

**WEB MARKETING: IS IT A WORTHWHILE OPTION FOR YOUR
PRACTICE?**

by

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Ferris State University
Doctor of Optometry Senior Paper
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ABSTRACT

Background: Surfing the internet is becoming a daily activity for many Americans. Consequently, practitioners may attempt to utilize this form of communication to advertise their practice. Many optometrists (ODs) may already be considering web marketing as an acceptable option; however, certain ODs may think web marketing not a suitable marketing option based on their geographic location in Michigan or the size of their practice. This study is designed to help inform ODs about whether or not they should be investing in web marketing.

Methods: We conducted a survey, with a forced choice format, investigating how many Michigan optometrists have websites marketing their practice. We have taken into account the geographical location of the practices and compared the results of practices located in cities, townships or villages of three different population sizes: 0-25,000; 25,000-100,000; and 100,000 and greater. We also compared results from different practice sizes based upon the number of ODs in the practice: 1 OD, 2 ODs, and 3 or greater ODs. We have investigated methods of setting up a website, the marketing power of a website, and the most appropriate content for a practice website. *Results:* According to the survey responses, more ODs than not believe that having a practice website is a cost effective way to promote, advertise, and serve the patients within their optometric

practice. *Conclusions:* Optometrists looking for an inexpensive, modern, and low maintenance way to promote their practice should strongly consider creating a practice website if they do not already have one.

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INTRODUCTION

Surfing the internet is becoming a daily activity for many Americans.

Consequently, practitioners may attempt to utilize this form of communication to advertise their practice. Many optometrists (ODs) may already be considering web marketing as an acceptable option; however, certain ODs may think web marketing not a suitable marketing option based on their geographic location in Michigan or the size of their practice. A study needed to be done to help inform ODs about whether or not they should be investing in web marketing and if a practice website is a worthwhile option. This survey was designed for ODs belonging to any practice size or location to find out if other ODs working at a comparable practice with similar practice characteristics are using a practice website to their benefit, and if so, how and at what cost.

METHODS

A survey with 17 total questions was created using Questionpro.com, an online resource that is partnered with Ferris State University. A request was sent to the Michigan Optometric Association asking permission to send a mass e-mail to Michigan optometrists with our survey embedded in the message. After receiving permission, provided we share our findings with the MOA, we sent out our survey to every optometrist listed in the latest MOA directory with a listed e-mail. After receiving 178 completed surveys, results were tabulated using the convenient questionpro.com software, which allowed us to sort our survey results by the number of ODs in a given practice, as well as by the population size of the city, town, or village in which their practice was located. Significant findings from each table were noted and then summarized to form conclusions about the appropriateness of a practice website for certain ODs.

RESULTS

A total of 202 ODs started the survey while 178 or 88.12% of ODs completed it. Only completed surveys were analyzed. A fairly even distribution of ODs of different practice sizes and locations participated, with 35.05% of ODs belonging to one OD practices, 30.41% of ODs belonging to two OD practices, and 34.54% of ODs belonging to practices with three or greater ODs. Most survey participants, 41.88%, worked in practices located in cities, villages, or towns with a population of 0-24,999 residents; 36.65% of participating ODs belonged to practices that draw patients from cities, towns, or villages of 25,000-99,999 residents; and 21.47% of survey participating ODs draw patients from cities, towns, or villages of greater than 100,000 people. Two types of tables were created comparing the responses of two special groups of ODs to all ODs in general; tables labeled “A” show OD responses grouped by the number of ODs that belong to their practice while tables labeled “B” group OD responses by the population of the city, township, or village in which their practice is located.

Of all the ODs who participated in the survey, 80.83% of ODs had a practice website while 19.17% of ODs did not. Table 1A shows that group practices of three or more are most likely to have a practice website compared to other practice sizes and Table 1B illustrates that practices located in cities, villages, or towns with a population of 25,000-99,999 were most likely to have a website.

