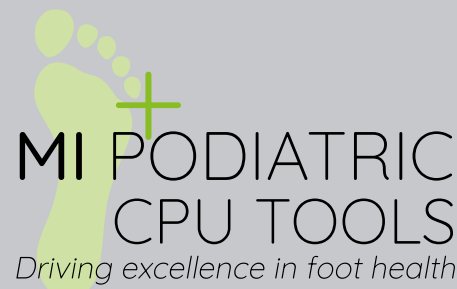


# CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL UPDATE



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## Creating a website for your practice

### Why do you need a website?

Whether you are a single practitioner, several professionals working out of the same premises, or a company operating in multiple locations, your business needs to be professional and trustworthy to attract and keep clients. People make judgements about your practice based on what they experience and how you make them feel. There are basic standards that need to be met and if you can offer a superior service your patients will reward you with their business and their loyalty.

### A business mindset

You may be clinically trained rather than having a background in business, and you may have gone into podiatry to help people rather than to make money. However, while you might think of your clientele simply as patients who need your services, it can be helpful to remember that they see themselves as paying customers. They are interacting with a business, and they expect a professional service. And they have options.

There is only so much reach you can get from referrals or word-of-mouth and advertising can be expensive. A social media presence helps, but a website can do so much more for you. It's a virtual shopfront and should be viewed as such.



**Key point:** Although social media is a useful business tool, a website should be seen as your shopfront to attract new patients.

A website can help your business grow as well as saving you time and money. It can help you with marketing, selling, and fielding questions and queries. A website can also help your practice build trust and authority; you want to be seen by the right people and for them to know you as the expert you are. For those professionals who want to build a brand and a business, a website is a valuable tool. Get the basics right and with a little effort you can leverage your website to work actively for you.

Whether we like it or not, we live in an increasingly digital world. In the UK, only 80% of small and medium-sized businesses <sup>(1)</sup> have a website. If you want to compete with others who do what you do, regardless of how large or small they may be, you need to look and act the part. A 2021 survey <sup>(2)</sup> of 5440 people reported that:

66% of people surveyed agreed that a business with its own website is more credible than one without

'66% of people surveyed agreed that a business with its own website is more credible than one without. Likewise, a majority indicated that they would expect it to be more difficult to verify the identity of (56%), find online (55%) and contact (54%) a business that does not have its own website'.

## How a website can help your business

### 1. A website belongs to you

If your business marketing strategy is based solely on word of mouth or social media - for example you have a Facebook page or Instagram account - you are dependent on other people or another business (Meta in this case). You cannot control what people say about you or when they say it. And what you and your patients see in their social media feeds depends on that company's algorithms and policies. They can change at any moment. Different social media platforms go in and out of fashion and you need to be on the right ones at the right times. Not everyone uses social media, so if your target demographic includes these people, you could be missing out on potential clients. Accounts can be shut down or suspended for infringing guidelines. This could be due to something beyond your control, like a misunderstanding, or hackers taking over your account.

Conversely, a website belongs to you. You have

complete control as to what appears on your website, when it appears, and how it appears.

**Key Point:** Not everyone uses social media, so a website offers a channel for new clients, and it belongs to you and is always available.

### 2. A website is always available

People do not need to contact you within business hours or be on the right social media platform to find the information they need if you have a website. It is always accessible. People can send an email, book an appointment, or buy your products or services whenever it suits them and without you having to do anything.

### 3. You can build trust and offer social proof

Trust is essential for patients to use your services, particularly in the healthcare sector <sup>(3,4)</sup>. You need to offer

examples of how you can be considered trustworthy. Providing a valuable source of help and information will encourage people to choose you over a competitor <sup>(5)</sup>. Even if your business works mainly from referrals, the lack of an online presence can be disconcerting. More than three quarters of people will check out a company online before engaging with them <sup>(6)</sup>.

If you are looking to grow your business, a website can work as a 'referrer' in the same way a valued patient might recommend you to their friends and family. A website is available to people searching for the help they know they need. Personal referrals depend on a person knowing their friend or family member needs a particular service - and not everyone likes to talk about health problems.

