Whitepaper

13 WARNING SIGNS
YOUR DENTAL WEBSITE NEEDS HELP

FUTUREDONTICS
Parent Company of 1-800-DENTIST

13 WARNING SIGNS THAT
YOUR WEBSITE NEEDS HELP

Your website is one of the most important dental marketing tools at your disposal. For new patients, it's likely the first impression they get of your practice. (And if you're not savvy, it might be the only impression they get). For existing patients, your website is a powerful tool to get them back into the office – as well as a way for them to refer you to friends and family.

Even if you already have a website, it's important to realize that not all sites are created equal. Today's patients expect modern design, rich features and integration with new technologies like smartphones, tablets and social networks. And they're increasingly likely to abandon a site that lacks these traits. More importantly, the Web is changing at the speed of light, and your site may now be out of date. While years ago, you could leave your website basically untouched, today you need to make sure it continuously evolves along with changes to the Web (and the expectations of your increasingly tech-savvy patients). Otherwise, you risk falling behind the curve and losing potential new patients before they ever reach your office.

If all this sounds overwhelming, relax. There are easy solutions on the market to upgrade your website and keep it up-to-date year after year. But the first step is recognizing that your site has fallen behind. Below are the top warning signs that your dental website needs help…

WARNING SIGN #1:
YOUR SITE DOESN'T INTEGRATE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

By now, having social features on your website isn't just expected, it's essential. Facebook is the second most popular site in the world and YouTube is the third.[1] So even if you're not using social networking sites in your personal life, your practice needs to have a presence on them – and that presence needs to be fully integrated into your website. Otherwise, you risk losing relevance and looking outdated to patients who visit these sites on a daily basis.

First, every website needs prominent links to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (plus other social media sites as they gain popularity). These should be presented as invitations to interact with your practice on the various social networks -- "Like us on Facebook, "Follow us on Twitter" etc. After all, 51 percent of consumers who "fan" brands on social networks say they're likely to buy that product or service since becoming a fan.[2] Next, make sure the great content you post on your site is reflected on your social media pages, and vice versa. When you post a new promotion or coupon on your website, for example, also extend that offer to Facebook and Twitter. And when you create YouTube videos with dental information your patients will value – embed those videos within your website.

Finally, carry over the look and feel of your website to all social media pages. Ask your webmaster to provide branded social media "skins" for each site that reflect the same design as your practice website. That way, whether a patient is interacting with you via your website, your Facebook page, your mobile site, or any other source, they are presented with a consistent, uniform brand.
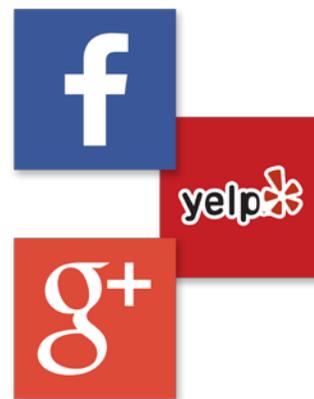
WARNING SIGN #2:
YOU DON'T HAVE A MOBILE-DEDICATED SITE

Does your site display beautifully on a mobile phone, with your most important information easily readable at the top? Do you have a specific version that was built and designed to be usable on all mobile devices? If the answer to any of these questions is no, your website needs an upgrade. Simply put, a conventional site that's hard or frustrating to read on a mobile phone, will lose business. By 2014, mobile internet usage will be more popular than desktop internet usage, and this trend is expected continue.[3]

NOTE: Many dentists are told their site is "mobile optimized," but this is not enough. "Optimized" simply means the page will adjust to the size of a phone screen (which usually renders it unreadable). You need a dedicated mobile site, specially designed to be easy to read and use from any mobile device.

Here's why this is so crucial. According to Google, two thirds of consumers report they're more likely to buy from a mobile-friendly site. Even more important: More than 60 percent say they'll abandon a mobile site if they don't see what they want right away.[4] That means your website could actually be driving people away.

If you're behind the curve on mobile, this should be a top priority.

