Website image selection

A picture is worth a thousand words

By Kimberley Ward

"The right image can be extremely powerful. It can capture attention, inform and influence... it can communicate who you and your company are far more quickly and effectively than words alone..."

Part five of a six article series that focuses on the importance of your web presence as an integral component of your practice marketing.

The ability to select suitable images for websites effectively is one of the most challenging skills for any web designer to acquire. The need to find visual matches for titles and words that in many cases have no corresponding match in physical reality can be difficult.

The right image on a page can be extremely powerful. It can capture attention, inform and influence. The right image can communicate who you and your company are far more quickly and effectively than words alone. As such, it is important that you look for images where the subject, theme or heart of the matter is immediately recognizable. You should consider the following when selecting images for your site:

1. Does the image convey the right feeling? Images communicate mood. Colours, backgrounds and facial expressions all combine to evoke feelings. An image may fit your brief in terms of the subject supporting the content, however it must also suit the mood of the site.

2. Does it add information? Web images should pull their own weight and contribute to the page. If the image does not make sense in the context of the page, it is better not to include it in your site.

3. Do I have a clear understanding of my brand? All images need to support your brand personality. It can be difficult to choose complimentary images without first having a clear understanding of your brand and the story you are wishing to tell on your site.

4. Are the images fairly unique? In order to support your company's distinctive branding message, the images included within your site should be unique to ensure you stand out in the marketplace. This can be difficult when there are so many stock libraries out there and the use of royalty free images is prevalent. Be aware of your competitors and the businesses in your area and avoid the use of any images that appear even only vaguely familiar.

5. Is the image contextually cropped? This is especially important for smaller images where the focal point can be difficult to see. To retain your visitors' focus on the most important elements of the image, you should ensure there are fewer details in the image the smaller it becomes (Figure 1).

6. Be mindful of the colours within the image. Take note of whether the colours within the image support your branding. Colour - or in some cases lack thereof - can be one of the strongest branding elements on a website.

Figure 1. As an image (far left) becomes smaller (above), crop in to focus on the relevant area only (left).

Figure 2. An example of a good image for a website - the colours are vibrant, the whole face is shown and the subject is in the foreground and in focus.

7. Faces draw attention. As humans, we are instinctively drawn to faces and within these, particularly the eyes and mouth, as they help convey mood and intent. In choosing images of people, it is best to include both these features. Note that the subjects of images don't necessarily need to be looking at the camera (Figure 2). The key is to retain the human connection, without distracting from the pertinent information within the page.

From a technical perspective, it's important that images are vivid and vibrant, with the subject in focus and that maintain their clarity (Figure 2). The difference in impact between high quality images and low quality images can be dramatic, so being mindful of how images will view on screen is also important. Avoid grainy or out of focus shots. Evaluate images in print beside each other to determine whether they are suitable to use together on your site. Note that you do need to balance the quality of the image with the file size (larger file sizes take longer to download, slowing your site). It's best to use higher resolution images that are optimized for web viewing to ensure the best results.

Specific to healthcare advertising, it's also best to avoid 'before' and 'after' images where possible on your website. Some viewers will find images of this nature confronting. If you feel the use of before and after images will add value to your messages, and therefore your website will benefit from their inclusion, it is suggested that the main image be the 'after' picture, with the 'before' revealed only after hovering over the image, or clicking through to an image gallery.

When it comes to the build of your site, SEO should always remain top of mind. Your developer will be aware that search engine 'bots' scan the text of your page, but are unable to determine what is contained within an image. It is important that your developer assign appropriate labels to each of your images, as these will inform the bots as to what is contained within the image. For example, if you have an image of a patient on your site, ensure this is labeled 'Smiling dental patient' vs 'Picture #1'.

About the author

Kimberley Ward is Business Development and Marketing Manager for Levitch Design Associates, one of Australia's leading healthcare interior design consultancies who offer an integrated approach to practice presentation. Custom corporate identity solutions, brand development, graphic/web design, promotional strategies and marketing campaigns are some of the services provided. For more information, contact (02) 9880-9300 or visit www.levitch.com.au.