A website helps build trust. You can offer helpful information and services and showcase testimonials, reviews, case studies, and other examples of 'social proof' to prove people value you. Social proof works on herd mentality. Humans look to others to know how they should behave, so if a group of people are all doing the same thing, we assume it must be the right thing to do. If you can show you have many happy patients, lots of sales, or are endorsed by an expert or celebrity, for example, others will want to be a part of that too.

**Key Point:** Showcasing testimonials, reviews and case studies on your website offers social proof of your expertise and builds trust.

### 4. You can show all your products and services in one place

You can easily explain and highlight all your services and expertise on a website. This can save you time explaining what you do or don't do and how you work. In other words, it helps to pre-qualify potential patients. And unlike social media pages, you can keep all the information where you want it. It will not slip down a timeline or get lost in the ether like it can on social media.

**Key Point:** A website can help you find the right patients, for example - highlighting the services that you offer and the ones that you don't.

### 5. You can benefit from search engine optimisation and other marketing opportunities

Using search engine optimisation (SEO) techniques can help bring more customers to your website. If your business model includes selling products or other services that do not involve patients attending in-person appointments this can be particularly useful. It gives you access to a market you might otherwise not encounter. It should also help to increase your patient list.

'Optimising' your website for the search engines involves having the right keywords, layout, security certificates and so on for them to find and rank you in a search. If your practice is based in Bristol, for example, you want people searching online for 'podiatrist in Bristol' to see your website first. You do this by 'optimising' it for that search term (see What else to consider). The higher you rank the more authority it implies.

If SEO and website-marketing strategies are managed properly your website can put you in front of more people. Your website analytics look at how people interact with your website. This will give you insightful data that can be useful for informing future marketing strategies, whether you do this yourself or engage an expert to help you.

### 6. You can save time and money

As already noted, your website can help pre-qualify potential patients which can free up time and resources. A frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) section can answer the queries you get asked all the time. This saves time responding to repeated individual enquiries. And some email queries may be answerable with a link to a blog you have posted,

or a particular web page, for example.

**Key Point:** A website can save you time and money, for example by including a frequently asked questions page to reduce repeated enquiries.

### 7. You can establish your expertise

You can offer easily accessible, valuable information such as blogs, professional affiliations and other advice and knowledge relevant to your patients. This will add value, build trust, and spotlight your expertise. Posting regular blogs or articles will inform your customers and help with your social proof, as well as driving more organic traffic (traffic that you have not paid for, for example through a paid advertisement) to your website.

### 8. You can feature reviews and testimonials

87% of consumers used Google to evaluate local businesses in 2022 and healthcare is one of the top industries where consumers see business reviews as most important <sup>(4)</sup>. Your website is the ideal place

Healthcare is one of the top industries where consumers see business reviews as most important

to feature testimonials and reviews that resonate most with your brand and show you in the best possible light. A good website gives people reasons to use you and not a featureless competitor.

### 9. You can build your brand

Brands and branding are not just for multinational companies <sup>(8)</sup>. Even individuals can build a professional brand. Your website will show you how you wish to be seen. Your branding, or in other words, how you appear, the things you are associated with, what matters to you, how you work, and so on, needs to be consistent and professional. What makes you unique and better than the competition can all shine through on your website. And if you have a website with an associated email address you automatically come across as more professional <sup>(9)</sup>: 85% of people consider businesses with a branded email address to be more credible than those without <sup>(2)</sup>. You would never expect to email a large company at a hotmail or gmail email address, for example.

**Key Point:** Your website can help to build your brand - that is who you are, what matters to you and how you appear.

### 10. Your website should be cost effective

A relatively small investment in a website that is well-designed and written, frequently updated,



quick and easy to navigate, and optimized for mobile use should pay dividends in the opportunities it creates. This should reduce the need for paid marketing by bringing opportunities to you, rather than you having to go looking for them. It can also reduce the need for dedicated resources for dealing with potential patients.

