

ARCHIVED

Report

WEBSITE REALITY CHECK

2014 Dental Industry Survey

Archived materials provide general marketing advice and may contain references that are no longer current today.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.

Website Reality Check: 2014 Dental Industry Survey

Dental websites play a vital role in new patient acquisition and retention. One-third of patients say their choice of dentist is greatly influenced by the quality of a dental practice's site.¹ That number is shooting upward as more and more patients make a point of visiting practice websites before selecting a dentist. It is encouraging to note that today a record 87% of dental practices are online in some capacity.² But it remains to be seen how many of these practices are reaping the full benefit from the time and money they invest in their sites.

To determine whether dental sites are following industry best practices for website usability and performance, we conducted a national survey of real dental practices. We wanted to see if dental professionals are taking the necessary steps to provide a quality online experience that converts Web visitors into new patients.

The results were surprising. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of practices now have websites, we found that a significant number of practices are still using sites that fail to meet what would be considered minimally acceptable performance standards in any other industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

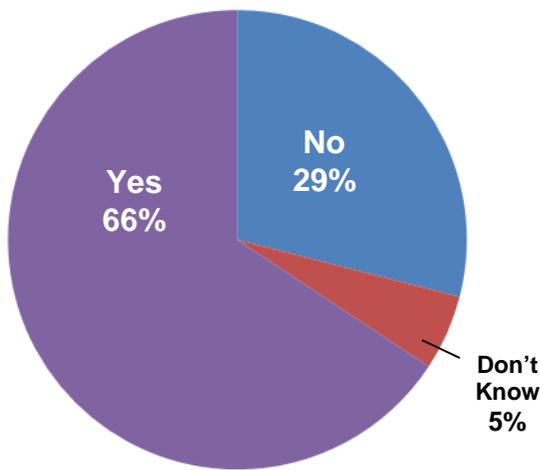
This report analyzes the findings of an **exclusive national survey of 1,032 dental practices**. The survey's goal was to see how many dental practices are applying the latest Web standards in five key areas of website design and functionality. (Websites that follow these widely accepted best practices enjoy a distinct advantage when it comes to attracting and retaining patients online).

Dentists and dental office managers were surveyed about their current website practices. They answered questions about important features – like social sharing, patient reviews, Flash and mobile – that have significant impact on patient acquisition and retention.

Following are the findings of our "State of the Industry" survey, along with the rationale behind asking each question, and recommendations for dental websites that are behind the curve in any of these important areas.

One-third of dental patients say their choice of dentist is greatly influenced by the quality of a practice's website.

DOES YOUR WEBSITE HAVE LINKS TO SOCIAL MEDIA SITES?



Why This Is Important: 73% of online adults use social media on a regular basis,³ making it an ideal medium for building relationships with new and existing patients through word-of-mouth recommendations, patient reviews, and online promotions.

Findings: Our survey initially showed encouraging results: 66% of dental practices are right on track with online marketing best practices and have their social media presence represented with links on their website. That said, it's troubling to see that at least 29% of practice sites are failing to leverage social media links.

(Note: This survey question did not factor in whether practices have profiles on Facebook and other social networks, only whether they have links on their site. For the nearly 1/3 of practices with no links, there may be a much larger problem if they have not created social media profiles to begin with.)

Another disturbing finding is that 5% of respondents said they don't know whether or not their site has social media links. That level of disconnect raises the question of what other key factors about the practice they may be unaware of.

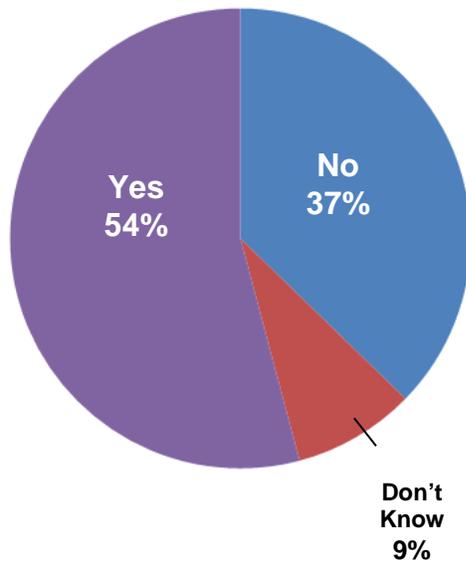
For modern dental patients, social media activity (especially Facebook, Yelp and Google+) isn't just expected, it's essential. Links should be included on your site, presented as invitations to interact with your practice – "Like us on Facebook, etc. And the great content you post on your site should be reflected on your social media pages, and vice versa. For practices who answered "No" or "Don't know," this is a simple fix – but one that should be taken care of as soon as possible.

Recommendation: If your practice isn't on social media at all, that's step one.