Table 1A

Do you have a website for your practice?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Yes	80.83%	70.15%	84.48%	87.88%
No	19.17%	29.85%	15.52%	12.12%

Table 1B

Do you have a website for your practice?				
Population	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Yes	80.83%	76.25%	84.29%	82.50%
No	19.17%	23.75%	15.71%	17.50%

Most OD's, 52.6%, hired someone else to setup their practice website; 19.4% of practice websites were set up someone in the practice, 9.09% did not know how their site was set up; and 18.83% chose "other." According to Table 2A, one OD private practices were most likely to have someone within the practice setup their website while two OD practices were most likely to hire someone else to setup their site.

Table 2A

How did you setup your website?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Hired someone else	52.60%	46.81%	67.35%	43.86%
Setup by someone in your practice	19.48%	23.40%	18.37%	17.54%
I do not know	9.09%	4.26%	2.04%	19.30%
Other	18.83%	25.53%	12.24%	19.30%

Table 2B

How did you setup your website?	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Hired someone else	52.60%	50.82%	50.85%	62.50%
Setup by someone in your practice	19.48%	19.67%	18.64%	18.75%
I do not know	9.09%	6.56%	11.86%	9.38%
Other	18.83%	22.95%	18.64%	9.38%

Most ODs who knew their website cost, 26.80%, thought that it was relatively inexpensive, i.e. less than \$100, to set up their website. Other responses for website cost included 9.15% for \$101-250; 8.50% for \$251-500, 9.15% for \$501-1000, and 7.84% for greater than \$1000. A little more than a third, 36.56%, of ODs did not know how much it cost to make their website. From Table 3A, one can see that more than half ODs in a three or more OD practice did not know how much it cost to set up their website. Table 3B shows that more than a third of websites set up in cities, villages, or towns of less than 25,000 cost less than \$100 to setup. Most ODs, however, did not know how much it cost to setup their site.

Table 3A

Approximately how much did it cost to setup the website?	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
<\$100	26.80%	29.79%	31.25%	21.05%
\$101-\$250	9.15%	14.89%	6.25%	7.02%
\$251-\$500	8.50%	14.89%	4.17%	5.26%
\$501-\$1000	9.15%	8.51%	16.67%	3.51%
>\$1000	7.84%	6.38%	10.42%	7.02%
I do not know	38.56%	25.53%	31.25%	56.14%

Table 3B

Approximately how much did it cost to setup the website?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
<\$100	26.80%	34.43%	27.59%	6.25%
\$101-\$250	9.15%	13.11%	6.90%	6.25%
\$251-\$500	8.50%	9.84%	6.90%	9.38%
\$501-\$1000	9.15%	11.48%	8.62%	6.25%
>\$1000	7.84%	3.28%	8.62%	15.63%
I do not know	38.56%	27.87%	41.38%	56.25%

According to the survey, most ODs, 65.36%, have a member of their practice who maintains and updates their website; 20.92% of ODs hire someone else; and 13.73% do not know who keeps their site up and running. It is apparent from Tables 4A and 4B that one OD practices and practices located in cities, villages, or towns of less than 25,000 people have the highest number of websites maintained by a staff member.

Table 4A

How do you maintain and update your site?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
A member of the practice	65.36%	70.21%	66.67%	59.65%
Hire someone outside of the practice	20.92%	19.15%	25.00%	19.30%
I do not know	13.73%	10.64%	8.33%	21.05%

Table 4B

How do you maintain and update your site?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
A member of the practice	65.36%	78.69%	63.79%	40.63%
Hire someone outside of the practice	20.92%	9.84%	20.69%	43.75%
I do not know	13.73%	11.48%	15.52%	15.63%

As far as how many people visit their practice websites per week, 31.58% of ODs said 0-50; 14.47% said 51-100; 5.26% said 101-250; 2.63% said 251-500; and 4.61% said greater than 500. 41.45% of ODs did not know how many hits their websites had per week, according to tables 5A and 5B.

