



## Website Design – meeting your consumer needs

This article is based on a presentation given by Susan Layton, FSBPT Chief Operating Officer and Thomas Wear, Cstraight Media at the 2013 FSBPT Annual Meeting.

In preparation for this session, 52 physical therapy jurisdiction websites were reviewed and rated. On a scale of one to five, just one site received a five. Eight sites earned no points at all. The majority of sites received one or no points.

The rating viewed the site through the eyes of someone who is not an informed consumer. They were based on content rather than aesthetics and included accessibility of that content.

While many physical therapy boards' mission statements agree that public safety is a prime concern, their websites don't encourage or assist the public in playing a role in its own protection. A state's physical therapy board website could become the primary way to obtain information such as

- “What is physical therapy?”
- “How do I verify if my physical therapist is licensed?”
- “What do I do if something goes wrong?”

Too often, those answers are difficult to find on the website, if they exist on the site at all.

### Improving your website

These suggestions were offered for making your physical therapy board website effective for consumers.

#### *Strategy first*

Most people think of a visual overhaul, then, if you're lucky, a content overhaul. First budget time and money for strategy, even though the deliverables are going to be word documents, not website design.

As for the timeline, it may be possible to overhaul a large website over six or seven months with everyone firing on all pistons. But you can also phase it in.

It is extremely important to pick the right vendor for the update; someone who understands your needs and constraints.

#### *Focus of your website*

Many websites were directed to the physical therapist rather than the physical therapy patient or consumer.

If you want to accomplish your mission, start by developing a consumer-centered design. A winning trifecta focuses on content, user experience and visual and interaction design. In other words, the right stuff in the right place that looks, feels and works right.

#### *Gather data*

Write content that matters to PT patients/consumers and licensees. Here are some tips to figure out what matters to those who visit your website:

- Role-play and inference gets you 80% of the way there. (In other words, brainstorm.)
- Evaluate what content and links get the most clicks/visits and where visitors spend the most time.
- Evaluate the most frequently searched terms on your site and to your site.
- Evaluate the most common inquiries you get from contact forms, emails, phone calls and letters.
- Send out a survey (cheaper with broader results) or host a focus group (more expensive but deeper results) to gather more information.

Determine what consumers and physical therapists want, where those wants overlap, where there are gaps and how you can bridge the gaps. Keep a user-first perspective.

#### *Consider your audience*

Use their language, not yours.

For instance, many websites used the words “consumer” and “public” instead of “patient” which can confuse users.

If you must use regulatory language, build a bridge using both terms and educate – don’t assume they understand. Include the user’s verbiage first. Don’t put patients/consumers on the outside. Use their language, not yours.

For instance:

- “Submit the S15 form” could be translated to “File a complaint about your physical therapy provider.”
- “License verification” could be translated to “Does my PT have a valid license?”

#### *Web users don’t read*

You have 6 to 10 seconds to tell the user what’s important on your page and what to do next. Only 16% read word-by-word. Everyone else scans.

Here are some examples on how to reel readers in.

- Use a headline to tell users the main item. You can have four or five headlines on one page.
- A strategically-written teaser will give you just a little bit more depth and context.
- If you can't say everything in the teaser, add a link such as "Learn more about this concept." Allow them to opt in to reading more.

### **Improving site usability**

Consider these pointers in helping to determine the usability of your website.

**Learnability:** How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?

**Efficiency:** Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?

**Memorability:** When users return to the website after a period of not using it, how easily can they re-establish proficiency?

**Errors:** How many errors do users make, how severe are these errors and how easily can they recover from the errors?

**Satisfaction:** How pleasant is it to use the design?

#### *Consider mobile devices and tablets*

About 30% to 50% of all web traffic now comes from a mobile or tablet device. You need to give readers 100% of your content and features on your site as soon as possible – no matter how they get there.

If your site is not mobile optimized, one of three or one of two visitors to your site will be alienated as soon as they hit the home page. A responsive web design, which is a single site that scales to size, is preferred.

#### *Address every audience on the homepage*

Address every audience, particularly the consumer, straight from the homepage.

- The FSBPT website has six primary web audiences, and the audience center content funnels all six - exam candidates, licensees, members, educators, volunteers and the public - to specific sites.

Include one to three of the most important subject/focus areas on the homepage.

- The center of the FSBPT page – prime real estate – is dedicated to the public. PT boards might want to add the FSBPT link to their websites.

#### *Search bar*

It is also vital to add a functional search bar to your site so visitors can find items quickly and

search when they're not finding the item on their own.

One of the biggest benefits of having a search bar is that you get to see data about what people want the most or what they're having the hardest time finding, and then you can do something about it.

### **Organization is key**

Organize content from the user perspective, not by your internal organization chart. Try to create content funnels to get them, as quickly and in as few clicks as possible, to where they want to go.

On the FSBPT site, users can locate, within six to 10 seconds, these items:

- Is the PT licensed to practice?
- Learn the basics
- Find a licensed PT
- Understand their rights
- File a complaint

### *Consider visual and interactive design*

Visual and interactive design is not just for looks. Testing reveals that subtle size, color, placement and interaction techniques can make statistically significant differences in performance of identical content.



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