Services like PatientActivator® can set up and optimize your Facebook page for you – plus make it easy to connect with new and existing patients via social media's Big Three: Facebook, Yelp and Google+. PatientActivator even offers a Facebook App which automatically posts patient reviews on your practice's Facebook business page. This offers a powerful channel to reach new patients – particularly the 24% of patients who now use Facebook as a way to search for dentists.⁴

And if your practice is already active on these social media sites, add links on your website as soon as possible!

DOES YOUR PRACTICE HAVE A DEDICATED MOBILE WEBSITE?



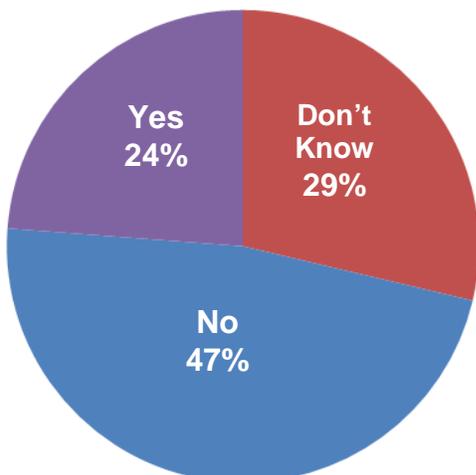
Why This Is Important: Mobile Internet usage has already overtaken PCs – and the trend is expected to continue.⁵ But many older websites are unable to provide users of smartphones and tablets with a satisfying mobile experience. Those that don't can expect to lose 60% of their visitors within seconds of their arrival.⁶

Findings: Compared with just a year ago, the industry has made huge improvements in this area, with over half of practices having a dedicated mobile site. But there's still a long way to go. At least 37% of practices lack what may be the single most important part of their online marketing mix – a dedicated mobile site. Without one, practices are going to be ignored by the fastest growing segment of new patients: Millennials (born between 1980 and 1995) searching for dentists using mobile devices.

It's important to note that while many dentists are told their site is "mobile optimized," this is not enough. "Optimized" simply means the page will adjust to the size of a phone screen (which usually renders it unreadable). You need a dedicated mobile site, specially designed to be easily read and used on any mobile device.

Recommendation: Due to the importance of mobile search, adding a dedicated mobile website is critical. If you're not sure where you stand, try accessing and navigating your site from a smartphone. A website that's hard or frustrating to read on a mobile phone will lose business. If your practice does not have a true dedicated mobile site – or if you're among the 9% who don't know – this needs to be a top priority.

DOES YOUR PRACTICE WEBSITE USE FLASH?



Why This Is Important: "Flash animation" was once a popular way to add interactivity to websites... but today it has a major negative impact on site performance due to its poor usability and design standards. It's so bad that even Adobe, the company that created Flash, no longer uses it.

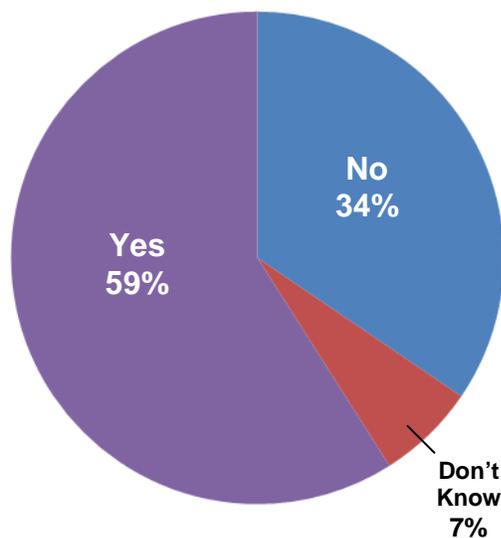
Findings: We're happy to report that nearly half of all dental websites are Flash-free. However, the numbers should be better by now. The fact that at least 24% of dental websites – and probably far more considering the number of "Don't Knows" – means that many practices are being hampered by an outmoded web technology that actually works against patient conversion.

Flash clearly remains a major problem in the industry, and one that a huge portion of dental professionals aren't even aware of. While Web experts agree that Flash technology should be eliminated from any modern site, fewer than half of dental practices have consciously done so.

These findings are particularly troublesome given the fact Flash doesn't work on iPhones or iPads – meaning these sites can't be viewed on millions of the most-popular devices used today. Sites using Flash appear as a black screen, an error message or display broken images. To make matters worse, sites often “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, etc.). The final nail in Flash's coffin is that it makes it virtually impossible for search engines to find your site.

Recommendation: Simply put, if your practice website uses Flash, you need a new site.

DOES YOUR PRACTICE WEBSITE INCLUDE YOUR REVIEWS?



