

# Practice Management

## Establishing Your Online Presence: Website Basics for Urgent Care Operators

**Urgent message:** Establishing a practice website takes careful planning and execution but it can enhance traditional marketing efforts by providing a central repository of relevant information for prospective patients.

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When consumers experience a minor illness or injury, numerous questions arise, such as “What do these symptoms mean?” “Can I do something about this myself?” and “What kind of help do I need, where do I get it, and how much will it cost?” Increasingly, people are turning to the Internet for answers. In fact, with so many consumers “connected” via smart phones and tablets, utilization of the Yellow Pages and other traditional media has waned. The Internet can instantly point prospective patients to relief and your urgent care center should be part of their consideration.

If your urgent care center doesn’t have a website that appears in major search engines, you could be missing out on potential patients. Even awareness that comes from seeing an urgent care center’s sign, participating in a community event, or hearing positive word of mouth must be reinforced at a time of need in order to spur utilization. The following steps will support your marketing efforts by demonstrating how to build a website from start to finish while also raising awareness of your website and online presence.

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### **Purchasing a Domain Name and Website Hosting**

#### **1. Brainstorm Potential Website Address (Domain Name) Choices**

The first step in building a website for your urgent care center is to determine what your website’s address (also known as a URL or domain name) will be. A domain name is an address for the Internet and it helps potential patients discover your website. If you

haven't determined the name of your urgent care center yet, researching available website addresses beforehand is a good idea. Law governing trade names does not necessarily prevent someone from registering your business name as a domain, so if this has occurred, your website address may end up being different than the name of your center.

An initial brainstorming session will help you come up with potential options. Here are some best practices for a domain name to keep in mind when considering website address choices:

- Ideally the domain name should be the same as your urgent care center's name so that a consumer can easily "guess" the URL. For instance, if the name of your center is "Provo Urgent Care," use [www.provourgentcare.com](http://www.provourgentcare.com) as your domain.
- Make the domain name memorable yet relevant. It should reflect the nature of walk-in services offered at your center.
- Keep the domain name as short and simple as possible. Shorter domain names are easier for people to remember and to share, and there is less chance of users mistyping.
- A domain name can consist of letters, numbers, and hyphens (although use of only letters is recommended because numbers and hyphens can be confusing when sharing your website address with people). Spaces or other symbols are not allowed.
- Create a list of all of your ideas, starting with your first choice, second choice, and so on.

## 2. Check Domain Name Availability & Purchase Domain Name

Once you have a list of all the potential domain names for your urgent care center's website address, the next step is to check if the domain name is available for purchase. There are many websites that you can use to check domain availability including [www.networksolutions.com](http://www.networksolutions.com), [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com), [www.1and1.com](http://www.1and1.com), and [www.hostgator.com](http://www.hostgator.com). Many of these sites will ask if you want a domain name ending with a .com, .org, .net, .info, and other extensions. A website ending in .com (which stands for "commercial") is the most common for business and is what you'll want to purchase for your center. Using the .org, .net, etc. extensions will likely confuse consumers who presume your website is a "dot-com" and mistype, ending up on someone else's webpage.

To check the availability of a domain, enter the desired domain name into the search box of the web-

sites previously and hit "search." If your potential domain names aren't available, it's time to get a little creative to come up with unique alternatives. You can try:

- Rearranging the word order
- Using abbreviations
- Adding location-specific words
- Adding a prefix
- Adding a suffix ([urgentcarecentral.com](http://urgentcarecentral.com))

For some ideas on prefixes and suffixes, visit: [www.dailyblogtips.com/200-prefixes-and-suffixes-for-domain-names](http://www.dailyblogtips.com/200-prefixes-and-suffixes-for-domain-names).

Once you've found an available domain name that you like, you can purchase a license to use the domain. The minimum subscription is typically 1 year, but discounts are offered for longer periods of time.

## 3. Purchase Website Hosting

After securing your domain name, you'll next need to purchase website hosting. Web hosts are companies that provide space on their servers for use by many different customers who choose to not make the substantial investment of buying and maintaining their own web servers. If the domain name can be likened to an "address" directing people to your website, hosting provides the online "space" for all of your web pages, including files, images, videos, and other media associated with your website.

Typically the same companies that license domain names also offer website hosting. Vendors typically bundle hosting with tools and resources to help build, enhance, and manage your website including easy-to-use website builders, a free email address for your domain, transaction processing, and more. When you purchase your domain name, usually the vendor will proceed to ask if you want to purchase hosting as well. For simple websites, usually the basic package will meet your center's needs. Also, discounts usually are available if you purchase hosting services for a long time period.