WARNING SIGN #3:
YOU'RE STILL USING FLASH

Years ago, Flash was a popular platform for adding animation and interactivity to websites. It had its day, but that day is over and done. Adobe, its parent company, isn't even developing Flash beyond its current implementation. [5]

Why is it so important to avoid Flash? It doesn't work on iPhones or iPads. Sites that use Flash show up as a black screen, an error message or broken images. That's one of the reasons why, according to one expert, "Flash intros are almost extinct. They are so bad that even the most clueless Web designers won't recommend them."[6]
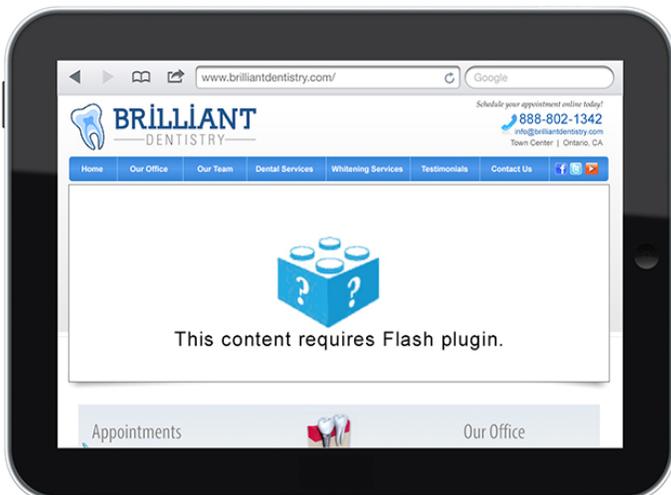
There are a host of other reasons to avoid Flash too. Flash sites fall apart when visitors actually use them (back buttons don't work, highlighting text is impossible, you can't increase font size or bookmark a page). Using Flash makes it more difficult for search engines to find your site, more difficult to cull information for Web Analytics, and prevents your website from coming up in search engine site previews. Flash doesn't work consistently in all browsers. And updating a Flash site is difficult and requires Flash skills.[7] As if that weren't enough, patients often disable Flash on their computers in order to avoid Flash-based advertising. This list goes on and on.

Bottom line: If your site still uses Flash, you need a new site.

WARNING SIGN #4:
YOU HAVE NO CALLS TO ACTION

If you see your website as just a page full of information, you're missing huge opportunities. **Make sure to include obvious calls to action – inviting your patients to call, email, make an appointment or just learn more.**

Your website is a way to get new and existing patients into the chair. Think of it less as a static advertisement and more as an active and ongoing conversation.

Both your desktop and mobile website need the obvious contact information (phone number, fax, address), but it's also key to have calls to action – graphics or text to entice prospective patients to click, getting them one virtual step closer to your office. This is a must. Even better, having online appointment requests gives them an immediate way to take action (while their motivation is high).

WARNING SIGN #5:
YOUR SITE LOADS SLOWLY

According to a recent study, 40 percent of consumers will abandon a website that takes more than three seconds to load. That's less time than it took you to read this sentence! The study also shows that **the longer a page takes to load, the higher the likelihood visitors will leave.[8]**

