

# Create and update your office web site

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**W**hen you have a few moments to spare, look at the web sites of some orthodontic practices in your area. You will learn a lot. What makes a web site attractive, educational, and easy to navigate? Will a good web site help build your practice? And most importantly, what words, visuals, and sounds can be pulled together to accurately portray your practice?

Before starting this editorial, I planned to look at 1 web site in each state, starting with Arizona and ending with Wyoming. Web sites are a way to attract new patients, so practitioners who are trying to grow their practices—younger clinicians and those working in more competitive areas of the country— seem to have the best sites. Some searches were disappointing: for example, when the first page to pop up was a yellow-pages evaluation form inviting me to critique the orthodontist's office. I encourage you to see what is being said about your office. Most of the comments I saw were positive, but it can be difficult to get rid of an inaccurate review; you can, however, ask patients or friends to enter a few positive comments to add balance.

Surprisingly, I began looking forward to the professionally designed web sites. More than a few companies develop sites for orthodontists, and they are good at it. I liked the use of sound, especially videos with audio, to describe what I was seeing. Some sites had loud music that hit you the minute the home page came up. I don't know about you, but a party atmosphere is not what I am looking for in a professional office. I liked the appropriate use of color and images in many sites but eventually learned to identify 1 company that designed orthodontic sites because different sites had the same look—even the same before and after patient photos. This is inappropriate in my book. As much as these companies charge, they should be able to create some individuality for each practice.

You might know by now that I value the development of evidence-based practice to the extent possible. As I read through the educational materials on various web sites, I was sensitive to the choice of words used to describe expected treatment outcomes. I was pleased with the cautious approach I saw on most sites. Offices were clear about what they promised as a result of early treatment, using terms such as *influencing jaw growth*, *harmonizing dental arches*, *reducing the risk of trauma*, and *improving self-esteem*. But I was surprised to see many offices claim that their fixed appliances would result in shorter treatment times. I try to keep up on the literature but have not yet seen any good studies to prove reduced treatment times. I am fairly certain that company claims of short treatment times are based on Class I problems, but people with severe Class II malocclusions are also interested a short treatment.

Many of the sites I looked at were interactive, allowing a patient or parent to look up their financial balance or the time of their next appointment. Some sites even allow patients to see how many award points they have accumulated for compliance with brushing, flossing, and wearing removable appliances. Orthodontists who lecture regularly or publish articles could reference these activities on their web sites. Most publishers, including the *AJO-DO* and our publisher Elsevier, allow you to post articles on a personal web site, as long as they are properly referenced.

To summarize my thoughts on what might help you to develop or improve your web site:

- Look for a professional company with broad dental web-site experience.
- Focus on an identifying characteristic of your practice to create an overall design and function.
- Determine what you can contribute to the site, such as photos, videos, music, audios, and newsletters to create a unique experience.
- Involve your staff in making some decisions.
- Plan to build on your site over time by adding new material.