Why This Is Important: Online reviews are dentistry's new word-of-mouth referrals. Today 92% of consumers report having more confidence in reviews they read online than in anything that company representatives tell them.⁷

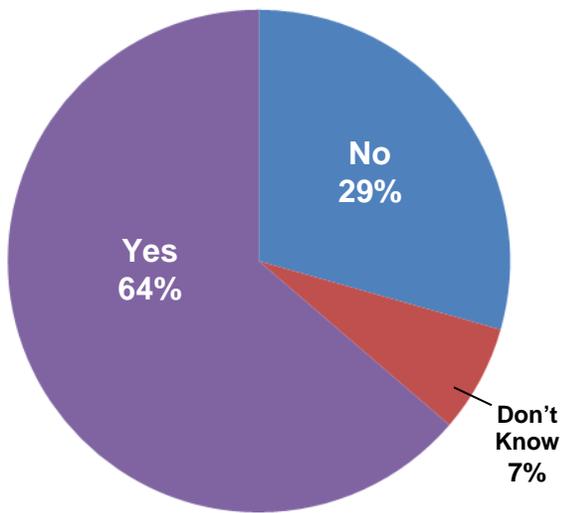
Findings: It's refreshing to note that almost 60% of dental websites are now featuring patient reviews. However, that number should be higher considering the important role reviews play in new patient acquisition. Over one-third of dental practices are behind the curve in adding reviews to their sites.

This is especially important given that a recent consumer study revealed that 70% of dental patients say online ratings and reviews influence their decision to choose a dentist.⁸

But here's the key: Reviews on your website need to be real reviews from a credible 3rd party site like Yelp. Manually posting patient testimonials isn't the same. Unless the feedback comes from a real reviews site, these stories lack credibility. The industry trend is definitely moving in the right direction. And for dentists who aren't yet showing their reviews, now is the time.

Recommendation: Staying on top of online patient reviews is critical. While monitoring them used to be a time-consuming endeavor, it has become a much easier task since Futuredontics introduced ReputationMonitor®. In just minutes a day, this user-friendly tool monitors your practice's entire online presence. It automatically pulls reviews, social media mentions and listings from hundreds of sites and displays them on a single screen.

IS SOMEONE AT THE PRACTICE ABLE TO EDIT THE WEBSITE?



Why This Is Important: Websites that require a webmaster to make simple changes are usually more expensive to operate. And since the average webmaster earns more than an accountant,⁹ many practices try to save money by foregoing much-needed updates that would help their website's performance. It's important to remember that ever-changing web content has a major positive impact on both patient engagement and search engine results. In fact, it's one of the most important factors Google considers when ranking your site.

Findings: It's stunning that in this day of user-friendly websites that only 64% of dental practices are able to edit their own site. Close to one-third of dental practices can't – and these offices would see long-term financial benefits by switching to a site that they can edit internally.

The fact that 7% of practices "Don't Know" whether they can edit their own site indicates that these websites are not being updated frequently enough to appear dynamic to patients and search engines.

Frankly, 100% of dental practices should be able to edit their own site. You shouldn't be at the mercy of a webmaster every time you want to make a change or have to pay extra for the "privilege" of updating your website. 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.

Recommendation: Switch to a user-friendly website. Doing so both eliminates unreasonable webmaster fees and – more importantly – it enables you to update your website in real time. Frequent updates to your website make it more attractive to patients and help improve your site's search engine rankings.

SUMMARY

Dental practice websites have been called one of the "greatest game changers in dentistry."¹⁰ The results of Futuredontics' "Website Reality Check" survey offer a telling snapshot of how practices in 2014 are using what is potentially their single most valuable marketing resource.

While many practices are following industry best practices for website performance, a significant percentage still do not. This is especially troubling today because it is generally acknowledged that an underperforming website can derail a practice's new patient acquisition efforts.

Simply having a website is no longer enough. In order to succeed today, a practice website must be able to meet the ever growing technological and performance requirements of both patients and search engines. It is essential that your site:

- Offers social media connectivity
- Provides a dedicated mobile site
- Eliminates Flash technology
- Presents patient reviews
- Offers self-editing options

Dental websites that meet these standards position their practices to thrive in the increasingly aggressive digital landscape.

ABOUT FUTURE DONTICS

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

To get a FREE copy of any our additional resources, including whitepapers, videos, webinars and more, visit futuredontics.com/MoreResources.

For info about our suite of dental marketing products, call 1-855-230-1313.

¹ Futuredontics, What Dental Patients Want, April 2013

-
- ² Dentaltown, Dentaltown Research, March 2014
- ³ Pew Research Internet Report, Social Networking Fact Sheet, September 2013
- ⁴ Futuredontics, Facebook 101: Simplifying Social Media for Dental Practices, August 2013
- ⁵ CNN Money, Mobile apps overtake PC Internet usage in U.S., February 2014
- ⁶ MarketingVox, Google Warns 6 in 10 Will Leave your Mobile-Unfriendly Site, September 25, 2012
- ⁷ Wall Street Journal, New Info Shoppers, January 8, 2009
- ⁸ Futuredontics, What Dental Patients Want, April 2013
- ⁹ Salary.com, Webmaster Salaries, May 13, 2014
- ¹⁰ Dentaltown.com, The 50 Greatest Game Changers in Dentistry, January 2011

Disclaimer: This whitepaper provides general marketing advice. Please consult your legal professional to ensure compliance with applicable laws in your jurisdiction.