### What makes a good or bad website?

You will already have formed an idea of what makes a good or bad website, but you may not have thought about it in those terms. Even in 2011 research showed that people form an opinion on a website in just 50 milliseconds <sup>(10)</sup>.

Bad websites are visually unappealing and frustrating to use. It is unlikely you spend long on bad websites as these days we have even more exacting expectations. We quickly move on from sites that do not deliver what we are looking for. A good user experience is vital to keep people's interest. A bad website does not draw people in at first glance. It does not provide the information a person is searching for, is likely to load pages slowly, and will not give the impression that a business is professional, trustworthy, or knowledgeable. People will not hang around.

### A good website should:

- Be well-designed and easy to navigate
- Provide all the functions and information your patients need, for example booking forms and contact and location details
- Be optimised for mobile devices so that people can read it on their phone or tablet without having to scroll sideways to see the whole page
- Have up to date, well-written content describing your products and services and blog posts, articles, and testimonials showing your expertise and how you add value
- Clear calls to action, for example 'book an appointment', 'call us now', 'sign me up to your newsletter', 'buy now', and so on.

### What does a website cost?

The cost of a website can vary hugely, depending on various factors. You will need a domain – the URL or website address – and a host. You'll need a domain name that is not already being used and depending on how you create your website the cost may be included. Alternatively, you can buy a domain name separately. If the name is not already

registered, it can be bought for a standard fee from the designated domain registrar. However, if the name has already been purchased the cost can vary considerably and will depend on its perceived value.

A web host stores your website's files on their server, and this also attracts a cost. Again, this may be included in your website plan. Most smaller companies will take advantage of shared hosting (sharing a physical space on a server with other websites) as dedicated hosting is more costly and only really necessary for large websites.

As far as the website pages are concerned, there are several ways to create a website:

- You can buy an off-the-shelf template and do everything yourself.
- You can pay a website designer to create your website but do the content – the writing (copy), media, and any integrations like diary links yourself.
- You can outsource every part of your website from the design and copy to branding and media, to an agency or individual companies who will take care of each element.

The more you do yourself, the less your website will cost. However, cost should not be the only consideration. A website is an investment and should be approached accordingly. And you can always start with the basics and invest more into it as your business grows.

### How do you go about getting a website?

#### 1. Do-it-yourself websites

There are numerous DIY website builders, and you can use the templates they provide to build your website yourself. You just populate your chosen template with your own copy (writing), images, and other media. You may have heard of WordPress, Wix, Go Daddy, Shopify, Squarespace, Ionos, for example. Each has a slightly different way of working and focus. You will get a different opinion about each builder from everyone you ask, however, WordPress is probably the most well known. It is worth doing your research into the different options and establishing exactly which one best suits your requirements.

*A few things to think about*

*You should know how you and your business operate so try to think how it might translate to the internet. Look for a website builder with strengths*

*that best suit your requirements. Remember, what works for someone else might not be the best option for your business.*

- Do you need something basic or something much more sophisticated?
- Does the free or basic package include everything you need or will you need to factor in additional costs?
- Does it include the cost of the domain name and hosting?
- Is a dedicated email address included?
- How easy is it to use?
- Do you need online support?
- Do you need an online shop?
- Do you already have systems that will need to be integrated into it?

You will need to write the text – or pay someone to do it for you – and source any images or other media you need for your website.

#### 2. Off-the-shelf website designers

You can use an off-the-shelf website package that comes with templates, like WordPress or Squarespace for example, but get a dedicated website designer to put it together for you. You will need to brief them on exactly what you want and how you want it, and they will go away and build it for you. They may ask you to provide your own copy and images, or they may be able to do this for you. If you are paying someone else to write your copy, make sure they are a professional copywriter with experience in writing website copy, and not just the website designer or someone else who is not trained to do this.

