

# How to use the internet to grow your practice and why you must stop ignoring it

**M Morgan**  
287 Harbour Rd, Ohope

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You are probably hearing a lot about how the internet is changing the way people do business and how there is a big shift away from traditional marketing toward digital and mobile.

How does this all relate to your business and how can you navigate the confusing world of websites, blogs, online marketing and social media without losing your shirt?

In this presentation I am going to simplify some of the complexity and will give you some actionable insights into how you can improve your understanding and your performance with your web based strategies.

The creation of high quality content has become the major difference between those who are achieving success online and those who are not. And this is all about “pull” not “push”. It is about creating value so that people approach you, not pushing your services at people as traditional advertising does.

It is also no longer viable to use tricks or hacks to get your website ranking well in search.

It is now all about the value you give to your market and how your business is perceived.

In this presentation I will talk about the value of your website, why content is so important and how a little bit of search engine optimisation knowledge can improve your results.

## **Your number one asset – your website**

If you are relying on online visitors from social media, directory listings, websites hosted by third parties then you have fallen into the digital sharecropping trap.

Sounds bad doesn't it?

And all of these traffic sources should be part of your overall strategy but here's the thing.

If you rely completely on sites owned by others you have zero control over your business results. All it takes is a change to the strategy at Facebook (and believe me there have been a lot of these), or the directory you are listing with getting slapped with a Google penalty (and there have been even more of these), or the free blogging platform deciding you are being “too commercial”, then your efforts have been in vain.

Start again.

However, if you build and nurture your own self-hosted website and you continually add value to it then the only person who can change the rules is you. It is yours and you can do what you want with it.

Interestingly, many people think that a website is something you begrudgingly pay a developer a couple of grand to create then you don't have to worry about anything for a couple of years.

“Yes, we have a website – it is at [www.cheapandnastywebsite.co.nz](http://www.cheapandnastywebsite.co.nz). We have all the right pages – homepage, services, about us and contact us.

You need to change the way you think about this very important asset.

First of all you have to see it as a long term investment. Treat it as your most important shop window.

How does it reflect your business? Is it professional and state of the art? Does it show that you value your customers and that you want them to have access to the best information organised and presented in a way that shows them respect?

Unfortunately, a cheap website is just that and anyone can tell that you are prepared to cut corners.

Secondly, you must have a commitment to adding valuable content to your website whether that is in the form of new pages or regular blog posts.

The third point is that you should get your website audited on a reasonably regular basis. Technical issues such as crawl errors, metadata problems, duplication or server issues will negatively affect how well your site does in search.

## **Search engines and why they are so important**

When we talk about search engines or search marketing we are really talking about Google.

Google has a massive market share in New Zealand so all of your efforts should focus on the search giant.

Let's take a look at how search works and how your website fits into the big picture.

Google has an incredibly complex algorithm which it uses to decide where in its search results every page in its index (like its library) should appear. There are over 200 factors that this algorithm uses to rate billions of pages.

Some of the more important elements are:

- How many and what quality websites are linking to a particular page?
- Is the site technically efficient?
- How popular is the site?
- Is the content completely relevant to the query?
- Is the page optimised so that the search engines can understand exactly what it is about?
- Is it popular on social media sites?
- Are there problems with errors?
- Is the content well written with good grammar and spelling?
- Does the page load quickly?
- Are there any signs of non-compliant or manipulative behavior?
- Is the content comprehensive enough?
- Does the business have a strong reputation offline?
- Are there many mentions of the company in respected news outlets?

And of course there are many, many more.

## Why should you be so concerned about search?

By having a respected, high functioning website that is well structured and easy to navigate you have the potential to tap into the huge search market. People use search engines to find solutions, to source information, to make commercial choices. If your website shows up for a range of popular search queries then your business will gain the benefits.

If you are not present then this additional business is very likely to go to a competitor.

## Solutions based content

One of the biggest mistakes I see is that businesses see a website as an online portfolio where they can talk about themselves. The interesting thing is that people just don't care about your business.

How many websites do you visit where the content starts with "We are the top..." or "Our award winning..." or "We do x, y and z..."

No one is interested.

People are there for one reason – an answer to a question.

So, it is important to make that shift away from "We" toward "You". Think about who your customers are. What are they really looking for? How can you provide solutions to their pain-points?

I will give a good example of how this works for your industry.

Our Doberman suffered from an injury to a cruciate ligament and the options were pretty limited. Two types of surgery were offered, both involved a long recovery time much of which would be spent in a crate. If you have had Dobermans yourself you know that this would not be an ideal situation. We wanted to see if there were any alternatives and so we looked around online.

A series of YouTube videos caught our eye and the vet in these clips was local and had some interesting ideas about possible non-surgical treatment. We watched the videos, liked what we saw, visited the vet's site and found out a bit more about his background before contacting him for a chat.

Bang, new customer! Multiply this across a number of questions and solutions and you start to get an idea about how search can bring a lot of business growth through being generous with your expertise and creating content that genuinely helps people.

Imagine if your website was showing up well for a large number of common issues from your specialist areas of expertise?

It's not rocket science.

Identify your most common issues for your customers and create comprehensive, well structured, professional content that answers these questions. Optimise the content for search engines and promote it to your networks.

Repeat.

What do I mean by optimise for search engines?

Here is a very simple guide to content and metadata. This will help your content to rank well in search.

## Optimising content

These steps are very important and will make the difference between your hard work making it into Google's index and being found or not.

I'll keep it pretty simple and not delve too deeply into the technical side of things.

Starting with the content - the most important element is your title.

