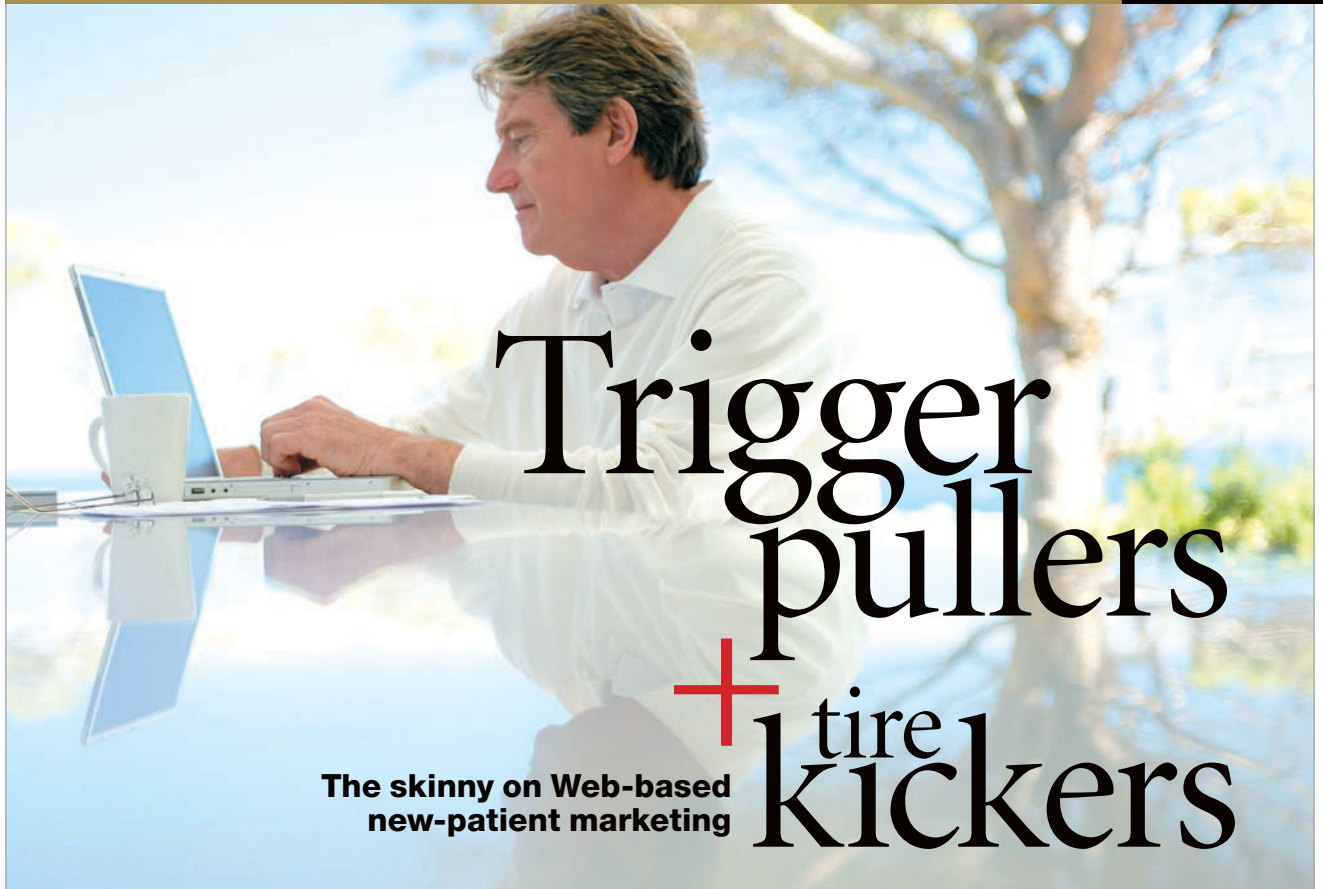


**BEST**

# practices

ENTREPRENEURIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR PRACTICE OWNERS



## Trigger pullers + tire kickers

The skinny on Web-based new-patient marketing

In order to appeal to visitors to your web site, particularly new patients, it's become increasingly important to mount a multifaceted campaign taking into account the types of people seeking information about you.

Visitors to your website fall into one of three categories, based on the action they take: Trigger pullers, DNRs (for Do Not Resuscitate) and tire kickers.

BY DANIEL A. BOBROW, MBA

### NEED TO KNOW

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#### Trigger Pullers

These are the visitors who are so motivated they immediately call your office and schedule an appointment. While we'd love all website visitors to fall into this category, the reality is, they don't. In fact, studies suggest that only 20 percent or so take action immediately following their first visit. This is the only visitor segment most websites manage to convert to patients.