## Designing Your Website

### 1. Planning the Website Content

Remember the main reason for having a website is for current and new patients to come across your center when searching the Internet. Patients may be searching for a particular piece of information, whether it's your center's hours, phone number, physicians at your facility, insurance accepted, or conditions treated. So you'll want to plan your website pages accordingly.

The best way to think of a website is as a place to put

all information related to your center that may be subject to change. As your center grows, you may add providers, extend hours, or expand your service mix—you'd hate to place printed marketing materials in consumers' hands (sometimes tucked away for years) with incorrect information. Include the basics—center name, address, phone, and core services—in your printed materials along with your website address and consumers who want additional information will always be able to find it by visiting your website.

Before jumping right in, though, take some time to visit the websites of local competitors and larger multi-location providers to start gathering ideas on what you like and dislike about their websites. Some items to take note of:

- What type of information does the website include?
- How is the content organized?
- How many pages do they have?
- What types of visual images or multimedia assets are used?
- What type of additional features did you like or dislike?
- What are your thoughts on the colors, fonts, etc...?
- How quickly did the website load and did it function correctly?

Spending time studying “best-in-class” websites will give you plenty of ideas and a head start on planning your own website.

## 2. Create Mockup Website

Regardless of whether you decide to build your website on your own or hire a third party, you'll need to have a good idea of the design and content. Remember that a website is a collection of related information organized in a user-friendly way. The homepage is the starting point for visitors to get to know your urgent care and “link through” to related pages for additional information.

A few ways to create a mockup website include:

- Using “old-fashioned” paper and pencil. Many people like to sketch out their website by hand and draw each piece of the page.
- Using Microsoft Word or other word processing programs. These programs can be used to create a mockup of each web page by using the insert and draw options to create text boxes, insert images, insert shapes, and other useful tools.
- Using Microsoft Publisher, Adobe Photoshop, or other layout publishing programs. If you want to get more

creative and detailed, you can use these advanced publishing programs, which have more functionality, to take your website design even further.

- Using tools tailored to create mockup websites, such as [www.balsamiq.com](http://www.balsamiq.com), [www.gomockingbird.com](http://www.gomockingbird.com), and [www.mockupbuilder.com](http://www.mockupbuilder.com). These tools make it simple to drag, drop, create, and reposition website elements to create a prototype.

## Building Your Website

Now that you have an initial website design plan, it's time to construct or “code” your website—either on your own or utilizing a third party.

### 1. Building Your Website on Your Own

There are three typical ways to build your website on your own: 1) Use your web host's online website builder; 2) Use website development software; or 3) Use a content management system.

**Website Builder from Web Host:** Most web host vendors include free website building tools when you purchase their hosting services. These tools usually incorporate an easy drag-and-drop interface to add items to the page. The interface is called WYSIWYG which stands for “what you see is what you get.” So, whatever shows on the page you are designing will be how your website will look. No technical programming skills are necessary. The issue is that these tools are for very basic websites—using them for a business may result in a website that looks amateurish or unprofessional.

**Website Development Software:** There are many different software programs you can use specifically to build a website. Most of these also include a WYSIWYG user interface and go even further to include the ability to switch to HTML code to create your website. Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is the coding language used for creating web pages and other information that can be displayed in a web browser. Using HTML gives web developers more flexibility, functionality, and control in designing a website. Website development software includes:

- CoffeeCup Visual Site Designer:  
[www.coffeecup.com/designer](http://www.coffeecup.com/designer)
- Adobe Dreamweaver:  
[www.adobe.com/products/dreamweaver.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/dreamweaver.html)
- WebStudio: [www.webstudio.com](http://www.webstudio.com)
- Microsoft Webmatrix:  
[www.microsoft.com/web/webmatrix](http://www.microsoft.com/web/webmatrix)

**Content Management System (CMS):** A CMS is a program that allows publishing, editing, and modification of

content from a central interface, usually through a user-friendly system accessed online (or in the cloud). The most popular CMS system is WordPress. WordPress is a platform with various features to build your website while making your website more robust, such as website themes, functionality add-ons, and more. No technical coding is necessary to build your site, although a little technology knowledge in general is helpful. WordPress usually is free and it can be installed through your web host. Contact your webhost for installation details.

## 2. Hiring a Contractor or a Third Party to Build Your Website

Unless you've had formal training in HTML programming or are already highly skilled in desktop publishing, the technical intricacies of building a website may be overwhelming. In addition, because a website reflects your "brand," an amateurish-appearing or error-filled website will turn off prospective patients and defeat the purpose of your online presence.