This is your opportunity to write compelling short copy that answers the question you are targeting. In the example I used with the cruciate ligament it could be something like:

### **Three ways to treat cruciate ligament injuries in dogs without surgery**

This is a very effective formula and one that you see online a lot. Numbered list (3 ways) – what it's about (treat cruciate ligament injuries) – interest addition/qualifier (without surgery).

Then your text based content needs to be comprehensive. Give full information – this builds trust and shows that you understand the solutions you are discussing.

Each concept (a couple of paragraphs) should be introduced with a sub-heading and these should be descriptive. If you are able to select the sub-heading tag with your Content Management System these should be either H2 or H3 and should be between 15 and 60 characters including spaces.

Aim for more than 500 words and if you can deliver over 1000 words you will do even better. Most analytics data shows that content that is well structured and that is between 1500 and 3000 words gets the best results in social shares, people referencing the content by linking to it and in search engine positions.

Here are a few other useful tips:

- Keep the language simple – don't use jargon or overly complex language.
- Use good quality images and/or diagrams to break up the content.
- For your images use a descriptive file name, not a numerical one e.g. cruciateligament.jpg not 654332.jpg.
- Add an alt tag to any image describing what it is about. Search engines can't see images so we have to tell them what the image is about.
- Write the content in a way that is speaking to the reader as if they are the only person you are speaking to. Use the words "You" and "Your" in your content. e.g. Unfortunately, your dog has injured its cruciate ligament and you really don't relish the thought of major surgery. Maybe your dog is older or perhaps you don't like the idea of the long recuperation time. Or maybe you simply can't afford the cost of surgery...

See how this is talking to your site visitors one on one?

This is one of the fundamentals of writing for the web.

## Optimising metadata

Even if you have very little in the way of technical ability you can still make the most of the opportunities that correct metadata offer.

Metadata simply tells search engines what a piece of content is about and gives clear instructions on how to display content in search and on social media sites.

Most Content Management Systems have areas for adding metadata and these may be under a tab called SEO or metatags or keywords. Whatever your CMS calls it here are a few basics for creating metadata.

## There are two metatags that are critical

### The SEO or Title tag

This is limited to 60 characters including spaces and I recommend you aim for 55 if possible. You need this to be compelling as this is what will show as your result in search. So if we take the example I have used above I will have to edit this for length.

Three ways to treat cruciate ligament injuries in dogs without surgery

This is 66 characters long so we will have to reduce it a bit.

Treat cruciate ligament injuries in dogs without surgery

At 56 characters this is just right and it still has the important words “cruciate ligament injuries in dogs” and “without surgery”.

### Meta description

You have 155 characters including spaces to make your pitch – to convince someone that they should check your content out.

Something like this:

Has your dog injured its cruciate ligament? Are you looking for alternatives to surgery? Find out other ways to treat this common problem here:

At 143 characters this is about right.

This is how it will look in search:

**Treat cruciate ligament injuries in dogs without surgery**  
yourwebsite.co.nz/ ▼  
Has your dog injured its **cruciate ligament**? Are you looking for alternatives to surgery?  
Find out other ways to treat this common problem here:

Does that look like a result you would click on if you were looking for this solution?

Most CMS will also have a section called meta keywords or simply keywords. This is a throwback to when search engines used meta keywords to help understand page content. This area is now ignored by search engines so do not add these. In fact, if you do use this section and put too many keywords into it, you may even be penalised.

## Other tips for better search presence

The number one thing to remember is that if it sounds too good to be true, it will be.

There are a lot of people out there who are quite willing to take your money by promising massive growth and unbelievable results.

There is no such thing as “low cost SEO” and you can’t ever expect “top Google positions” without hard work and a credible brand.

Google has been very tough on any manipulative techniques and over the last couple of years has been very active

in penalising sites that break the rules – even inadvertently.

Be very wary of any offers of “hundreds of links” or people who email or phone you saying that your site is defective for any reason.

Always check out any SEO provider by checking out who they are:

- Do they have an About Page with actual people with real social media pages?
- Do they have a contact page with multiple points of contact?
- When you Google them do the individuals show up in search?
- Do they list their clients and can you contact them for a reference?

If not, then steer clear. It is too risky and a penalty can take months of work and thousands of dollars to reverse.

There are a few things you can do yourself to improve your search presence.

1. List with local business directories like Yellow, Finda, Localist etc and make sure your business details are consistent across them all – exact same phone number, address and contact details. This means if you use an area code or a postal code on one you need to use it on all others.
2. A little word of warning though. These directories will hard-sell expensive search engine optimised listings, Adwords campaigns or social media management which in my experience drive very little traffic to websites. So stick with the free or entry level versions.
3. Next find trusted directories that list Veterinary Clinics and look at listing with them. Always make sure your listing has a live hyperlink – i.e. has the http:// at the start.
4. Set up a Google+ Local page with the same details as your other listings and link your website.
5. Get your customers to leave reviews on this page as well as your other directory listings.
6. Set up accounts with the major social media sites – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and if you are a fan of video use Youtube as well. Link your bios back to your website. Learn how to use social media effectively.
7. Social media is not going away and offers a pretty amazing way to connect with a large number of people and to bring visitors to your website. Become a frequent visitor to websites like Hubspot and Social Media Examiner to learn more about current best practice.
8. When you create content reference other people with expertise to demonstrate your points. Link to them and then when you publish let them know you have referenced them with a friendly email.
9. Be generous in your local community. Charitable work is brilliant for getting press mentions and leads to increased online profile.

Here are the key points I’d like you to take away from this presentation:

- Invest in a quality website
- Have it audited regularly
- Learn a bit about search engines and what they want
- Create comprehensive, solutions based content for your market
- Learn some basic web copywriting principles
- Optimise your content for search
- Build your site authority (carefully)
- Avoid cheap, low quality web services
- List with major local business directories
- Learn about and use social media
- Be active in your local community