

HME TODAY Access our **Annual Buyer's Guide**
Your online resource for products and services



TOOLS AND TACTICS FOR HOME HEALTH PROVIDERS

- >> About HME
- >> Contact Us
- >> Subscribe
- >> Read Weekly eNewsletter

Search

HOME | NEWS | CALENDAR | BUYER'S GUIDE | CAREERS | RESOURCES | CURRENT ISSUE | ARCHIVES

Issue: **December 2002**

Web Wisdom

by Roberta Domos, RRT

In the wake of the dot.com bust, setting up a company Internet site is easier and cheaper than ever before.



Not long ago Internet marketing was all the rage. As the dot.com industry continued to boom through the late '90s, many HME suppliers could not help but wonder if they were missing out on something big. Sure, we all heard about the small dealer here and there who turned the advent of the Web into a huge business success.

Yet despite the temptation, the conventional wisdom held that those successes would be more the exception than the rule. The industry did not appear to lend itself easily to online marketing, and the investment in technology that was required was substantial.

Then, as suddenly as it began, the dot.com industry went from boom to bomb, and dealers who had followed their instincts were glad they did. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to completely write off the Web as a marketing tool. Now that the dust has settled and the costs have decreased, you do not need to aspire to be an online giant to justify creating an Internet presence for your company.

Who the Web Reaches

A recent Pew research survey completed in March 2002 (Pew Internet and American Life Project) reports that 73 million people have gone online in search of health information at some point, and that about 6 million people go online for health information on any given day. According to the study, 71% of those users are between 50 and 64 years of age. That is the good news. The less encouraging news evident from the research is that most online "health seekers" are only looking for information. They are not inclined to make health care purchases over the Internet. So, while most people still prefer the "in person" aspect of health care, it is clear that consumers do use the Internet to gather information on health care companies and products.

On the plus side, "health seekers" are just as likely to be potential referral sources as they are potential patients. It has become increasingly common for hospitals and physician offices to have Internet access. For these reasons, it makes sense for HME companies to consider developing basic Web sites that can serve as online marketing brochures.

Go Online For Less

Developing a Web presence need not cost a lot of money. You can contract for a basic, professionally rendered Web site for as little as \$1,000. Or, if someone in your company has a good sense of design and is handy with word processing, you can develop a Web site using in-house staff and WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) software tools. WYSIWYG programs work like word processing programs and do not require any knowledge of HTML coding (the programming language most basic Web sites use).



Bay Home Medical and Rehab, Traverse City, Mich, shows off its experienced and well-trained staff with an excellent "about us" page featuring staff pictures. www.bayhome.com



The Web site of Apria, Lake Forest, Calif, carries a good

Typically, WYSIWYG Web development tools also contain templates you can use to build a Web site. Unfortunately, most included templates are not particularly business-oriented. Not to worry though—you can pick up an attractive template that is designed for business use for less than \$50. The software will generally cost you between \$100 and \$150, and reliable Web site hosting another \$20 per month.

Some major HME manufacturers also provide Web site design help and free or discount Web site hosting services to their customers. Ask your manufacturer sales representatives if they offer such services.

Web Design Basics

Whether you contract for the development of a Web site or you decide to build one yourself, you will need to be savvy about some Web site development and design basics. The site's design should be simple, professional, and appeal to the eye rather than assault it. To accomplish this, stick to a light background with dark type of one font style. Avoid crowding your Web pages with too much information. Instead, use bulleted lists to draw site visitors to information you want them to focus on. Most important, make sure your links to other pages (your navigation bars) are easy to identify and in a consistent location on all pages of your Web site.

Resources

- >> Media Kit
- >> Editorial Advisory Board
- >> Advertiser Index
- >> Reprints

- Article Tools
- >> Email This Article
 - >> Reprint This Article
 - >> Write the Editor

Sign up for **HME Today's e-newsletter Friday Report**



Featured Jobs

Respiratory Therapist
Muscle Shoals, Alabama

Pharmacist, Home Infusion Pharmacy
Carlsbad, California

Sales Manager
Elk Grove Village, Illinois

More Jobs...

powered by: **ADICIO**

Find a Job

Enter Keywords

Select State

All

Employers:

Find the right candidate today & connect with thousands of job seekers.

www.thejobcure.com

example of an easy-to-use navigation bar and features extensive patient education resources on both common diseases and Medicare coverage. www.apria.com



Green Bay Home Medical Equipment, Green Bay, Wis, makes products easy to find with a left-side navigation bar and uses logos from product manufacturers to add interest to its Web site. www.gbhme.com

All Web sites start with a "home" page with individual subordinate pages branching off from there and then linking back, via navigation bars, to the home page. As you think about what content to include on your company's site, it is a good idea to map out the design on paper right from the start. This way you can easily visualize just what it is you are designing and how each page relates to the other pages in the Web site. Let us assume you are designing a basic five-page Web site. The home page is usually the first page your viewer will encounter. Make sure your company logo is displayed prominently here and at least minimally on all the other pages in your Web site. This will help brand your site.