The DNRs also comprise approximately 20 percent of web-site visitors. These are the people who, for some reason, choose



## Tips To Get You Noticed

A simple way to attract people to your website is to include your website address (url) anywhere prospective patients will see or hear it: on stationery, business cards, external signage, your on hold message and, of course, on all conventional marketing channels such as: direct mail, TV, radio, billboards, etc.

Another way to get your website noticed is via online search. Online search is sub-classified into free (also called organic) and paid (sometimes termed pay-per-click) search.

The goal of both forms of online search is to get your website ranked high on search engine listings when the web surfer looking for dental care enters words or phrases (called keywords and key phrases) that are a match for what your website offers.

Use text (search engines cannot read graphics) with the word “dentist” “dentistry” and “dental” on your site often. List your city name and zip code, and names and zip codes of towns surrounding your practice. Get listed on the Google Local Directory. This is a relatively new opportunity for getting local products and services listed.

A paid search strategy, also called pay-per-click, can get your website ranked more prominently on relevant listings more quickly than relying solely on organic search. The reason is that search engines require time to notice your website (that’s why it’s called organic search) and, since the search engines are paid when a visitor “clicks through” a pay-per-click link, these ads get noticed by the search engines quickly. Be careful, though, not to overbid. It is not critical to be first on the list. Also, be certain you only advertise locally: you don’t want to pay for a visitor who lives in, say, Saskatchewan, if you don’t.

not to pursue a relationship with your practice. The reasons are, and are likely to remain, a mystery. However, marketing principle dictates that we can’t, indeed should not try to be, all things to all people.

As for the tire kickers, this group comprises the majority of your visitors—they’re just not ready to commit. As with DNRs, reasons abound. They may be deliberate in their decision making. They may just be beginning their search. They may, like most of us, need time to feel comfortable before making an important decision.

A properly designed and implemented website marketing strategy can also turbo-charge your other marketing strategies. This is because, if someone is not ready to make an appointment, they feel uncomfortable about calling your office. Your website offers an alternative way for the prospective patient to learn about your practice in a way that makes them comfortable. Once there, your website can begin the process of establishing credibility and allowing the patient to decide when to contact you. This is simply an example of running the race at the patient’s pace.

Success at converting website visitors to patients requires a dynamic strategy by which visitors receive a reason to willingly share their contact information with you, and automatic follow up communications during that critical one- to twelve-month gestation period in which the tire kickers metamorphose into trigger pullers. The system must be automated because human nature suggests that otherwise, you and your staff will always find some-

## pullquote

thing else to do—and your prospective patients die on the proverbial vine.

### Your campaign

We suggest beginning your automated follow-up sequence with a special report, which appeals to the interests and needs of the visitor. Survey your patients to learn why they chose to join your practice as a basis for composing your reports. Our clients' websites include up to 12 special reports with such topics as "The 5 Things You Must Know Before Choosing a Dentist," "How To Overcome Your Fear of the Dentist" and "Are Implants Right for Me?"

In addition, because of that 1- 12-month gestation period for visitors to transition from tire kicker to trigger puller, you'll want to keep in front of the prospective patient for one year.

We recommend a series of email and direct mail cards. Some emails also offer an audio component, that is, a recording of the doctor or staff member (usually the hygienist). The emails offer a series of "Smile Secrets" offering brief, but valuable information intended to continually to the patient the dentist's credibility so that so that when it's time to make an appointment, you'll be the one they call. Also, by varying the medium, but not

the message, we continually reinforce the dentist's brand identity in the mind of the prospective patient.

Schedule your communications with sufficient frequency (how often would you suggest) so that the prospective patient does not forget you. Just don't overdo it. Otherwise, your communications may be relegated to the trash can, spam folder or both.

If all a visitor to your website gets is a "thank you" for visiting, information about who you are, what you do, and a "contact us" button, what you've got is in essence an electronic brochure. Informational websites are fine, as far as they go. But they lack a mechanism for capturing visitor information and automatically communicating over time with that visitor.

A high volume of qualified website visitors along with an easy-to-navigate website are necessary, but not sufficient for success with web-based new patient marketing. So arm yourself with the tools to capture visitor information and automatically communicate with them over time. Doing so will mean that when they are willing, you'll be ready and waiting. ■

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## PRACTICE CAFE

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### Track It!

Another valuable benefit of using the Internet as a patient generating tool is the ability to reliably track results. Be sure to have access to, and know how to use, the analytics and reporting capabilities offered by your web host. Also, place a unique telephone number on your site so you can identify which calls originate from a visit to your site, as well as the ultimate outcome of the call. You will then have the raw data to arrive at reliable calculations about response rates, cost per patient and, of course, that all-important return on investment.