How much a website designer charges for this service varies hugely, as does their experience and expertise. Shop around for one specialising in the website builder (eg WordPress, Wix, etc) that is best for your business. It is important to find someone you think you can work with and make sure you establish exactly what you are looking for. Find out what will and will not be included. For example, once your website is up and running you may still need to factor in an additional monthly or yearly charge for hosting or ongoing support.

#### 3. Bespoke website designers

You can ask a web designer to create a bespoke website for you from scratch, rather than from pre-

built templates. This will be tailored to exactly what you want from your website and how you need it to function. This is only really necessary for large companies with complex requirements. A bespoke website-design service would also either organise or liaise with copywriters and any other individuals or teams necessary to the process. This might be as part of the package or for an additional fee. It is important to be clear on what you want so you can communicate it properly to the website designer. And ensure you understand what is included in the design package and what will be up to you to source or subject to an additional charge.

### What should you include/where do you start?

The number of pages you have on your website, how they are laid out, and what they include will depend on your business and what you are trying to achieve. There are a few basic pages that all good websites need and others that may apply to your business or be useful for it.

A one-page website with minimal information is not sufficient these days. However, the amount of information on your website and how it is set out will depend on various factors. These are the basic pages you are most likely to need, and you should aim for a minimum of 300 words per page as any fewer than that may mean the search engines do not index them:

#### → Home

This is the 'landing' page, where people arrive when they type in your main website address. It needs to be engaging and informative. Ideally it should have a little detail on most or all of the other pages available on your website with links to those pages where people can find out more about each subject.

#### → About

This is where you introduce yourself or your team and give a little information about who you are and what your business stands for. In a sector that revolves around interpersonal relationships and direct contact, the more of a 'human' side you can show, the better. You should give people an idea of what they can expect from you and why you are qualified to help. People should be able to see your qualifications the logos of any professional bodies you belong to should be displayed. These all show expertise and help build trust.

#### → Services

People want to know what services you offer and



how you approach them. They may have very little idea of what a podiatrist actually does. Perhaps a friend has suggested they need one, or a doctor has referred them. The more relevant information you can offer, the better. You want the people contacting you to have a sound basis of what they can expect and how you can help. They may be unsure about which service might be the right one for them.

A comprehensive, informative services page can point people in the right direction. It can help them by giving them the information they need to ensure they can be confident in approaching you. It should also mean they will not unnecessarily use up your time and resources in establishing if you are the right fit.

#### → Testimonials and reviews

Posting social proof like testimonials and positive reviews on your website goes a long way to persuading people you are competent, trustworthy, and reliable.

#### → FAQ

A frequently asked questions page gives you the opportunity to pre-empt the questions you are often asked (even if you have already answered them elsewhere on your site or they seem obvious to you). You can use them to explain how you work, how to book an appointment, what you charge, your cancellation policy, and so on.

#### → Blog

A blog page is a great way to connect with your clients and provide information that matters to them. It is a valuable tool that also helps the search engines to find you, which in turn helps lead more people to your website (this is known as organic traffic).

#### → Contact

Your contact page should include all your contact details, for example, phone numbers, email addresses, physical address, hours of business, and so on. Many website domains come with email included but you can also buy an associated email address (9), which makes your business seem more professional. You may also wish to include a contact form (where people fill in their details to get in touch). You can decide what information you require on your contact form, for example name, email address, phone number, message, and so on).

#### → Shop

If you sell physical products (or even virtual ones like gift vouchers) you may find an online shop is a useful addition to your website. It gives you the opportunity to sell to people who are not, and will never be, on your patient list.

#### → Bookings and online consultations

Automating your booking and online consultation process helps you free up time and resources, as well as making it simpler for people to find a time that suits them. People can book outside practice hours and rearrange appointments as necessary, depending on criteria that you set.

### What else to consider

#### 1. Target clients and how to appeal to them

The content on your website needs to appeal to your target clients. Maybe you are targeting a certain demographic like women, the over 60s, or sportspeople, for example. Whatever your demographic, make sure your content speaks to them and will make them feel comfortable and provide reassurance that they have come to the right place.