In today's fast-paced media landscape, a slow-loading website is an unvisited website. If your site loads slowly, it could damage your response rate and irritate prospective patients enough to drive them away. The New York Times reported that people will visit a website less often if it is slower than a close competitor by more than 250 milliseconds.[9] That's faster than the blink of an eye. Your website needs to deliver quickly.
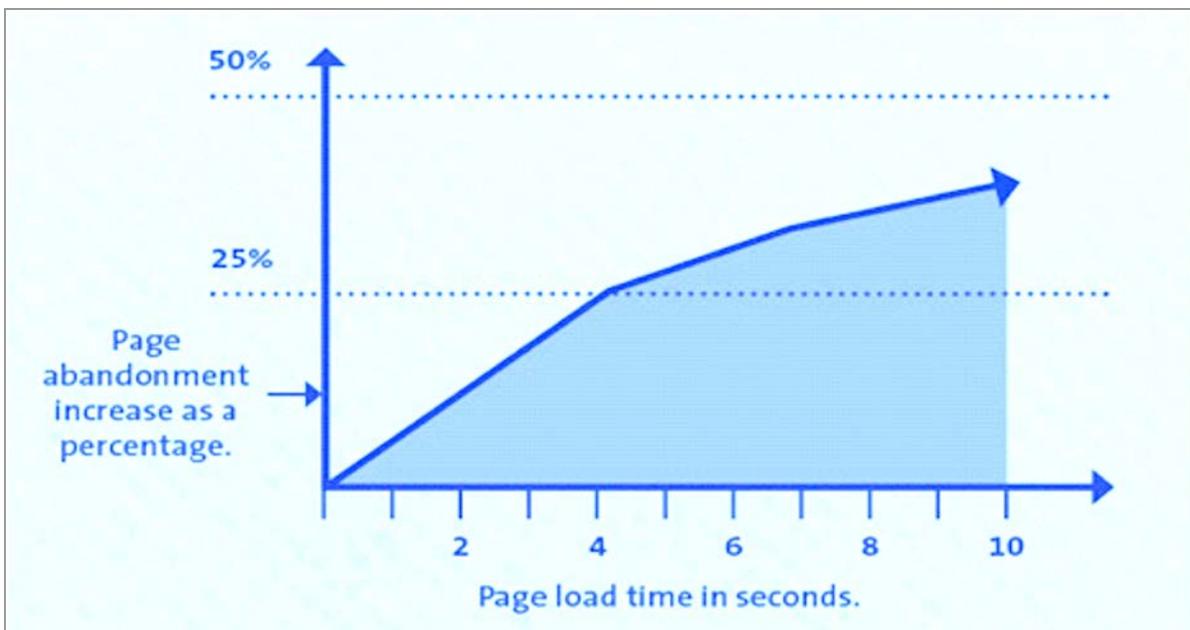
Source: http://blog.kissmetrics.com/loading-time/

WARNING SIGN #6:
YOU'RE NOT SHOWING YOUR REVIEWS

The Internet is no place for modesty. Positive online reviews are the best word of mouth you can get, so make sure they're featured on your site. According to a Yahoo! survey, 83 percent of consumers say that online reviews influence their perceptions of companies.[10] Patients expect to see reviews; they use them to make decisions.

A recent Nielsen study showed that online consumer reviews are the second most trusted source of brand information and messaging, with 70 percent of respondents indicating they trust online opinions. Randall Beard, global head of Advertiser Solutions at Nielsen says, "Consumers around the world continue to see recommendations from friends and online consumer opinions as by far the most credible."[11]

But here's the key: These need to be real reviews from a credible 3rd party site, like Yelp. Many dentists will manually post patient testimonials online, but this is not the same. Unless the feedback comes from a real reviews site (where users can post authentic, unedited comments), these stories lack credibility. Remember, new patients will seek out these reviews one way or another, so featuring them right on your site gives them all the information they need to choose your practice, all in one location. The best Web services will automatically pull in your reviews from the major 3rd party sites, so if you're unsure about how to integrate with Yelp, Google+ and other reviews sites, find a provider who will do this work for you.
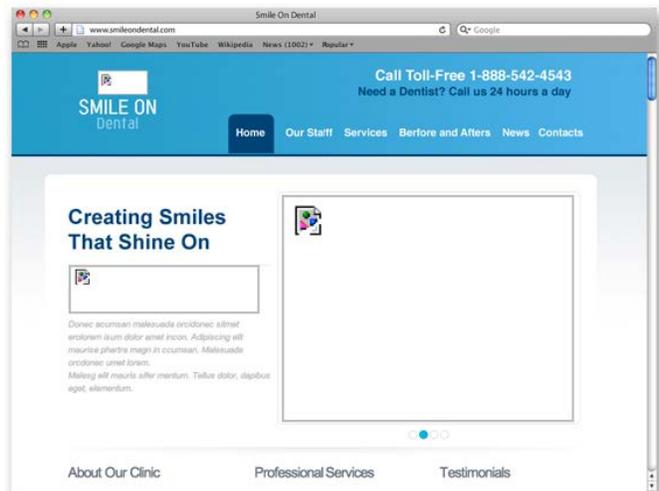
WARNING SIGN #7:
YOUR SITE DOESN'T WORK WITH ALL BROWSERS

Your site may be award-worthy when you view it in your office, but the most beautiful design is useless if it doesn't work for its intended audience – no matter how they access the Internet.

