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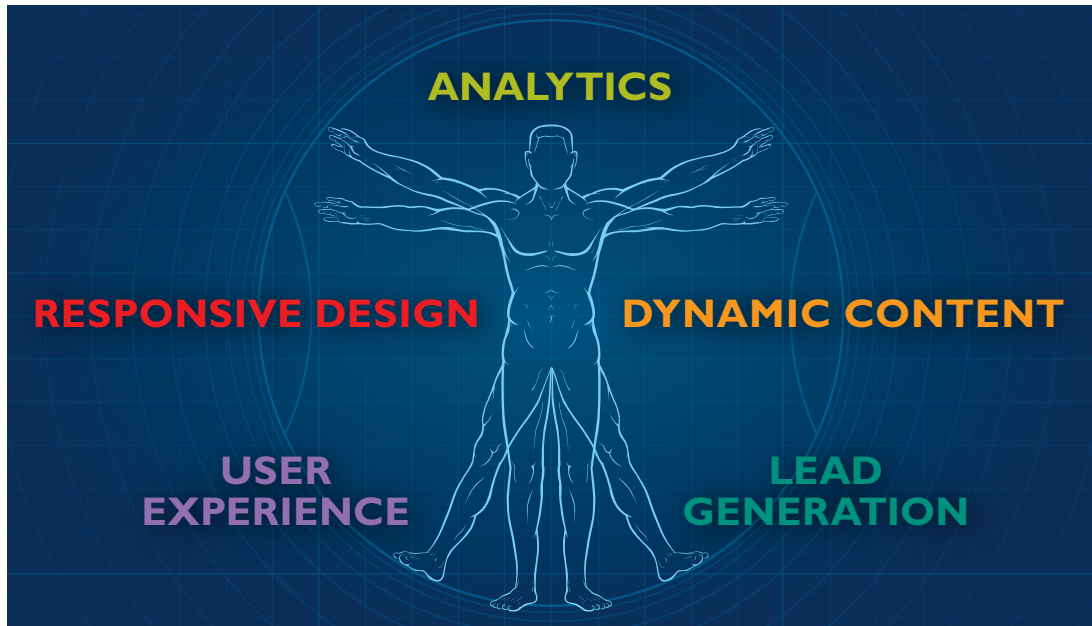
WEBSITE ANATOMY 101

THE LATEST ON HOW TO BUILD A HOSPITAL WEBSITE THAT DRIVES PATIENT VOLUME

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The digital landscape has evolved dramatically over the past 20 years, and so has the role of websites. What started as a template that served as an online directory has become the definition of your organization's brand, culture and future. Patients will visit your hospital's website and they will judge your organization by their ability to easily navigate your site and quickly find pertinent information. Hospitals and physician practices cannot underestimate the importance of a positive web experience to increase patient volume and retention. A good website will also tell your organization if it's meeting goals.

This white paper outlines five elements of healthcare websites that will give your organization significant ROI.

Designing a great user experience

A good hospital website should be designed with the patient experience in mind. Think about why most patients will be visiting your organization's website: to find a new doctor, to find your office locations, hours and contact info, and to read general health information. As a result, these three pools of information should be easy to find and navigate on your site. For example, the find a doc functionality should allow patients to find a physician or office near their current location (based on the GPS of their phone) and all locations should be clickable and open up in a maps app to give patients directions.

Outside of functionality for patients on the go, the design of your hospital's website should be clean and minimal, highlighting your brand promise and the information important to patients. Navigation and layout should be intuitive. Social media channels should be easily accessible through large, uncluttered buttons. If your hospital is located in a rural area, strip down your site to be mindful of load time in areas of limited Internet access.

Christopher Butler, the COO of Newfangled made a great point about web design: "A designer may recognize the fundamental role that design plays in making great experiences possible, but most people don't. But they do recognize when design fails."

