



## DO YOU HAVE A SLEEP LAB WEBSITE?

by Duane Johnson PhD

Should all sleep labs have a website? Yes! Should all sleep labs have a blog? Yes! Should all sleep labs have an internet market plan? Yes – you should develop a web presence with your marketing plan in mind.

Why should you have a website? Because 85% of businesses have websites and approximately half of all patients use the internet to make healthcare decisions.

Because over 90% of physicians use the internet. These percentages have grown nearly four-fold over the last five years alone and will continue to grow just as rapidly. Think about it; the first thing we ask when hearing about something new is 'what is the website?'

Websites do not have to be complex or super fancy. You do not have to spend a fortune with a web designer to have a

good web presence. There are a number of do-it-yourself tools out there from software you can purchase to services you can subscribe to (like GoDaddy's Website Tonight tool). Your website simply must communicate credibility and your unique sleep service value.

Your website should: Be easy to read, have a conversational format, be easy to navigate, have substantive/helpful information, be user-friendly and have a personal element (i.e. blog).

A website should be more than an informational brochure about your sleep lab services. You should use it as a communication tool. It requires a commitment to active management to be continually effective. The goal is to creatively provide well-rounded 'value' for your sleep services so that current sleep patients and professional references as well as potential patient visitors will want to return frequently to your site and ultimately use your services. You can easily make your sleep lab website alive and personal with relevant graphics, audio and video. This can be done well at amazingly low costs with simple tools.

A website is a patient and referral communication tool that can be a home base for meeting their sleep service needs. Those who visit and experience your sleep lab's website must find it helpful, feel that it will be helpful to others and want to forward your website information to their friends, family and other contacts.

A major goal for a web presence is to be able to collect visitor (current patient, potential patient and referral source) contact data such as email. You can do this simply by providing a 'Subscribe' option to your useful sleep newsletter or alert service on your website. By collecting this contact data you can also periodically email helpful sleep information and your sleep service opportunities to them. By having visitors 'subscribe' you have their permission to use their email as a contact method so that you can avoid any 'spam' issues.

Once you have your website up and going you need to consider some 'back door' strategies for building your web presence. These strategies include developing keywords, page descriptions and meta tags for your website information that will help your website be identified in search engines. Submitting your website to search engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN will give your web presence a boost. There are a number of software tools (like TrafficSeeker) that will walk you through the listing process. It is important that you frequently update and expand your listing data to keep it 'fresh' as well as competitive in search engines. There are also a number of 'pay per click' services you can utilize for better search engine placement if you have the budget for it.

Developing your sleep patient community following through both an active website and blog is an excellent investment of sleep

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team time and can be done with minimal financial outlay. These will not only help patients but the sleep lab's bottom line. Patients and healthcare professionals will recommend you more frequently to their friends if you create that 'feel good' experience for them through your website, and remember exposure yields increased business.

The simple difference between a website and a blog is that a blog is a more personal, relationship building communication tool where you have interaction with readers. A blog attracts people in your niche. It gives them something for free in exchange for their email address. From here you can make them an offer for a sleep service/product they can buy. This gives you an opportunity to convert your visitors to patients and referral sources.

To be successful your blog should:

- Always be up-to-date. 50% of blogs are abandoned after 90 days. It is not good for your patients, potential patients and referring physicians to come to your blog and find outdated information.
- Have good content which helps you showcase your expertise in the area which assists in developing good relationships.
- By reaching out to your sleep patients and prospective patients and referral source you are part of the blogosphere which makes you part of a larger community and you can then 'connect' with more people.
- Have an appropriate design. People viewing your blog should immediately know if it is appropriate for them. Benefits should be easily described. Options and choices should not be so many that they confuse the reader.
- Have a call to action. Good content is a start but beyond that you need to move the reader into buying your products and services. At the least you should ask your readers to comment on your blogs to get them involved.

Does a blog take a lot of time? It could but does not have to be. It does not have to especially if the blog's writing maintenance is shared among the entire sleep team. At a minimum, once a week you should post a relevant column, article, information or answers to patient sleep questions, or even operate a chat room to support CPAP patient users. It is an opportunity to develop a sleep service loyalty and relationships.

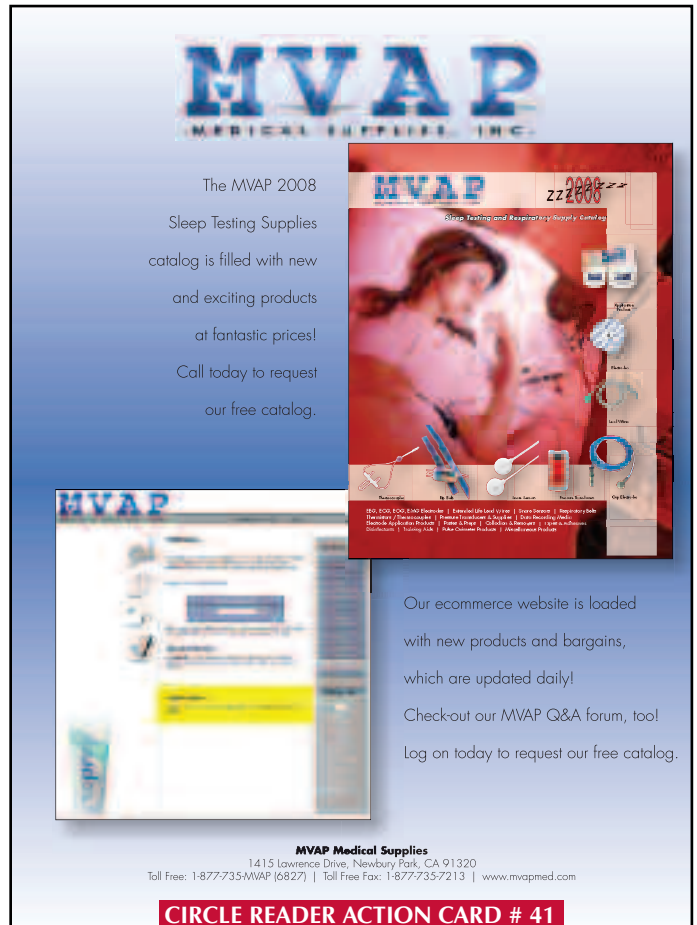
You want to keep it professional while being personal at the same time. You can do this by addressing specific subscriber questions, or by placing sleep team pictures on the blog, etc.

Remember to keep it simple not too clinical, more in layman's terms so that the large majority of your readers can relate and understand the information. Surprisingly, on average most Americans read on a sixth grade level so you need to keep that in mind when developing all your communication. Make everything easy to read. To learn more about blogs visit [www.buildabetterblog.com](http://www.buildabetterblog.com).

Remember, your web presence objective is a market attraction strategy. It's purpose is to optimize attracting new sleep patients as well as non-sleep physician patient referrals while maintaining relationships with sleep patients you have already served. Getting results for your sleep lab from a web presence is the goal.

Our society is now one of growing web users. Everybody uses the internet. What will give you a competitive advantage in your sleep market community is how well you adapt and stay relevant to the communication tools your potential patients and physician referrers use.

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