Not everyone has the same Web browser. What looks great in Internet Explorer may look like a chaotic mess to a visitor using Firefox. The images may not load for someone using Safari. Almost 40 percent of Internet users have browsers other than Internet Explorer, making cross-browser compatibility more important than ever.[12]

There's no way to know which browser your clients will be using, so make sure your site renders well across them all. Check your site in Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, and Internet Explorer. Do your images load? Does the "Request an Appointment" form work? Check out every little corner of your site for functionality and aesthetics. Then have your friends check. Then have their friends check. Make sure it works.

And here's a helpful hint: if your website has a message telling viewers "This site is best viewed in [a specific browser]," that's an indicator that you likely need a new site.

WARNING SIGN #8:
YOU DON'T POST FRESH, DYNAMIC CONTENT

Patients see your website as an extension of your practice, so it's important that it feels active and inviting. If your content seems stale, like it hasn't been updated in years, it's as if they arrived at your office to find the lights off and the door locked. **Show them that you're engaged and open for business by keeping the content up to date.** This can be as easy as featuring a monthly promotion or coupon, posting holiday-themed photos or having a blog with regular posts. Also make sure that changes to your hours, staff or contact information are immediately reflected online. The important thing is that patients feel they've arrived at a thriving online forum. This doesn't have to take a lot of time, just a little attention on a regular basis. Of course, this also leads us to another important warning sign…

WARNING SIGN #9:
YOU CAN'T EDIT YOUR WEBSITE YOURSELF

You shouldn't be at the mercy of a webmaster every time you need to make a change. Even if you have a great webmaster, your site should have an easy content management system where any member of your practice can replace a photo, update text, or post a promotion or a coupon 24/7.

At the bare minimum, you should be able to make text changes immediately. And this should be as easy as point and click. But ideally, your site should also have a simple drag-and-drop interface AND an excellent support team to help you make changes at any time. If updating your site is difficult or expensive, you need a new provider. **Make it easy, make sure you can do it yourself, and make sure you don't have to pay extra for the "privilege" of updating your website.**

WARNING SIGN #10:
YOUR DESIGN LOOKS DATED

Is your website design flat and square? Does the text move, scroll, blink, or is it in multiple fonts? Is there clipart? Are there pages and pages of text? Does your website have a visitor counter? If you answered yes to any of these questions,
your Web design is out of date.

I**f it's been more than three years since you've updated your site, you're sending the wrong message to patients. You're suggesting to patients that your practice is out of date as well.**

A website's design lifespan is about three to five years. If you go over that time without updates, web trends have likely passed you by. Remember, your site is often the first impression patients get of your practice. Make it a good one.

Replace an outdated site with a modern design!

WARNING SIGN #11:
YOU HAVE A SPLASH PAGE OR MUSIC PLAYING

When people go to your website, does a "loading" icon appear? Is there a movie, some music, or some animated images, but nothing useful on the landing page? This is called a splash page. It's just an extra step patients have to navigate through to get to their destination, and most users agree that it is nothing but annoying. It's often annoying enough to deter them from ever returning.

Caleb Whitmore, CEO of Analytics Pros, says, **"If you have a splash page when users enter, you're probably causing half the people to leave."**[13]

The same goes for music that plays when the site loads. You never know where your audience is going to be when they view your site, or what their musical taste is. Looped music isn't welcoming, it's annoying. Let your prospective patients get where they want to go quickly and quietly. Avoid unnecessary fanfare that slows them down or may turn them off.

WARNING SIGN #12:
YOUR SITE USES OUTDATED SEO TRICKS

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of adapting your website to increase traffic from search engines such as Google and Yahoo. These search engines are key. If patients search for a dental practice on Google, you want your practice to come up right away; it could mean big business for you. Because the Web is constantly evolving, you need to keep abreast of changes to search engine operation and make sure your website still ranks.
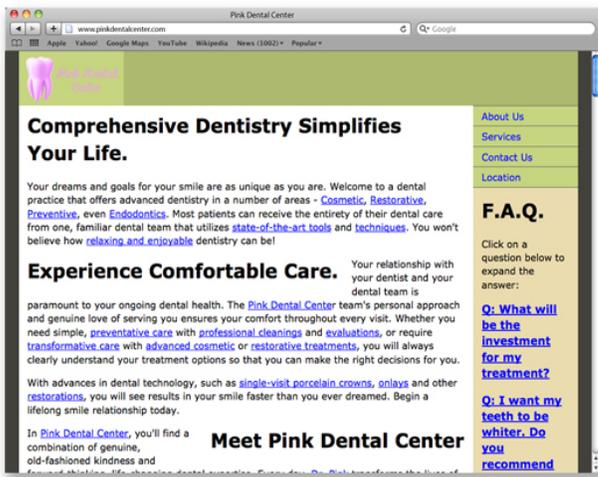
Years ago, filling the text on your website with hyperlinks, like in the image to the left, was a good way to trick search engines into ranking your site. That doesn't work anymore.