The home page is not the place to go into great detail about your company. Instead include a short one- or two-sentence blurb about your company that identifies you as an HME dealer serving a specific area, a bulleted list of the categories of equipment you carry, an accreditation organization seal if you are an accredited provider, and perhaps a picture similar to what you would use on the cover of a brochure.

Next, decide on the content for a page that gives more information about your company, often known as the "about us" page. This page can contain complete contact information for your company, including numbers to call to place an order, to inquire about a bill, or to contact your company after regular business hours. It might also include your company mission statement, information about your company's philosophy, and pictures of key staff along with a short professional bio on each one.

Now you have three pages left to insert content that is going to be useful to potential viewers seeking information. You might elect to use all three of these pages to expand on the product choices your company offers, highlighting them by categories and including information about what brands your company carries. Pictures work well here, and can usually be obtained from the various vendors with whom your company contracts.

Alternatively, you might wish to confine all basic product information to one page and, as your site grows, create subordinate pages under the main product page. If you go this route, you will have the last two pages in our example left to provide information of specific interest to patients and referral sources.

For instance, the patient information page might give details about insurance filing, patient co-payments and deductibles, and a patients' rights statement that is part of your company's policy. If your company is actively involved in community projects, such as a health fair, or if you host periodic open houses or health information seminars, you can also list those events on this page. You might even choose to provide a simple form that patients can use to send a comment or question to your company via email.

The provider page can be used to offer information to your referral sources such as a list of insurance companies your company contracts with or specialty programs and products your company offers that are designed to stimulate increased referrals.

Taking it to the Next Level

Once you have got the hang of Web content development, you might want to expand the resources on your company's Web site. For instance, you might choose to offer information about qualifying criteria for insurance-covered items so they can be referenced by physician office staff members who complete Certificates of Medical Necessity (CMNs). Or, if your company has created a fax order form for use by referral sources to make the referral process more efficient, you can put a downloadable version of this document on your Web site. Referral sources can then get a new form from your Web site each time they need one.

Beware, though, of setting up online forms to send referral information over the Internet. Because of patient confidentiality concerns and new Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations, you will need secure servers and sophisticated encryption technology to legally offer that service.

Drawing Site Visitors

Once you have covered the areas of design and content, it is time to refine the site to make sure it gets noticed by Internet search engines. Naturally, you will tell patients and referral sources about your Web site, but you will also want to ensure that it can be found by people who increasingly use search engines as a sort of Internet yellow pages. Different search engines use different methods to index and rank the site in the search listing hierarchy, so you will need to make sure that your Web site accommodates the various methods in order to gain maximum search engine visibility.

Some search engines require that you manually submit a brief description of your site and request a listing. Others charge a small fee for submission. However, most search engines "crawl" sites on the Internet using automated systems that read the underlying HTML code. That code contains items that are visible in the browser, such as the actual text content and the title of the page, and items that are invisible in the browser, such as meta tags—hidden text that describes the content of the site. Getting your Web site listed high in the search engines depends on whether the textual information in the HTML code or in the description you provided matches the key words being requested on the search. For this reason, avoid using acronyms such as HME and DME in meta tags and descriptions. Instead, spell out the terms so that search engines can read and categorize your site correctly. In addition, make sure meta tags are populated with a representative list of the products you carry.

As you can see, there is really no reason not to establish your presence on the Web. Costs are relatively low, and, given the potential benefits, the time to market your company on the Internet has arrived.

Roberta Domos, RRT, is owner and president of Domos HME Consulting Group, a consulting firm in

Louisville, Ky, and Redmond, Wash. Contact her at (425) 882-2035, or see her Web site at www.hmeconsulting.com.

Article Tools

- » [Email This Article](#)
- » [Reprint This Article](#)
- » [Write the Editor](#)



[News](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Buyer's Guide](#) | [Careers](#) | [Resources](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#)
[About HME](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Read Weekly eNewsletter](#)
[Media Kit](#) | [Editorial Advisory Board](#) | [Advertiser Index](#) | [Reprints](#)

Allied Healthcare

[24X7](#) | [Chiropractic Products Magazine](#) | [Clinical Lab Products \(CLP\)](#) | [Orthodontic Products](#) | [The Hearing Review](#)
[Hearing Products Report \(HPR\)](#) | [HME Today](#) | [Rehab Management](#) | [Physical Therapy Products](#) | [Plastic Surgery Practice](#)
[Imaging Economics](#) | [Medical Imaging](#) | [RT](#) | [Sleep Review](#)

Medical Education

[SynerMed Communications](#) | [IMED Communications](#)

Practice Growth

[Practice Builders](#)

Copyright © 2009 Ascend Media LLC | HME TODAY | All Rights Reserved. [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)