Table 5A

Approximately how many times in a month do you think your website is visited?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
0-50	31.58%	36.96%	47.92%	14.04%
51-100	14.47%	13.04%	12.50%	15.79%
101-250	5.26%	8.70%	2.08%	5.26%
251-500	2.63%	4.35%	0.00%	3.51%
>500	4.61%	2.17%	4.17%	7.02%
I do not know	41.45%	34.78%	33.33%	54.39%

Table 5B

Approximately how many times in a month do you think your website is visited?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
0-50	31.58%	39.34%	34.48%	9.38%
51-100	14.47%	19.67%	10.34%	12.50%
101-250	5.26%	4.92%	3.45%	9.38%
251-500	2.63%	1.64%	1.72%	6.25%
>500	4.61%	3.28%	1.72%	12.50%
I do not know	41.45%	31.15%	48.28%	50.00%

The overwhelming majority of ODs, 95.17%, felt that the benefits of having a practice website are worth the costs of setup and maintenance. The two OD practice had the highest rate of believing that a practice website was worth the costs of setup and maintenance at 97.78%, according to table 6A.

Table 6A

Do you think the benefits of a practice website are worth the costs of setup and maintenance?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Yes	95.17%	93.33%	97.78%	94.44%
No	4.83%	6.67%	2.22%	5.56%

Table 6B

Do you think the benefits of a practice website are worth the costs of setup and maintenance?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Yes	95.17%	93.22%	98.11%	93.55%
No	4.83%	6.78%	1.89%	6.45%

Most ODs, 78.23%, utilize a practice website as both a marketing tool and as a service to patients rather than just one or the other. Tables 7A and 7B suggest that the three or more OD practices and OD practices located in cities, towns, or villages of 25,000-99,999 are more likely than other practices to use a practice website as a marketing tool only.

Table 7A

Do you view your site mostly as a marketing tool, a service to patients, or both?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Marketing Tool	16.33%	11.11%	15.22%	20.00%
Service to Patients	5.44%	8.89%	2.17%	5.45%
Both (Approximately Equal Between a Marketing Tool and a Service to Patients)	78.23%	80.00%	82.61%	74.55%

Table 7B

Do you view your site mostly as a marketing tool, a service to patients, or both?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Marketing Tool	16.33%	13.11%	23.64%	10.00%
Service to Patients	5.44%	8.20%	3.64%	3.33%
Both (Approximately Equal Between a Marketing Tool and a Service to Patients)	78.23%	78.69%	72.73%	86.67%

When asked about the content of their practice website, ODs responded by choosing all that applied from the pre-selected content options. Table 8A lists responses about website content from ODs belonging to one, two, or three or more OD practices while Table 8B shows website content for practices drawing from the three population sizes. According to tables 8A and 8B, Dr. Information/Biography, Practice Location Information, Contact Information, and Services Offered were the most common pieces of information found an optometric practice website regardless of practice size or location.

Table 8A

What information is provided on your site (Select all that apply)?				
	Overall	One OD	Two ODs	Three or More ODs
Dr. Information/Biography	13.22%	12.86%	13.64%	13.17%
Staff Information	9.15%	9.00%	9.09%	9.24%
Practice Location Information	14.31%	14.15%	13.64%	15.13%
Contact Information	13.92%	13.83%	13.33%	14.57%
Appointment Booking	3.48%	3.22%	2.73%	4.48%
Printable Forms	7.65%	6.43%	8.48%	7.84%
Services Offered	13.72%	13.50%	13.64%	14.01%
Information About Frames and Product Lines Carried	8.45%	8.68%	8.79%	7.84%
What To Expect During an Examination	7.75%	9.00%	8.18%	6.16%
Instructional Videos or Links to Videos	6.46%	7.40%	6.67%	5.60%
Success Stories	1.89%	1.93%	1.82%	1.96%