If you decide not to build your website yourself, you can hire a contractor or a third-party company to do it. Most local advertising and marketing agencies—who can develop a more comprehensive campaign for your center including your logo, printed collateral such as brochures and flyers, and mass advertising including newspapers, billboards and radio—can also assist you in building an online presence. If your center is already established and you're approaching your website as a one-off project, there are also various websites you can use to find someone to help you. Some websites to consider using include:

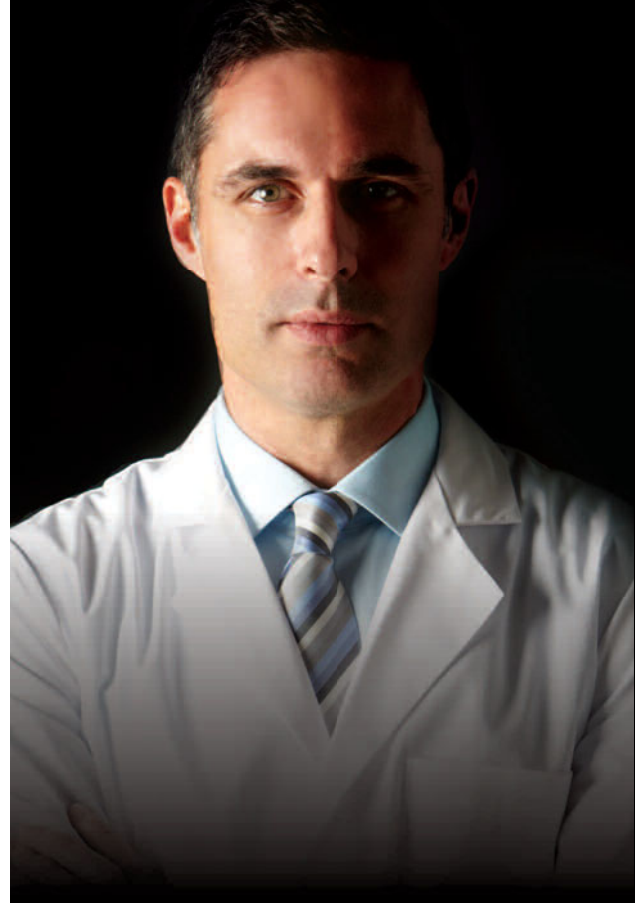
- Elance [www.elance.com](http://www.elance.com)
- Freelancer [www.freelancer.com](http://www.freelancer.com)
- Desk [www.odesk.com](http://www.odesk.com)
- Craigslist [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com)

When working with a freelance website developer or third-party marketing firm, you'll want to provide as much detail as possible to ensure that your website turns out as you expect it to. Up front, provide the designer with your website mockups and any additional ideas you have about the project. It can also help to provide samples of websites you think are particularly appealing. When looking for someone or a company to work with, ask for references and/or work samples—it's important that a developer be credible, reliable, knowledgeable, and communicate well. Expect a few conversations either by phone or email to ensure



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that the developer understands the project, require the opportunity to review drafts, and verify that the website meets your requirements before making payment.

### Testing Your Website

Once your website has been built, you'll want to test it to make sure everything looks and works the way you expect it to. You wouldn't want a prospective patient to get the wrong impression if your website contains errors or does not function properly. Some common problems you should test for are:

- Do all of the hyperlinks work?
- Is all of the information there?
- Is all the information correct?
- Is the website free of misspellings and grammatical errors?
- Do all of the images show?
- Do the videos and other multimedia assets work?
- Does your website work in different web browsers (Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, and Apple Safari)?

If you have outsourced your project to a third party, a professional web developer should thoroughly test the website prior to delivery. Also having multiple people review the website can better catch errors and generate suggestions for improvement.

### Submit Website To Search Engines

Now that your website is built, you'll want to ensure that people are able to discover your new website using search engines such as Google and Bing, which account for a majority of web searches. The best way to have your website listed in search results is to actually submit your website address to these main search engines so they can "index" or "crawl" your site to discover all of your new web pages. This process may take a few weeks to sometimes even months. Let's go through the steps on submitting your website to Google and Bing. You can also easily search how to submit your website on various search engines other than these main ones, but it's good to start out with these two first.

#### 1. Submit Website to Google

1. Go to the website: [www.google.com/submityourcontent/business-owner](http://www.google.com/submityourcontent/business-owner)
2. Select the "Add your URL" link.
3. Sign into the Gmail account associated with your

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business (example [myurgentcare@gmail.com](mailto:myurgentcare@gmail.com)). If you don't have a Gmail account, you can sign up for one by clicking on the red "Sign Up" button in the top right corner.

