6 WAYS TO USE MOBILE TECHNOLOGY TO GROW YOUR PRACTICE IN 2013

A Sesame Guide to Practice Success
You’ve worked hard to make your practice website look great online, but how does it display on your smartphone? Take a moment to pull up your website on your smartphone and evaluate the result for yourself. Unless you have a mobile-optimized website, the outcome of this exercise may be sobering.

Here’s the good news. If you have a website, you have a site that can be accessed by nearly any mobile device with a browser. The bad news? Chances are your site takes too long to upload on a mobile browser. Once loaded, it may not look its best on the small screen. The content often renders the text too small so it is difficult to read without constant zooming and scrolling to navigate. Lastly, the fancier elements of your site that look great on a computer screen, such as flash videos or animation, may appear poorly or not work at all on your smartphone.
This begs the question—why is catering to mobile users important in the first place? Here are some interesting facts:

- Today 110 million Americans own a smartphone, according to comScore, a leading digital media research authority.\(^1\)
- Mobile is now the fastest-growing source of traffic on the Internet.\(^2\)
- In Q4 2011, smartphone shipments overtook PCs, an important milestone that says a lot about the future of modern-day computing.\(^3\)
- One half of all local searches are performed on mobile phones.\(^4\) What’s more, Google has seen mobile search queries grow five times in the last two years.\(^5\)
- By 2014 more people are expected to access the Internet via mobile phones than via desktop computers.\(^6\)
- By 2015 there are expected to be 788 million mobile-only Internet users.\(^7\)

Smartphones have become an indispensable part of our daily lives and are quickly becoming a fundamental part of your practice online presence.
How does this relate to your practice? And how do you leverage the power of mobile? Today, 92 percent of smartphone users seek local information on their device, and 89 percent have taken action after looking up local content. These users are your prospective patients, and they’re searching for a dental care provider while on-the-go. A mobile-optimized website can help ensure your practice doesn’t miss out on these patients by giving them the information they’re looking for quickly, all in an optimal viewing experience for their smartphones.

**The growth of mobile users cannot be ignored by your practice. This guide will share six ways you can leverage mobile technology to grow your practice today.**
1. Optimize your site for mobile, not just desktops

One of the key differences mobile browsing has with desktop browsing is the small screen and touch interface of most modern smartphones. Websites that look great on a large monitor lose their impact, and often, their functionality, when translated to a small screen. In just a few seconds and clicks, a desktop user can browse and interact with your website. For a mobile user to complete the same action, more action is needed—scrolling, zooming in and out, etc. This added effort needed for mobile users, if made frustrating by a difficult or non-functional website, can discourage or deter these users from choosing you as their care provider.

To combat this, it is essential that your website has content, design, and features that accommodate a smaller touch screen interface. This is best accomplished with a mobile-optimized version of the website. The idea is that your website alternates between a desktop or mobile friendly version automatically by detecting the type of device the visitor is using. A mobile-optimized version of your site can help ensure pertinent information is displayed in the right way for all your users, regardless of where they are or what device they’re using to look at your website.
Quick content for on-the-go patients

While a mobile-optimized version of your site will make navigation easier for mobile users, your content must also be written with mobile users in mind. This means focusing on the most important information first, such as contact info and directions. Consider this: the mobile visitors to your website are often on-the-go; they’re the patients waiting in line at the coffee shop or sitting on the bus on their morning commute. These patients have only a few moments to get the most important details from your website, and by focusing on this info first, you’re making it easy for them to choose you.

For your mobile site, make sure to keep practice details brief, and contact information front and center. Keep the text on each page concise. Add links to your social networks and testimonials to allow the prospective patient to get a glimpse at what makes your practice unique.
3 Don’t make patients wait for large images to load

According to a 2011 Compuware survey, nearly 60 percent of consumers said they expect a website to load on their mobile phone in three seconds or less. Additionally, only 50 percent of those surveyed said they would wait a mere five seconds, or less, for a mobile website to load before exiting.9 Bottom line, your mobile website needs to load quickly. The truth is, a slow-loading website just won’t cut it in this fast paced, digital world. Not only can a slow-loading site be expensive for users with limited data plans, but it wastes time and can frustrate the user, most likely causing them to abandon your site and move on, perhaps even to a competitor’s site.

Ensure the images on your mobile website are small and used only where needed. Avoid fancy animations and videos on your mobile site, as these will slow down the load time considerably, and may not even work on some devices.
Part of catering to patients well online is recognizing that some patients wish to communicate via email. This is often initiated by the contact form on your website. It is always advisable to keep your contact form as short as possible, as a long form with many fields can be intimidating and time consuming for a prospective patient to complete. This issue is amplified for mobile users, who are using a touch keypad to input their information.

To avoid frustrating your mobile users, keep your form down to basic contact info only: Name, email, phone number, etc. Leave the detailed questions for the initial phone call.
5 Don’t hide content behind multiple clicks

Desktop users may click three or more times to access content they seek on your website, but smartphone users may only click twice before giving up and moving on to a competitor’s site. Consumers generally do not have much patience with websites and will tend to move on if the information sought is not clearly and easily accessible on the first page. This is particularly true on mobile sites. According to Google, 40 percent of users turned to a competitor’s mobile site after a bad experience.10

The most important goal of your website should be to drive patients to call or email your practice. So ensure the contact information is prominent on every page, especially the home page.
Make connecting with the practice easy

The goal of your website should be to drive new patients to contact your practice and set up an appointment. A distinct advantage of mobile websites is the ability to allow a web page to initiate a phone call.

Include a click to call button that allows patients to call your practice with just one click—no need to type in a phone number at all. This adds enormous convenience and simplicity for a patient to make that all-important first call. Ensure you’ve prominently featured the click to call button on every page of your website.

The same concept can be applied to maps and directions. Besides the click to call button, add a “Get Directions” button that links directly to your office address on Google Maps or another online map provider.

Conveniences like these show patients how much you value them and their time, and significantly reduce barriers to contact you.
Final Thoughts:

Because the user experience of navigating a website on a smartphone is vastly different than on a personal computer, it poses new challenges for your practice to optimize your marketing and patient engagement efforts. With the wide use of mobile devices today, consumers have become more sophisticated and expect quick transactions that work flawlessly, every time. For your dental practice, this means you must cater directly to this growing group of on-the-go patients with a mobile-optimized website.

In this day and age when mobile Internet is outpacing desktop Internet usage, optimizing your website for these patients is critical to maintaining an effective and competitive practice, and ensuring that you continue to convert prospective patients into booked appointments.

References