Table 8B

What information is provided on your site (Select all that apply)?	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Dr. Information/Biography	13.22%	13.19%	13.42%	12.97%
Staff Information	9.15%	10.19%	8.68%	7.57%
Practice Location Information	14.31%	13.89%	14.47%	15.14%
Contact Information	13.92%	13.43%	13.95%	15.14%
Appointment Booking	3.48%	3.70%	2.89%	4.32%
Printable Forms	7.65%	7.64%	8.16%	6.49%
Services Offered	13.72%	12.96%	14.47%	14.05%
Information About Frames and Product Lines Carried	8.45%	7.64%	9.47%	8.11%
What To Expect During an Examination	7.75%	8.10%	7.89%	6.49%
Instructional Videos or Links to Videos	6.46%	7.64%	5.26%	5.95%
Success Stories	1.89%	1.62%	1.32%	3.78%

When ODs were asked about the content they thought patients utilized on their site, Practice Information/Location, Contact Information, Services Offered, and Dr. Information/Biography were the most popular responses, independent of practice size or location, according to table 9A and 9B.

Table 9A

For which of the following do you think patients utilize your site most often?	Overall	One OD	Two ODs	Three or More ODs
Dr. Information/Biography	9.93%	11.63%	4.55%	13.21%
Staff Information	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Practice Location Information	31.21%	32.56%	36.36%	24.53%
Contact Information	21.99%	13.95%	29.55%	22.64%
Appointment Booking	1.42%	0.00%	0.00%	3.77%
Printable Forms	6.38%	9.30%	4.55%	5.66%
Services Offered	22.70%	25.58%	20.45%	22.64%
Information About Frames and Product Lines Carried	2.84%	4.65%	0.00%	3.77%
What To Expect During an Examination	0.71%	2.33%	0.00%	0.00%
Instructional Videos or Links to Videos	2.13%	0.00%	4.55%	1.89%
Success Stories	0.71%	0.00%	0.00%	1.89%

Table 9B

For which of the following do you think patients utilize your site most often?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Dr. Information/Biography	9.93%	8.47%	11.32%	10.71%
Staff Information	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Practice Location Information	31.21%	32.20%	32.08%	25.00%
Contact Information	21.99%	27.12%	15.09%	25.00%
Appointment Booking	1.42%	0.00%	0.00%	7.14%
Printable Forms	6.38%	8.47%	7.55%	0.00%
Services Offered	22.70%	18.64%	26.42%	25.00%
Information About Frames and Product Lines Carried	2.84%	3.39%	0.00%	7.14%
What To Expect During an Examination	0.71%	0.00%	1.89%	0.00%
Instructional Videos or Links to Videos	2.13%	1.69%	3.77%	0.00%
Success Stories	0.71%	0.00%	1.89%	0.00%

According to the survey, 11.27% of ODs overall already let their patients book their own appointments via their practice website. Of those ODs who do not already allow their patients to book their own appointments, Table 10A shows that 61.36% ODs in the two OD practices are the most willing to let patients book their own appointments in the future while the OD from the single OD practice was the least willing to allow patients to book their own appointments at 30.23%. A quarter of practices located in cities, townships, or villages of 100,000 or more residents already let their patients book appointments via the practice website, according to Table 10B.

Table 10A

Would you ever allow patients to book their own appointments on your website?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Patients can already book on the website	11.27%	9.30%	9.09%	14.81%
Yes, I am considering allowing it in the future	48.59%	30.23%	61.36%	51.85%
No	40.14%	60.47%	29.55%	33.33%

Table 10B

Would you ever allow patients to book their own appointments on your website?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Patients can already book on the website	11.27%	6.78%	9.26%	25.00%
Yes, I am considering allowing it in the future	48.59%	45.76%	50.00%	50.00%
No	40.14%	47.46%	40.74%	25.00%

In Table 11A, more than half , 51.08%, of ODs overall would consider allowing advertisements on their website. Table 11B shows a data trend that shows a direct, positive relationship between willingness to advertise on a website and practice size drawing from a larger patient population.