#### 2. Style and structure

A 'busy' website with dense paragraphs full of technical text will put people off. So will small, old-fashioned fonts and no images. You will also need to bear in mind that not everyone likes to look at pictures of feet and all their associated problems so you might like to have a separate section for 'graphic' images. Look at other companies' websites and see what you like that will also appeal to your target clients. Consistency is key so make sure all your pages follow the same format.

#### 3. Security

Whether you are doing it all yourself or paying

someone else to do everything for you, you need to ensure your website is secure or people will be unwilling to use or trust it. It will need to have all the right security settings and ideally display a 'trust seal'. A secure website starts with https, not http. The addition of the 's' shows it is secure and is known as a Secure Sockets Layer certificate (an SSL). A trust seal is a logo or icon you can display that will take a user through to an authentication site to prove you are legitimate. Speak to your website designer or check security credentials with the website building company you are using. You also need to comply with GDPR (general data protection regulation) – please refer to the end of the article for further information.

### 4. Search engine optimisation, analytics, and tracking

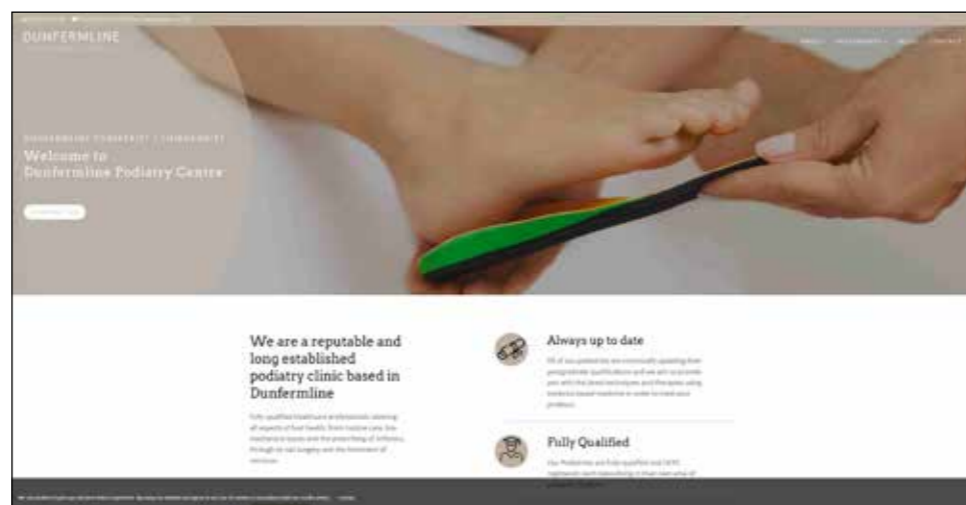
SEO, or search engine optimisation, is a discipline all of its own. Your website needs on-page SEO, off-page SEO, and local SEO to be most effective. A good copywriter will ensure you have all the right on-page and local SEO in your written copy but check that they have the credentials to do this properly. A good website designer should add all the other on-page SEO you need, and a lot will be included in off-the-shelf websites that you design yourself. Local SEO is essential for businesses that depend on in-person appointments. Make sure you have references to the towns and counties you predominantly attract patients from (on your contact page and also in your FAQs) so the search engines know to list you if someone searches for a podiatrist in your area. You can also employ an SEO marketing agency who will help you.

Off-page SEO is generally built by others linking to you, for example by including a link to one of your blog articles or your services. Other people and businesses will only link to you if you can make them look good by providing interesting, relevant, and professional information.

### 5. Professional input

The more professional input you can get into your website, the better. A website designer should be able to advise you and build your website the way you want it, saving you the time and stress of trying to learn how to do it yourself. If you can afford to get your copy written, do so as it should pay off in extra website traffic. If you can hire a photographer to do proper headshots, you will immediately seem more professional and trustworthy.

