



GPIT Information Leaflet on Practice Websites

1. Pros and Cons of a Practice Website

Pros	Cons
May generate more business	Cost (see below)
Enhances image of practice as modern and forward looking	Need to update site and keep it relevant
Useful PR in battle with private health clinics and pharmacies	May lead to unwanted spam email or phone calls from marketing companies
Can act as a source of useful patient information about the practice	Possible legal considerations (see below)
Information source for patients regarding breaking news e.g. Flu outbreak, drug safety scare	

2. Website Options

There are a number of different options open to GPs which can be customised to reflect the amount of time and money the practice wishes to devote to a presence on the web. These will include:

- a. Free listing only – for practices who are not interested in developing their own website, they can ensure that the practice is listed on local web portals. Many towns and cities around Ireland have local web portals run by chambers of commerce or other business organisations which list the contact details of local businesses. It is important that GP practices are listed here even if they don't wish to have their own website.
- b. ICGP listing – The ICGP web site www.icgp.ie/findagp offer a "Find a GP" service to the public. The listing can be searched under area or services offered. Make sure your contact details and information are up to date and accurate. The site allows the practice to list its opening hours, services provided and display a map of its location.
- c. Paid listing – Some companies offer a listing on their web site or business directories for a fee. Talk to other users before you sign on for any of these companies and check out the terms and conditions carefully. In the past many ICGP members have indicated that they unwittingly registered with online business directories and were then subject to quasi legal demands for payment. A general email was sent to all College members on this topic in February 2011.
- d. Static websites – these are free or low cost, low maintenance options which allow a practice to place information about the practice on line with a minimum of fuss. Because the nature of the information is static (address, opening hours etc) they generally don't require regular updating. e.g. www.gettingbusinessonline.ie, www.docvadis.ie.
- e. Dynamic websites – For a full interactive site which is designed to engage with patients, many GPs employ local web design companies. The market is very competitive and prices have fallen over the past number of years. GPs can still expect to pay around €1000 for a basic site which will include registration fees and search engine optimisation (see below).
- f. Do-It-Yourself – If a member of the practice is proficient with IT or has a little training in the area it is possible to build your own web site from scratch using a web design



software package e.g. WebEasy Professional, Web Studio 5. There are also several free online software packages which supply a huge range of templates or themes e.g. Word Press www.wordpress.com, Web Plus www.serif.com.

3. Getting Started

As well as a means to build and design your website, you will also need a Domain Name for your practice and a hosting company that will host your website.

- a. The domain name is essentially your unique address on the internet. It contains a prefix (usually www) followed by a dot, followed by the name of your site e.g. mypractice, followed by another dot and then the suffix. The suffix usually contains two or three letters indicating the country the site is from e.g. ie for Ireland or the type of organisation the site pertains to e.g. gov for a government department or organisation.
- b. Some internet service providers offer free web hosting with long and complicated domain names. These are best avoided if you want your patients to remember your web site address.
- c. Many web hosting companies will offer domain name registration as part of the service they provide however you can do this separately and register a .ie domain name with Ireland's domain registry www.iedr.ie.
- d. Sites with .ie domain name are more popular among Irish GPs. These are a little more expensive than .com or .org domain names and usually cost around €80 per annum.
- e. Web hosting companies offer a range of services in addition to simply hosting the website. These include online backup, email accounts, virus and spam filters, visitor statistics and web editor software. Basic web hosting prices start at around €40 per year www.hostingireland.ie.

4. What Information Should a Practice Website Contain?

There are no "rules" around what a practice website should contain but the following may prove a useful checklist:

- Name, address and contact details of practice.
- List of GPs, qualifications, Medical Council numbers and special interests.
- List of ancillary and administration staff.
- Opening hours and out of hours arrangements.
- Services provided and list of fees.
- Practice policies in relation to appointments, repeat scripts, information sharing etc.
- Directions to the practice and possibly a Google map.
- Useful form download e.g. drivers medical form, medical card application form.
- Patient Information Leaflets. The site can host patient information leaflets you use regularly e.g. managing fever in children or information on diseases or treatments you have a special interest in.
- Links to local hospitals, pharmacies, support groups etc.



- Name of person responsible for the information on the site, when last updated and contact information.

5. Possible Functions

Other possible functions include online appointment booking, online repeat prescription ordering and links to Facebook or Twitter accounts.

6. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

If you have gone to a lot of trouble and expense to create a website, you want to make sure that people will see it. Web design companies will normally offer SEO as part of the design package. This is where they will attempt to make your website appear first on a list of "hits" provided by an internet search engine. The mechanics of how this is achieved is quite complicated but it involves making sure the site is listed with the search engines and contains words, phrases and terms on the site that are most likely to match with the search terms used by your patients when they are searching the web for information. Further information on this topic can be obtained from Google and other search engine websites.

7. Legal Considerations

It is important to make sure that any information you post on a website is true and accurate.

- a. GPs could be held medico-legally liable for health information that is incomplete, incorrect or misleading.
- b. GPs could face Medical Council sanctions if they make unfounded claims on their website or claim to have unique solutions to health problems.
- c. GPs can also face legal action if they post information, photographs, videos or other material without the consent of the owners.

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