Table 11A

Would you consider allowing advertisements on your website?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
There are currently advertisements on my website	12.23%	16.67%	14.29%	7.41%
Yes	51.08%	42.86%	57.14%	51.85%
No	36.69%	40.48%	28.57%	40.74%

Table 11B

Would you consider allowing advertisements on your website?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
There are currently advertisements on my website	12.23%	13.79%	11.32%	7.41%
Yes	51.08%	37.93%	58.49%	66.67%
No	36.69%	48.28%	30.19%	25.93%

Tables 12A and 12B show that the vast majority of practice websites, regardless of practice size or location, can be found with basic internet search engines i.e. Google.

Table 12A

Can people reach your website by doing an internet search (i.e. Google) for optometrists in a desired location?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Yes	90.85%	92.86%	88.89%	90.74%
No	0.70%	2.38%	0.00%	0.00%
I do not know	8.45%	4.76%	11.11%	9.26%

Table 12B

Can people reach your website by doing an internet search (i.e. Google) for optometrists in a desired location?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Yes	90.85%	88.14%	98.15%	82.14%
No	0.70%	1.69%	0.00%	0.00%
I do not know	8.45%	10.17%	1.85%	17.86%

ODs from a two person practice were the most likely to say that having a practice website has brought in new patients, while ODs from three or greater OD practices were the least likely to say that the website has brought in new patients, according to Table 13A. Of all OD responses, 81.69% of ODs thought their website has brought in new patients.

Table 13A

Do you think that the website has brought in new patients?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Yes	81.69%	81.40%	88.64%	75.47%
No	18.31%	18.60%	11.36%	24.53%

Table 13B

Do you think that the website has brought in new patients?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Yes	81.69%	79.31%	85.19%	78.57%
No	18.31%	20.69%	14.81%	21.43%

About three quarters of ODs believe that their established patients are unaware of their website and Tables 14A and 14B give specific percentages based on practice size and location.

Table 14A

Do you think the majority of your established patients are aware of the website?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Yes	25.90%	30.95%	16.67%	29.63%
No	74.10%	69.05%	83.33%	70.37%

Table 14B

Do you think the majority of your established patients are aware of the website?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Yes	25.90%	21.05%	30.19%	28.57%
No	74.10%	78.95%	69.81%	71.43%

Tables 15A and 15B show the reasons why some ODs have chosen not to own a practice website. Unfortunately, in Table 15A, the most popular reason for why these ODs do not have a website fell into the “other” category. In table 15B, the majority of ODs without websites in smaller cities, towns, or villages thought that their patients were already aware of the services they offered. Of ODs drawing from large cities, the two most popular reasons for not having a website include “A website is not appropriate for

my patient population” and “Our new patient population is already strong enough.”

Table 15A

What is/are the most appropriate reason(s) for why your practice does not have a website?				
	Overall	One	Two	Three or more
Too expensive	11.36%	16.00%	0.00%	11.11%
A website is not appropriate for my patient population	13.64%	12.00%	20.00%	11.11%
I use other means of internet promotion (i.e. Facebook)	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Never considered the idea of internet promotion	9.09%	12.00%	0.00%	11.11%
Our new patient population is already strong enough	13.64%	16.00%	10.00%	11.11%
Our patients already know of the services we offer	18.18%	16.00%	30.00%	11.11%
Other	34.09%	28.00%	40.00%	44.44%

Table 15B

What is/are the most appropriate reason(s) for why your practice does not have a website?				
	Overall	0-24,999	25,000-99,999	100,000 or more
Too expensive	11.36%	7.69%	16.67%	16.67%
A website is not appropriate for my patient population	13.64%	11.54%	8.33%	33.33%
I use other means of internet promotion (i.e. Facebook)	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Never considered the idea of internet promotion	9.09%	7.69%	8.33%	16.67%
Our new patient population is already strong enough	13.64%	11.54%	8.33%	33.33%
Our patients already know of the services we offer	18.18%	23.08%	16.67%	0.00%
Other	34.09%	38.46%	41.67%	0.00%

