Whitepaper

# 10 THINGS PATIENTS HATE ABOUT YOUR WEBSITE

**FUTUREDONTICS**
Parent Company of 1-800-DENTIST

# 10 THINGS PATIENTS HATE ABOUT YOUR WEBSITE

**Your website is one of the most important dental marketing tools at your disposal.** A Futuredontics survey of consumer preferences found that 30% of patients say their choice of dentist is greatly influenced by the quality of the practice's website.[1] For new patients, it's likely the first impression they get of your practice. (And if you're not on top of your game, 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. The problem is:  the typical patient's visit to a dental practice's website is usually short and disappointing. For a variety of reasons the site failed to meet their expectations which we will explore in this whitepaper.

It's important to realize that all dental websites are not created equal. Today's patients expect modern design, rich features and integration with new technologies like smartphones, Google Maps 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 More importantly, **the Web is changing at the speed of light, and your site may now be out of date**.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.

> *Patients make judgements about the quality of your dentistry based on your website.*

We've compiled a list of ten common things patients really dislike most about dentists' websites. These "turnoffs" can prevent you from connecting with prospective patients and they can even drive away people who've been loyal patients for years. Read on to see how many of these problems affect your website and what you can do to correct them.

## TURNOFF #1: YOUR SITE IS STRAIGHT OUT OF 2008

**Is your website design flat and square?** Does the text move, scroll, blink, or is it in multiple fonts? Is there clipart? Does a "loading" icon appear or cheesy music play? Are there pages and pages of text stuffed with keywords for SEO? Does your site have a visitor counter? If you answered yes to any of these questions, your Web design is woefully out of date.

A website's lifespan is about three to five years due to changes in design, technology, Web standards, search engines and consumer behavior. If you go over that time without updates, web trends have likely passed you by. In a Futuredontics' survey of dental professionals, 61% of respondents reported that their practice websites were over 3 years' old.[2]  Remember, your site is usually the first impression patients get of your practice. Make it a good one.  I**f it's been more than three years since you've updated your site, you're sending the wrong message.** You're suggesting to patients that your practice is out of date as well.

## TURNOFF #2: IT DOESN'T WORK ON MOBILE DEVICES

**Does your site display beautifully on mobile devices — cell phones, smartphones and tablets — with your most important information easily readable at the top?** If you answered "no," you have a problem. Your website is a turnoff to today's fastest growing segment of patients — mobile-connected consumers. Today, 90% of all American adults own cell phones,[3] 64% have smartphones (up from 35% in 2011),[4] and 42% own a tablet.[5] These mobile devices play a critical role in how patients will find you. If your website isn't mobile-friendly you have serious problems.

In 2014, mobile internet usage surpassed desktop internet usage for the first time in history. [6] This is a trend that's sure to continue. 65% of all online searches now begin on a smartphone and 46% of consumers exclusively use mobile devices to research products and businesses, including dentists.[7] Dentists can't afford to ignore this sea change in consumer behavior.

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**Internet searches on mobile devices are the primary way patients will find dentists moving forward** and a conventional site that's hard or frustrating to read on an iPhone, Android or tablet will lose business. More than 60% of consumers say they'll abandon a website right away if they have a negative mobile experience.[8] Even worse, 43% of these consumers will then immediately go to a competitor's site.[9] That means your website could actually be driving people away to a dentist down the street.

**A mobile-friendly website is absolutely essential due to major changes Google made to its search algorithm in April 2015.[10]**. The search giant has expanded use of mobile-friendliness as a ranking signal. This change affects mobile searches in all languages worldwide and has a significant impact on your practice's search results. Now, it's easier for websites that are optimized for mobile devices to get relevant, high quality search results. This means you'll need a mobile-friendly site to connect with new patients using Google to search for dentists on mobile devices. Over 46% of dental websites are affected by this change.[11] Is yours one of them?

**Dentists can't afford to be behind the curve on mobile. Ensuring that your site is mobile friendly should be a top priority.**

## TURNOFF #3: YOUR WEBSITE TAKES FOREVER TO LOAD

According to two landmark studies, **47% of consumers want websites to load in two seconds or less**[12] with 57% saying they will abandon any website that takes more than three seconds to load.[13]  That's less time than it took you to read this sentence! Unfortunately, the average website takes between four and six seconds to load.[14] The really bad news is that 85% of mobile users expect pages to load as fast as or faster than they load on the desktop.[15] **Simply put, the longer a page takes to load, the higher the likelihood visitors will leave, never to return.**

In today's fast-paced media landscape, a slow-loading website is an unvisited website. If your site loads slowly, it will 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.[16] That's faster than the blink of an eye.

