



Web site 101 for your balance program

Web sites have become an essential part of doing business in any industry, including in a balance program. Your Web site serves as a powerful marketing tool – it's the first place new customers go to learn about your services, and it's where your current clients go for updates and sharing ideas.

Not having a site – or having a poorly designed one – can cost you a substantial amount of business. Your consumers simply will move to another site, with one quick click. There are a number of professional firms that specialize in building Web sites, so be sure to consult an expert before building or refreshing your site.

So what makes a good Web site? Here are a few basic tips that will get you started in the right direction.

1. Make sure they're designed for your customer.

The goal is to make your customers comfortable on your site. They should be able to find the information they're looking for without having to work too hard. The overall look and feel of the site should be positive, polished and professional.

Your site should answer some basic questions that answer who you are, what services you provide, and how to find you. Make sure the content is written to your audience and not for your internal use. If your target audience is patients, for example, it's important not to overwhelm them with technical jargon and long clinical explanations.

2. Keep it easy and readable.

The site design should have plenty of white space, so that it's appealing for people to visit. Nothing turns off a Web site reader more than long, dense blocks of text. Limit text to one or two fonts with at least 12-point type, so that the pages are readable and it doesn't look as if you're trying to cram too much into a small space. Less definitely is more!

Your Web site should have enough pages for your content, but not too many, with related content grouped on each page. Users should not have to go through a series of clicks to get the information they're looking for. Your contact information should be visible on each page, to make it easy for the viewer to instantly call or e-mail you.

Be sure to select graphics and photos that are Web enabled. Make sure the images load quickly for the viewer, and select images that don't have restrictions on their use. Both the graphics and the tone of the writing should reflect the essence of your company. Keep it professional, and make sure it reflects your company's values and overall "look and feel."



3. Optimize your search engine

Once your site is up, you'll want your customers to be able to find you easily. The site should be coded such so that it's compatible with all of these major Web browsers: Internet Explorer, Firefox and Safari. Also, you should build important "keywords" – the terms customers type into search engines to find your services – into the code and content of your site. Your Web site developer can help you do this. Having keywords helps customers find you, and it also helps in what's called "organic" search results.

Organic search results are listings on search engine page that appear because of their relevance to the search terms, as opposed to being paid advertising. Each search engine also includes opportunities for buying ads. These ads appear on pages related to a search, and you pay only when the viewer actually clicks through to your Web site.

Bottom line: it's important to invest in optimizing your search engine. There's no point to having a great site if no one can find it.

4. Keep your Web site fresh

It's important to remember that Web site development is an ongoing process. You can't just "finish" your Web site and walk away.

Web sites are not static tools – it's critically important that they be revisited and updated frequently. Your site is an important investment, so make sure you're directing customers there through any of your company's ads, brochures and other promotions.