Google's content filter carefully screens the content of you site, and using outdated SEO tricks like this could keep your site from ranking highly in Google. Other obsolete tricks that can result in your website being screened out by filters include duplicating content throughout the site, having a low amount of original content or using unnatural language (trying to artificially add in key words for higher SEO).

If your website uses old SEO tricks, you need to immediately update (or replace) it. After all, the best website does no good if it can't be found.

WARNING SIGN #13:
YOU'RE BEING CHARGED TOO MUCH

Of course you want to invest in a great site – but some companies will over inflate their costs, thinking you'll never know the difference. Even worse, they'll charge extra fees for things that should be free – making changes to your site, branding, social media features and, most importantly, support!

Always check to make sure you're not being charged hidden fees. Your website is a living, breathing thing and you should be able to interact with it as much you want, whether that means editing your photos, adding a special offer, customizing the design, or just asking questions. Make sure you work with a trusted company who has the infrastructure and expertise to easily host your site, give you unlimited phone support and make automatic updates – without having to charge you hidden fees to offset all that service.

SUMMARY

There's no question that your website is a powerful connection between your practice and your patients. To get the most out of that connection, it needs to be up to date and well optimized, with features that tap into the power of social media, patient reviews and mobile devices. And just as important, your site should be easy to use and customize, without additional charges for support. Check your own site against these 13 warning signs – and if it's in need of an upgrade, make it a priority. If you don't yet have a website, make it your first priority!

Here's another important tip: Don't try to do this yourself (or have a friend build a site for you). It's faster, cheaper and more reliable to work with a professional provider of dentistry websites. If you're currently using a website provider, here are some important questions to ask, when deciding whether they're right for you:

- Are they specialized in dentistry and dental websites?
- Do they offer a true dedicated mobile site, optimized for smartphones and tablets?
- Are they fully integrated with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube?
- Will the company host your site on a reliable server?
- Is there existing dental content to choose from?
- Can the company do all the set-up/work for you if you choose?
- Are you able to easily edit the site yourself (with easy point-and-click interface)?
- Can you fully customize the look and feel across desktop, mobile and social media?
- Will you be charged additional fees for support or editing?

Archived materials provide general marketing advice and may contain references that are no longer current today. After viewing the techniques, theories and materials presented herein, you must make your own decisions about specific marketing practices and exercise personal professional judgment regarding the need for further education. Please consult your legal professional to ensure compliance with applicable laws in your jurisdiction.

ABOUT FUTUREDONTICS®

Futuredontics®, parent company of **1-800-DENTIST®** and **Patient Activator®,** is the nation's leading provider of dental marketing services. Since 1986, the Los Angeles-based company has dedicated itself to developing powerful products that help dental practices thrive.

Recognized as dentistry's premier new patient leads program, the company's flagship 1-800-DENTIST service has helped over 9 million dental patients nationwide connect with member dentists. Every day, thousands of patients get personally matched to dentists through their 24/7 call center or via 1800dentist.com.

PatientActivator — Futuredontics' communications, social and online reputation solution — increases production and boosts the practice's online presence with automated appointment confirmations and tools for marketing, social media, reviews and much more.

Futuredontics also offer an extensive library of dental marketing resources – including whitepapers, webinars and videos. With unlimited live customer support, dentistry's best marketing products and North America's largest dental referral website, Futuredontics is the proven way for dental practices to grow their patient base and increase production year after year.

For more information about our dental marketing services visit us at

www.futuredontics.com

To get a FREE copy of any our additional resources, including whitepapers, videos, webinars and more, visit futuredontics.com/MoreResources.

For info about our suite of dental marketing products, call 1-855-230-1313.

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