Your website needs to deliver quickly. **There are a variety of ways to increase web loading speed, including using a fast server, enabling browser caching, and optimizing images.** However, all of these solutions require a modern, well-designed, mobile-friendly website and a state-of-the-art Web hosting service

## TURNOFF #4: UGH! 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.[17]

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."[18]

> *Flash doesn't work on iPhones or iPads.*

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.[19] 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.**

## TURNOFF #5: YOU DON'T SHOW 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 survey by BrightLocal.com, 88% of consumers read online reviews to determine the quality of local businesses, from mechanics to dentists.[20] Patients expect to see reviews; they use them to make decisions.

BrightLocal's study also found that 88% of consumers say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.[21] 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."[22]

**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.

## TURNOFF #6: PATIENTS CAN'T REQUEST APPOINTMENTS ONLINE

**Patient expectations about appointing have radically changed over the past five years.** Thanks to services like Open Table, people now expect to be able to go online and make reservations or schedule appointments whenever they want…even if it's 2 o'clock in the morning.

Round-the-clock access is the new norm. People looking for services like car repair, hair salons and even dentists want easy access to 24-hour online scheduling. Convenience and instant gratification are prized by consumers today. **Nearly one-third of dental patients say online appointment requests are a key factor they consider when selecting a dentist.**[23] Unfortunately, most dental practices aren't able to take advantage of this important trend.

> *Convenience and instant gratification are prized by patients today.*

According to Futuredontics' recent survey of dental office managers, only 17% of respondents indicated that their practice currently offers an online option for scheduling appointments after office hours.[24] This represents a huge lost opportunity, as many consumers will continue searching for another practice that can accommodate them immediately, and others will simply hang up and fall back into procrastination. **Websites featuring online appointment requests are a "must –have" for every dental practice.** The dollar amount of potential production lost due to a practice's inability to offer 24/7 online appointing requests is staggering.

## TURNOFF #7: YOUR SITE DOESN'T INTEGRATE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

By now, having social features on your website isn't just expected, it's essential. 74% of adults online use social networking sites and 70% of them are on Facebook every day[25] helping make it the second most popular site in the world.[26] 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 regularly visit these sites — often several times a day.

First, every website needs prominent links to Facebook and Google+. These should be presented as invitations to interact with your practice on the various social networks -- "Like us on Facebook, "Connect with us on Google+," etc. After all, 35% of consumers say that social media influences their purchasing decisions[27] and 41% report that it affects their choice of a specific doctor, hospital, or medical facility.[28] 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 when you create Facebook videos with dental information or patient testimonials – 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.

## TURNOFF #8: NO GOOGLE MAPS? NO DIRECTIONS? NO PATIENCE!

The Internet has spoiled a lot of people.  Easy access to information has made them a little lazy. Whether they're comparing prices on TrueCar.com or booking a vacation on Expedia, people expect websites to provide everything needed to make a decision in one visit. Convenience is king in the consumer's mind. This applies to all manner of business sites, including those of dental practices.

**A frequent complaint patients have about dental websites is that they don't provide Google Maps directions to the practice.**  No big deal, right? Actually, it is. After going through the process of finding local practices online, researching them on Yelp, narrowing their choices, and selecting a prospective new dentist, the last thing an anxious patient wants to do is open yet another new window on their browser and search for Google Maps for driving directions. Busy people don't have the patience for this.

Dental websites that provide directions to the practice are more likely to connect with prospective patients. Everyone appreciates the added convenience which makes life easier. **If you haven't done so already, have your webmaster add the Google Maps API to your practice website.**


## TURNOFF #9: STALE, OUT-OF-DATE CONTENT

**Does your website feature offers that expired months ago?**  Are you still wishing patients "Happy Mother's Day" in July? Little things like this send a big message to patients: You're not on top of your game.

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 issue

Fresh content isn't only important for patients. It can have a significant impact on your site's search engine optimization (SEO). One of the factors Google uses to rank websites is based on the "freshness" of its content. **Some SEO experts recommend that upwards of 30% of the pages on your site annually should be new, fresh content.**[29]

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.**

## TURNOFF #10: PATIENTS CAN'T FIND YOUR CTA

If you see your website as just a page full of information, you're missing huge opportunities. **Make sure to include obvious CTAs (i.e. calls to action) – inviting your patients to call, email, request an appointment online or just learn more.** The simpler and more direct the CTA the better. There's nothing worse than having motivated patients leave your website in frustration because they couldn't figure out how to get in touch with you.

Both your desktop and mobile website need the obvious contact information (phone number, address, email), 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).

## 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 patient turnoffs – 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 truly mobile-friendly site, optimized for smartphones and tablets?
- Are they fully integrated with Facebook and Google+?
- 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**

## Footnotes

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