## Case Study



**Peter Thomson, Dunfermline Podiatry Centre, Fife.**  
[www.podiatrycentre.co.uk](http://www.podiatrycentre.co.uk)

### Why a website?

Dunfermline Podiatry Centre in Fife realised that indirect marketing was probably the most important way in which they could get their services in front of potential patients. As most people who are looking for a podiatrist are usually in pain or discomfort already, they will seek out a suitable business. Knowing that everyone uses Google search engine nowadays, a website was the obvious choice. It was important for Dunfermline Podiatry Centre to be easily found online and to look professional.

### The process of getting a website

The practice's first website was a basic one they built themselves and it went online in 2003. It has since been upgraded a couple of times over the years. The original site was on the Wix platform which served as a great entry-level website for several years. As the business grew, however, they found it difficult to make the finer, professional tweaks they needed.

When they felt their original website was no longer fit for purpose, Peter Thomson, the practice's principal podiatrist, decided to use the services of a professional web design company. The web designer was able to offer a range of design options for the site and they switched to the WordPress platform.

The practice wanted the website to serve as a source of valuable information for existing and potential patients. They knew that people spend

time doing their research to find the treatments that suit their needs and to get an idea of pricing. They decided against an integrated online booking system having found that people ended up booking the wrong appointment slots and for treatments they didn't really need.

### How a website has benefitted the business

The website saves the practice time and money. Having invested in SEO (search engine optimisation), Dunfermline Podiatry Centre ranks highly for the local area on Google, and first for podiatrist and chiropodist in Dunfermline, which they feel makes a huge difference to their business.

As Peter says, "the website certainly saves us time with phone calls as patients can find the information about our business online and that makes it easier for us". The website only needs some tweaks every few weeks to ensure it stays current and they need to set some time aside for this. This might be due to a new treatment or a change in prices, for example.

Being online means you'll get online reviews which Peter notes can be a double-edged sword. Online reviews are an important thing to have, and the practice works hard to try and get good ones. However, it is not possible to control what is not on their website. The practice is very aware that if you have a website that is ranking well on Google, you have to deal with the possibility of negative reviews as well as positive ones.

## Case Study



**Elizabeth Jones, Total Foot Health, Salisbury.**  
[www.totalfoothealth.co.uk](http://www.totalfoothealth.co.uk)

### Why a website?

Although Total Foot Health's first practice website was launched about 15 years ago, in 2020 they realised it needed to be completely overhauled. The business was expanding and had become a multi-disciplinary practice offering a wider range of services. Elizabeth Jones, the clinical director, also wanted the ability to offer an online booking facility.

Elizabeth felt that one of the main challenges for podiatrists is that many people are unsure what a podiatrist does. She wanted the practice website to provide lots of information to address this. She also wanted it to be found easily for people using commonly searched keywords like "foot pain" and "ingrowing toenails".

### The process of getting a website

Total Foot Health decided to employ Wade Digital, a local company that were highly recommended and that they felt understood their business needs. The site was built on the WordPress platform and the web design agency also did the practice's SEO (search engine optimisation), a key requirement they were looking for.

Elizabeth and the practice director researched competitor podiatry and physiotherapist sites and took all the best elements to incorporate into Total Foot Health's. They wrote all the content and developed the structure they felt their business needed. They wanted the "what", "why", and "how" for every clinical condition but tried to just give a brief overview – enough to encourage people to book an appointment.



They hired a professional photographer so they could project the professional image they wanted.

### How a website has benefitted the business

The practice seeks feedback on the website from new patients and they like it. It links to Trust Pilot and Google reviews, which are managed very carefully.

Elizabeth feels that the online booking option has made a real difference and made sure it appears on every web page. She finds that the 24-hour online booking facility is invaluable for working people who are likely to be trying to make an appointment outside normal working hours.

She also knows that people need information before they visit a new practice because they can be very anxious about health consultations. They need to have confidence they are going somewhere professional. The photographs on the Total Foot Health website let people know they can expect a professional and caring environment.

The only downside, as Elizabeth sees it, is the cost of maintaining a website. However, as she herself says, "good marketing should be either free or low cost, whereas advertising costs hundreds of thousands": and a website is a low-cost marketing tool.

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For further information on GDPR, please visit: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/>

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