Your Web Site?

In 2008, Sesame Communications sponsored a national study to identify what orthodontic Web site factors lead prospective patients to make appointments with practices, and what factors lead patients to reject practices. Among the key findings from this study was the determination that an orthodontic practice Web site has a mere 90 seconds to capture a new patient. The study further determined the 25 factors, which prospective patients consider when choosing you over other orthodontic practices online. These Top Patient Appeal Rated Web site factors were defined as best strategies^{*1} and include, among other elements, expressing to patients that the practice is warm, personable and patient-centered.

A key finding of the study was that after reviewing the practice home page, prospective patients immediately navigated to read up on the orthodontist, the team and the first visit experience.

The Internet world is fast evolving with consumer behavior and expectations progressing in quantum leaps. Internet-savvy patients look for online sophistication from

1. *Get Found and Get Chosen, White Paper, Sesame Communications, February 2009

all service providers, including health-care professionals. The behavior of prospective patients comparing orthodontic practices based on their Web sites has changed markedly in the past 18 months, as observed by ongoing research. In its most recent study, completed in February 2010, Sesame Communications assessed how the quantity of Web site pages impacts the longevity of patient visits.

Google Analytics data was used to analyze 138,788 page views and aggregate time on 10 selected orthodontic Web sites. The data included only unique visitors and covered a six-month period. All reviewed Web sites had been designed in 2009 and varied in size from 30 to 65 pages.

Patient Orthodontic Practice Web Page Viewing Patterns

All Web sites studied exhibited the same page view distribution. The home page received the most views, followed by pages with decreasing levels of page views.

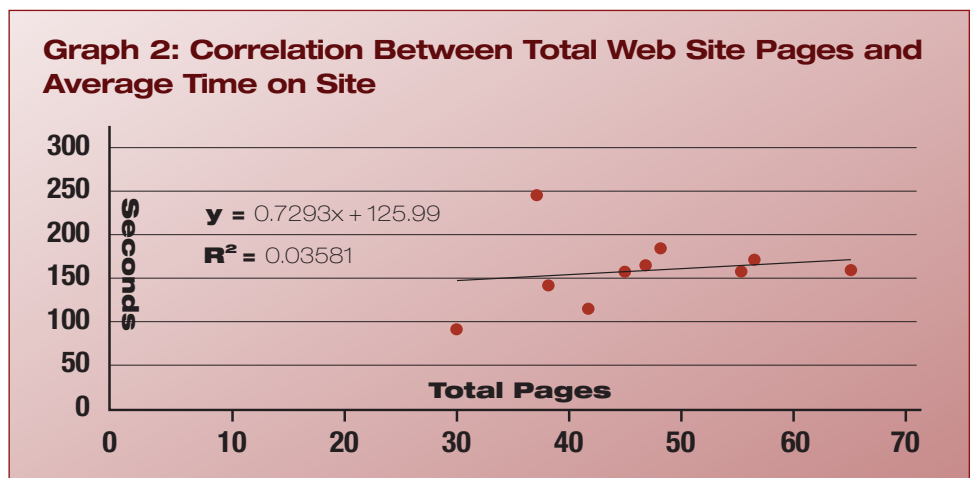
The data in Graph 1 (at right) supports previous findings. The home page was number one, accounting for 30.83 percent of total page views recorded, followed by the Meet-the-orthodontist page (11.8 percent) and Location or Contact page (4.47 percent) and lastly, Meet-the-team (2.94 percent). Clinical information pages ranked low in page views with 2.36 percent or lower.

In this study, the top 10 most-viewed pages accounted for 68.09 percent of total page views recorded. The least-viewed 20 pages of a site accounted for only 7.57 percent of all recorded page views. There are many peripheral pages on a site that receive minimal traffic.

Does Web Site Page Size Impact Visit Longevity?

A significant amount of development and editing time is dedicated to web site content. This research study posed the question of whether it matters to a visitor how many pages are on the Web site? To answer this question, an analysis was performed of the total number of pages tracked in Google Analytics for each site and the average time spent on site (in seconds). This data was then plotted on a scatter graph.

Graph 2 depicts the results of the regression analysis. Although there is a very slight positive correlation between the number of pages in a site and the average time on site, the regression line plotted through the data points had an R-squared of 0.0358. This indicates a very weak relationship between the average time spent on site and the total number of pages that a site has. The average time spent on a site with 30-40 pages was 160 seconds, as compared to 163 seconds on a site with more than 50 pages. This three-second increment is not statistically significant.



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Conclusion

The data strongly suggests that the quality of the top five visited pages determines the effectiveness of a Web site in attracting the right new patient. Patients form an opinion about the practice from the home page as well as information about the doctor(s), and the team. Rarely do they invest time in reviewing clinical information.

A new significant finding of this study is that the number of pages on a Web site does not statistically impact time spent by potential patients on the site. In this study, the one positive outlier in the data, consistently and statistically ranking higher in patient visit time was a smaller Web site with only 36 pages.

Standing out from the crowd does not mean making your Web site bigger and more elaborate. In fact, the truly effective Web site is the site that zeroes in on getting right the few pages that really matter. Sophistication in orthodontic Web sites entails keeping current as consumer behavior changes faster than you can say “Twitter Blog Facebook YouTube.” ■

Author’s Bio

Rex Li is a Search Marketing Specialist at Sesame Communications. With a strong background in economics and web analytics, Rex manages and optimizes solution-based online advertising campaigns using quantitative and data analysis. Rex holds certifications as a Google Adwords Professional and as a Google Analytics Qualified Individual.



Diana P. Friedman is the Vice President of Marketing and Web Services at Sesame Communications. Diana has had an extensive career launching dental innovation for leading manufacturers such as Philips Sonicare, as well as experience as a recognized speaker and practice management consultant.

