

Internet marketing in the medical industry; challenges and future

Bu-Kyu Lee, D.D.S., M.S.D., Ph.D.

Section Editor of JKAOMS

Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Asan Medical Center, University of Ulsan College of Medicine, Seoul, Korea

Nowadays, people are living in the so-called, the “Internet era”, which means the Internet has become essential to their daily lives. People have become accustomed to the Internet whenever they want to search for certain information. This phenomenon has revolutionized the peoples’ way of life and thoughts, which will ultimately have an impact on the future. This change is also affecting the medical and dental industries.

Many areas in the medical field can benefit from using the Internet. Hospital marketing is one of the key areas where Internet use is active in the medical and dental field, which has become an essential and routine administrative work. Hospitals favor the use of the Internet because they can advertise their strong aspects, such as competitive cutting edge facilities, high quality doctors and affordable fees, efficiently to people with easy access to the Internet. Online communication between patients and doctors is also a great tool of medical marketing that has been improved through the use of the Internet. Internet communities for patients or doctors are now growing popular and provide an excellent opportunity to exchange information on the doctors and clinics they have experienced. Many assume that this might be beneficial to patients and be effective for doctors, who open new clinics to compete successfully with the existing competitors.

In reality, however, many issues are being raised as a result of active Internet use. Contrary to people’s expectation, the relationship among doctors or between doctors and patients

might become worse as Internet marketing competition increases. People easily criticize each other online, for example, by posting false episodes about bad experiences in competing hospitals or doctors. And also they often confuse public by giving medically unproven information on their websites where anyone can access through internet. This might be clearly harmful for public health.

Many reasonable people in South Korea tend not to believe all the information on the Internet because they are web-based, and try to gain insight to distinguish true and false information. Nevertheless, not all people have such discernment and paying too much attention to check false information is time-consuming. In this chaotic environment, regular people can be very confused about the transparency and can often be a victim of a heated online attack. Some cases may even result in criminal action. In addition, many cases often cause emotional stress, waste of time and unexpected expenses on the business level, which all ultimately impact the treatment of patients.

What would be the best way to address these concerns while highlighting the positive function of Internet use for medical marketing? Regulation revamps, such as strong penalties, can be effective in preventing slander. In addition, it is also important to keep Internet communities transparent as an open space, so that people can behave online as they do in the offline societies. This approach may be debatable but worth consideration, particularly in the field of medical business.

The medical business is different from other types of businesses because medical services involve human lives. Therefore, the dignity the doctors should be respected in all cases. Competing doctors and clinics should be aware of this and the fellowship among doctors should always be considered. This does not mean a type of cartel and unreasonable protection of each other but sound and fair competition with mutual respect. As the future world will be more interrelated through the Internet, it is important to return to the basics, i.e., to the

Bu-Kyu Lee

*Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Asan Medical Center, University of Ulsan College of Medicine, 88 Olympic-ro 43-gil, Songpa-gu, Seoul 05505, Korea
TEL: +82-2-3010-5970 FAX: +82-2-3010-6967
E-mail: bukylu67@naver.com
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8483-937X>*

©This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Copyright © 2015 The Korean Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. All rights reserved.

promise that was made on the day when the white coat was first worn just after graduating from college.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.