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to help ODs decide whether or not it would likely benefit their practice and/or patients to make their presence known on the web via a website. Before the survey, it was thought that practice location and the size of the practice were two likely variables that would affect whether or not an OD felt that a practice website would be beneficial. Rather than rely on the ODs subjective opinion of whether they thought their practice was in a rural, urban, or suburban area, the population of the city, village, or town in which their practice resides was thought to be a more objective measure of the location of their practice. Practice size was inferred by asking ODs if they belonged to a one, two, or three or more OD practice, in which practice size ranges from smallest to largest respectively. The survey that was sent to Michigan ODs was designed so that optometrists reading the results of this study could know if other ODs with similar practices to their own are utilizing web marketing and whether or not they think it has been a beneficial investment.

Of all the ODs who participated in the survey, 80.83% of ODs said they had a practice website while 19.17% of ODs responded that they did not. The responses of those ODs with practice websites tended to make the notion of a practice website highly favorable. Many, 81.69%, of ODs thought their website has brought in new patients to their practice. Therefore, it is recommended to the struggling practice to invest in a

website to hopefully increase their new patient numbers. The overwhelming majority of ODs, 95.17%, felt that the benefits of having a practice website are worth the costs of setup and maintenance. If one is interested in owning a website for their practice, there are a few things to consider.

About half of OD's, 52.6%, hired someone else to setup their practice website, indicating that creating a quality website may best be designed by professionals. Considering that ODs who practice on their own without partners tend to be rather independent individuals, it is no surprise that the survey found that one OD private practices were most likely to have someone within the practice setup their website. Most ODs who knew their website cost, 26.80%, thought that it was relatively inexpensive, i.e. less than \$100, to set up their website; however, the survey suggests that ODs are spending a very wide range of funds on building a practice website. If someone wishes to charge significantly more than \$100 to setup a website, it may be in the OD's best financial interest to shop elsewhere, especially if the practice is located in a more rural location. According to the survey, more than a third of websites set up in cities, villages, or towns of less than 25,000 cost less than \$100 to setup. In addition to other things, one should make sure not to forget to post information about the practicing OD, the practice location, contact information, and services offered as these are the most common pieces of information found on an optometric practice website regardless of practice size or location. One should also make sure that their site will be findable by the patient who searches for it with a common search engine. If one is unfamiliar with web design, he or she should not be afraid to inquire how to update the site.

Once the website has been created, most ODs, 65.36%, have a member of their practice who maintains and updates their website, which means that keeping the website updated is easier than actually starting the website from scratch. It is also recommended that ODs start doing a better job of letting their established patients know that their practice website exists. About three quarters of ODs believe that their established patients are unaware of their practice website. If a patient is happy with their care, it is possible that they will share your web address with others, especially if the web address is on something tangible for the patient to take home, like a business card. Besides simply being a tool to recruit new patients, a practice website may soon be a popular way to make a practice run more efficiently.

According to the survey, 11.27% of ODs overall already let their patients book their own appointments via their practice website. Of those ODs who do not already allow their patients to book their own appointments, 61.36% of ODs in the two OD practice would be willing to let patients book their own appointments in the future compared to only 30.23% of ODs from single OD practices. A quarter or practices located in cities, townships, or villages of 100,000 or more residents already let their patients book their own appointments via the practice website. Besides making patient scheduling more efficient, a practice website may also be a way to increase sales.

More than half (51.08%) of ODs overall would consider allowing advertisements on their website. This could allow patients to become aware of one's product line, which could be financially beneficial especially if their practice is located somewhere where designer frames are often desired by the patient population. The data trend that shows a

direct, positive relationship between practice size and ODs' willingness to advertise products on their websites. Private practice optometry is not only a profession but also a business; perhaps a small investment in advertising through a website could increase practice revenues over time.

Hopefully this study informs optometrists of the benefits of a website for one's optometric practice. If there is anything left to be discovered on the topic of web marketing through a practice website, it would have to be why those few ODs who do not have a website choose to refrain from going online. Based on the results of this study, there are very few reasons not to.