4. Enter your URL into the box.
5. Enter the re-CAPTCHA code.
6. Select the "Submit Request" button when finished.

#### 2. Submit Website to Bing

1. Go to the website: [www.bing.com/toolbox/submit-site-url](http://www.bing.com/toolbox/submit-site-url)
2. Enter your URL into the box.
3. Enter the characters from the picture in the text box.
4. Select the "Submit" button when finished

Because Google functions like an online Yellow Pages, you'll also want to make sure your physical business is in its listings. "Google Places for Business" will ensure that your center comes up on a map with other businesses when prospective patients search. Google Places matches the user's physical location with businesses meeting their search description. What's nice is that adding your business to Google Places is free.

#### Submit Business to Google Places

1. Go to the website: [www.google.com/placesforbusiness](http://www.google.com/placesforbusiness)
2. Sign into the Gmail account associated with your business (example [myurgentcare@gmail.com](mailto:myurgentcare@gmail.com)). If you don't have a Gmail account, you can sign up for one by clicking on the red "Sign Up" button in the top right corner.
3. Enter your main business phone number.
4. Select the "Find Business Information" button. Google will search to see if information related to your business is already available to help fill out your business listing.
5. If your business isn't found, go ahead and enter your business information manually. This includes business name, phone number, address, website address, operating hours, and other relevant information.
6. Select the "Submit" button when finished.

### Improving Your Website Ranking with Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Do you ever wonder why some websites are listed on the first page of Google or other search engines when you type in certain keywords to search for? Search engines have a complex way to determine which web-

sites are most relevant to the keywords or phrases a person is searching for. If your website is listed on the first page for keywords, chances are better that a person will visit your website. Some studies state that 85% of people never look beyond the first page of the results.

Luckily, there are many tactics to help your website achieve a higher ranking based on keywords for which people search. This is called Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO is the process of improving the visibility of your website or webpage in a search engine's "natural" or unpaid "organic" search results. SEO might sound complicated, and it can be, but there are simple and basic SEO tactics your center can implement on your website that will help improve your webpage rankings. These include:

1. Researching keywords that potential visitors are using to search for urgent care centers. It would be easy if everyone typed in something as precise as "urgent care centers in Denver" but patients are more likely to search for specific conditions or needs, such as "flu," "travel vaccinations," or "walk-in doctor." Consider incorporating some of the keywords in Table 1. You can also use Google's Keyword Tool to see what the average search volumes are for keywords and see related terms that you might not have thought of.
2. Integrating these keywords into the content of your website. Your website should contain all the terms that an individual might search for information related to your operation. You can include the keywords in:
  - a. The title of your webpage
  - b. Any headers on your webpage
  - c. Throughout the text in the body of your webpage
3. Integrate social media accounts to enhance your online presence by linking to your social media accounts from your website and linking from your social media accounts back to your website.

SEO doesn't just happen on your website, though, it also happens outside of it, too. One major factor by which search engines determine the ranking of your webpages is the number of websites that link back to yours. Each link back to your site is like a "vote" for your site. So, it's important to consider efforts to broaden the online reach of your website, whether it's through obtaining positive press online, getting listed in directories, being mentioned in blogs, or other methods. Be

sure to include your website's address in anything you do or post online.

For more details about SEO, visit [www.seomoz.org/beginners-guide-to-seo](http://www.seomoz.org/beginners-guide-to-seo)

### **Maintaining Your Website**

Once your website is built, it's important to keep it updated with the latest information about your center. This is especially helpful if there are changes in hours of operations, staff, or any other essential information patients are often looking for on your website. You want a good plan for maintaining your website, including who will update it and how often, and what information will need to be updated.

How you will maintain your website should also be a consideration when determining how to design and build your online presence. If you hire an expert to build a sleek, high-performing website and you have no skills to update it, you'll need to rely on other professionals to make changes. This is why establishing a relationship with a web developer or integrated marketing agency may be preferable to treating the website as a one-off endeavor.

### **Updating Marketing Materials to Include Your New Website Address**

Your website is a great way to market your business to potential clients. Make sure you include your website address on printed marketing materials such as business cards, advertisements, flyers, and brochures. Because you can't print every detail of your operation in your marketing materials, your website will serve as a reference for individuals who want to learn more about your center.

