

Web marketing explained

With more people turning to the internet to search for care, a user-friendly website is becoming more important. Elizabeth Ziemba and Jason Summerfield discuss what will make a website work for you.



Every day more people log onto the internet searching for reliable information about care services. Businesses that do not have a website or whose website needs updating are missing opportunities to attract customers and deliver key messages about their services. Are your customers able to find your business and, if so, what impression are they getting about your services?

Why have a website?

Overall, a well-designed and executed website should be a cost-effective way of projecting your image, attracting new customers, providing relevant information about your services and offering customer service for existing clients.

A website is an affordable way to have essential information about your business available to customers anywhere in the world, all the time. A website can be updated easily information like brochures or move in packages can be available. It can be a convenient tool for your business as well as your current and prospective customers.

Let them come to you

The internet allows people to find you rather than you having to find them. Locating the right customer at the right time in the right location can be a tiresome, expensive process delivering mixed results. Customers who find you on the internet have pre-screened themselves by locating your website, reading about your services and contacting you. They are a solid, qualified lead for your business.

Websites level the playing field between large, medium and small businesses. A professional looking, effective website instils confidence especially for smaller businesses who can convey a solid image. Your website should help you compete more effectively regardless of the size of your company.

Get ahead of your competitors by setting up or polishing your website. Many care homes still do not have websites. Don't be one of them. Utilise all the marketing tools available to your business with a website being a key to unlocking market potential and staying competitive.

Know your customers

Use your website to understand your current and prospective customers better. Simple surveys as well as analytical tools are available for you to use as part of your site. By analysing survey results and information about who visits your site, the words they search, which parts of the site are of most interest, you can improve your site content and be more responsive to the needs of your clients.

Think of your website as an integral part of your customer service department. To save people the trouble of calling for basic information, create a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section on your website as well as providing complete contact information and a map of your location. Provide forms online so

at special events or as part of the everyday services your business provides. Remember that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Whether you are thinking about developing a website or are re-evaluating the one you have, a website is a vital part of effective marketing.

What makes a good website?

Content is king. The information and messages you put on the website are the most important part of your site. While flashy visuals are eye-catching, providing reliable, relevant, easily understood information is key to getting people interested in your services. What you say and how you

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that people can download them and complete them at the customer's convenience.

Put your best foot forward. Your website should be a showcase for any specialised services that you provide that your competitors don't. Do you have dementia services? Award winning staff? Unique therapy programmes? These types of distinguishing characteristics are perfect material for your website to maximise its potential as an effective marketing tool.

Create a feeling about your service that reflects your business ethic to support your brand identity. Social care services are all about people, not buildings. Make sure your website conveys the message that you and your staff provide warm, reassuring and competent care through the careful selection of photographs and videos of residents, staff and families

say it will determine who will take the next step and contact you to engage your services.

A good visual design is one that is clean and simple yet pleasing to the eye. First impressions are key and should encourage visitors to read the content. Keep in mind that visitors may have visual impairments so keep pages uncluttered and make sure the font style and size is easily readable on screen. The right design will draw in visitors, making them feel comfortable and allowing easy access to your information.

Ease of use

Thoughtful web design allows for ease of navigation. In other words, how intuitive is it for the user to find the information needed? Your site's visitors are on a mission to find information about what your business



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offers and it's your job to help them find it with minimal effort. The easier the site is to navigate, the more likely it is that the user will find the information they're looking for and the more likely they'll stay around long enough to become a prospective customer. Think of how long you are willing to wait to find the answer to a question on the internet – one click? Two clicks? If you want information within one to two clicks, so do your customers. Make sure your navigation is logically organised and consistent across the entire site for an optimal user experience.

Tell people about your company. In a business like social care, the people who deliver the services are a key part. Prospective and current customers want to know who is involved in the care of their family member or friend. We are curious beings. Include brief biographies about the owners, managers, and staff emphasising professional credentials, relevant experience, awards and ties to the community. Provide some history about the company and details about the Board of Directors and Advisory Board. All of these details add credibility to your business and foster confidence in your ability to deliver quality care services.

Make contact

Provide contact information for key members of staff identifying the types

of enquiries they handle. For example, indicate who is responsible for admissions, hiring, public relations and so on. Contact information is not just the mailing address and general telephone number but also includes direct dial phone numbers, email addresses and fax number. An email form is also an excellent means to let users conveniently send enquiries directly from the website, while you have their attention. A map and written directions pinpoint your location and help people find you.

Ask for contact information for the people who are viewing your website. Give visitors the option to sign up for more information including initiations to educational or social events at your care home. Your site is an excellent way to develop a database of prospective customers or to maintain contact with your existing clients and their families and friends.

Web design

The last two points about website design are for you, the business owner. Make sure the site is search engine optimised. In other words, make sure the website is designed so that search engines like Google and Yahoo can find your content. If the search engines can find you, so can the average internet user.

Finally, make sure your website has the behind-the-scenes tools to collect statistics, track visitors and what they do and analyse the results

of visitors' activities. Don't be afraid of this feature. These tools allow you to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your website so that you can improve its content and effectiveness. Google Analytics is a free tool that is easy to use and will help you.

Commit to the investment

The cost of developing, designing, launching and maintaining websites is at a level where the smallest business can have a presence on the internet that can increase business. A website does require the investment of time and money to ensure it is done well, but so does every marketing project. While only the most computer savvy might be tempted to design a website as a do-it-yourself project, working with a competent web designer can be a wise investment, especially if you understand why your business should have a site and the components of an effective website.

Be consistent

As a final point, a smart web designer will ensure that the overall look of your website is consistent with other marketing materials such as brochures, direct mail, business cards and print advertising. Use the same logo, font styles and colours to promote a consistent recognisable brand identity across media, much in the same way you recognise Coca-Cola without having to read the actual name. Reinforce consistent messages about your business throughout all of your marketing efforts so that the messages will stick within the minds of your audience, helping your business grow. After all, that is the measure of success of any marketing campaign. **CMM**

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