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>
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> *COO of Newfangled*

Responsive design for multi-platform access

A website with responsive design means that it automatically resizes and reorganizes based on the screen size of the user. This means that whether it's on a desktop computer, tablet or mobile device, it always looks beautiful and doesn't require any pinching or zooming to be legible. The reality is that patients are constantly on their phones – whether they're in line at the grocery store, sitting on their couches watching TV or out to dinner – and if your website isn't responsive to their mobile screen, they'll X out. It's not only about convenience, but about the ability to access the information they need at a time when they need it. If they can't get it from you, they'll get it from someone else.

If that's not convincing enough, Google recently announced that as of April 2015, the search engine will penalize sites that aren't responsive. This means that if you want your hospital to stay in organic search results, you have no choice but to implement a responsive design. To find out if Google deems your site mobile-friendly, take the test.

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Dynamic content for search ranking

Due to complicated Google algorithms, it's no longer an option for websites to remain static. Organic ranking in search results will suffer if your organization's website isn't updated with quality information on a regular basis. The easiest way to comply with this rule is to implement content marketing, i.e., blogs, newsletters and articles. This is a great way to demonstrate thought leadership by publishing content about general health information and specialties that your patients may be searching for. Get inspiration for topics based on questions your current patients ask – if they're asking, there's definitely a group of prospective patients wondering the same things.

Like in the world of academia, healthcare organizations exist in a 'publish or perish' digital world. Stay relevant and fill the void of care information using your physicians' expertise.

Lead generation and marketing automation

The first three points we've discussed focus on getting patients to your hospital's website. However, if you don't have some type of lead generation strategy in place, you're missing a lot of opportunities to further engage these web visitors. The simplest way to generate leads is to offer content that requires a patient to enter his or her email address to gain access. This can be accomplished through an email newsletter sign-up form, a quiz or evaluation that requires an email to get results, or an informational white paper that requires an email address for download. No matter how your organization acquires leads, the important thing is what you do with them.

Email marketing may not immediately come to mind for hospitals, but the options are limitless.

An organization could email:

- new blog posts or articles published
- information about new physicians joining a practice
- new practices opening
- information about new programs or site renovations

To get more personal, physician practices could use marketing automation to nurture leads. This includes setting up lead scoring, which assigns different patients points depending on which pages of your website they visit, specific content they download and even their medical history, and then entering them into automatic email campaigns to get them to schedule that next appointment.

Here are a few types of automatic email campaigns to convert patients:

- reminders to schedule routine tests
- appointment reminders
- custom health information tailored to that patient's needs or conditions

Hospitals may not be able to offer coupons or deals, but that doesn't mean they don't have a compelling offer – one's good health.

Analytics & metrics to refine web strategy

Once a hospital has all of this in place, it's time to track it with marketing analytics tools. These tools allow organizations to track their number of site visitors, how long they stay, how many pages they visit and whether they converted into leads. Some of the more advanced platforms, such as Pardot, Marketo, Hubspot, Act-On and SharpSpring offer lead generation tools, lead management, detailed analytics, email marketing and social publishing. If your hospital isn't ready to make the financial commitment to one of these platforms, you can get away with Google Analytics as a bare minimum.

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For example, through analytics you will be able to track pieces of content that drive a lot of volume to your site, emails with exceptionally high CTRs and specialties that are generating a lot of interest. This intel will allow your organization to tweak and repair its marketing strategy to increase its ROI.

Website design for healthcare consumers

The goal of any hospital website is to attract patients, engage them with relevant health information and get their permission to continue sending them marketing information. This all starts with intuitive design and a positive user experience. Functionality is more important than ever, especially across multiple platforms. Based on Google's latest algorithm change, responsive design is no longer an option if your hospital hopes to stay in organic search results. Bolster your efforts with thought leadership and an inbound marketing strategy to promote engagement. Last but not least, track your website's overall performance with analytics. Implementing these five components into your hospital's current web design will help to drive patient volume and improve your ROI. ■

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