### **Integrating Social Media to Enhance Online Presence**

Most likely you've heard of or even used a social media site but have you thought about how social media can drive business to your center's website? Social media is an interactive platform where individuals and communities create and share user-generated content. Connecting with your target audience through social media is a great way to improve your online presence by improving your reach and engagement through social platforms that are being used every day to communicate. Social media channels allow real-time sharing of information, whether it is news, photos, videos, or other multimedia content. Many urgent care centers have found that social media increase exposure, improve traffic, generate leads, and develop loyal patients.

**Table 1: Urgent Care Keywords**

Consumers typically search online for medical symptoms or problems—for which urgent care can be a solution. To ensure that your center’s website is recognized by major Internet search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing, be sure to include throughout your website the keywords for which potential patients may be searching. You can add to or subtract from the words listed here, depending on your service offering, patient mix, and acuity.

Adult Illnesses	Common Illnesses		Diagnostic Tests	Gynecological Conditions	Skin Conditions	Vaccinations
Allergic reactions	Acid Reflux	Frozen Shoulder	Arthritis Panel	Menopausal Complications	Acne	dtap
Anemia	Acne	Heart Burn	Cultures	Menstrual Irregularities	Athlete’s Foot	Flu
Anxiety	Allergies	Heat Stroke	Full Lab Panels	Pregnancy Diagnosis	Burns Rashes	Hepatitis a
Arthritis	Amenorrhea	Hemorrhoids Hemoglobin	Hematocrit	Sexually Transmitted Diseases	Cold Sores	Hepatitis b
Asthma	Bee Stings	Influenza	Hepatitis	Vaginal Bleeding	Ear Piercing	hib
Colitis	Bladder Infections	Insect Bee Stings	HIV		Eczema Dry Skin	ipv
Diabetes	Bronchitis	Interstitial Nephritis	Influenza	<b>Trauma</b>	Impetigo	meningitis
Diverticulitis	Chicken Pox	Laryngitis	Kidney Liver	Acute Fracture	Poison Ivy Poison Oak	mmr
Gallstones	Colds	Pink Eye	Microscopy	Auto Accident Whiplash	Psoriasis	pneumonia
Gastritis Indigestion	Cuts Lacerations	Sinus Infections	Mononucleosis	Complex Lacerations	Ringworm	td
Gout	Dehydration	Splinter Removal	Prostate PSA	Crush Injuries	Skin Infections	varicella
Headaches Migraine	Diarrhea	Sprains	Pregnancy Test	Falls	Skin Lesion Removal	<b>Other</b>
Hypertension	Ear Infections	Stomach Flu	STD Cultures	<b>Insurance</b>	Sunburn	School Physicals
Kidney Stones	Ear Wax Removal	Strep Sore Throat	Strep	Blue Cross Blue Shield	Swimmer’s Itch	Sports Camp Physicals
Sleep Disorders	Fever	Swimmer’s Ear	Therapeutic Blood Levels	Cigna Aetna Humana	Wart Removal	Pediatrics Children
Urine and Bladder Problems	Fingernail Toenail Injuries	Swine Flu	Thyroid Screens	United HealthCare UHC	Wound Care	Walk-in Center Clinic

*Basic Tactics on Using Social Media to Enhance Your Website*

- Have social media accounts link **BACK** to your website. Many of the social media accounts allow you to provide information about the business, including your business website address. This will help increase exposure and traffic back to your site.
- Have your website link **OUT** to social media accounts. Connecting your website to your social media pages will encourage website visitors to connect with you.

There are various social media platforms for you to consider using, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others. Let’s take a brief look at how to setup these accounts.

Facebook is the most popular social networking site. Facebook can be used to share the latest news, stories, or other relevant content that your target audience will be interested in. The first step in using Facebook is to set up a business page for your center by following the instructions at [www.facebook.com/pages/create.php](http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php).

Twitter is known for instant updates with a limit of 140 characters for each tweet (or message). Twitter can

be used to send out short reminders or messages to your target audience. To set up a twitter account, visit <https://twitter.com/signup>.

LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking site where you can create a company page for your business. A company page can tell your story, highlight your services, engage your followers, share career opportunities, and drive word-of-mouth marketing. To find out more about setting up a LinkedIn company page visit [http://help.linkedin.com/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/1561](http://help.linkedin.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/1561).

**Conclusion**

As more consumers begin their search for health information on the Internet, establishing your center’s website and online presence are essential steps in reaching these prospective patients. A website will enhance your traditional marketing efforts by providing a central location for the latest relevant information about your center that patients can easily find and reference. Establishing an online presence takes careful planning and execution and with the knowledge you’ve gained after reading this information, you are now better prepared to take the next steps on the journey to build a successful website for your center. ■