Technology Forum

Tips for Designing a Web Site to Promote Your Research/Clinical Services

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The public is increasingly turning to the Internet to answer their mental health questions and concerns. Developing a "web presence" has become an important component in the successful promotion of clinical and research services. Unfortunately, many professionals in our field are reluctant to take advantage of this low-cost educational and advertising opportunity because they feel overwhelmed by the technical aspects of the process. But developing a web site can be surprisingly simple and does not require advanced computer classes or hours studying a manual.

At the Social Anxiety Treatment Program at MCP Hahnemann University, we have been running a successful web site for the past five years (visit www.mcphu.edu/shp/fear) without any formal training in this area.   We have been pleasantly surprised to find that it has become among the most popularly referenced sites on search engines for social phobia treatment. Since we began counting visitors in 1999, we have recorded over 45,000 "hits" to our site, and we routinely receive calls from individuals around the world who are interested in obtaining more information about social anxiety disorder in general, or about our program in particular. Below are a few tips that we hope will benefit others who are interested in setting up a new web site.

1. First, you will need server space. Most universities offer free web space for students and staff, so you will need to contact your computer resources department to see what is available at your university. If this is not available or you are not affiliated with a university, you can obtain web space through one of the many free sites (e.g., _Yahoo! GeoCities_ at http://geocities.yahoo.com) or pay a small fee for web space from an Internet Service Provider. The main drawback from free sites is that additional advertisements will appear on your page that you would not have if you paid for space.

2. You will need an easy-to-use HTML (Hypertext Markup Language; the basic programming language for designing web pages) editor to design your site. A couple of good pay programs that we recommend are _Microsoft FrontPage_ and _Macromedia's Dreamweaver_. You can do some basic HTML editing on programs that you may already have access to, including newer versions of Microsoft Word or Publisher. Also, you can download free HTML editors that will perform many of the functions of the pay products. _Netscape Composer_ and _Microsoft FrontPage Express_ are excellent choices and can be found at these companies' web sites. HTML editors write the programming code for you. Therefore, if you can use common word processing programs, you should have little difficulty learning how to use these web design programs.

3. Most of these programs provide various templates from which to choose; you simply supply the content. As you acquire more skills, you can visit web sites that you enjoy surfing and borrow design elements for your site.

4. When making a web site keep one concept in mind: user friendly. A common mistake is to design a web site that simply advertises one's services. Make sure also to provide general helpful information on your topic area of expertise. This way, your site will be more likely to attract visitors and become popular on the search engines.

5. Once you have a web site designed you will need to promote it. One way to do this is to develop your own "favorite links" section that lists web sites of similar interest. Contact other popular web sites that share your area of interest and invite them to do a "link exchange." Also, all major search engines allow you to submit your web site for inclusion on the list of sites they reference. Submit your site to a number of popular search engines to increase your chances of being listed.

The Internet can be a great resource for professionals and consumers, but it also can be a troubling source of misinformation. Therefore, it is imperative for evidence-based practitioners and researchers to develop web sites through which the public can access accurate information on mental health issues. By developing popular web sites, we can help disseminate cutting-edge research and treatment options based on psychological science to consumers while promoting our programs and clinics in the process.

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Resource Column

Anxiety SIG Website: A New Resource for Researchers and Students

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We are pleased to announce that the Anxiety SIG website is available online at www.aabt-anxietysig.org. Dr. Martin Antony, the Anxiety SIG president, appointed us as co-editors of the website over the summer with the hope that this project would increase members' involvement in the SIG. After conducting an extensive review of existing anxiety-related websites, we realized that most anxiety-related information available online is geared toward consumers or individuals with no prior knowledge of anxiety disorders. Thus, we decided to focus the information included on the Anxiety SIG's website toward individuals interested in learning about or conducting anxiety-related research. We expect that this website will be a useful resource for individuals interested in learning about current programs of research conducted by anxiety researchers in the United States and Canada as well as for student and young investigators to learn about available positions and award opportunities.

Currently, there are several sections of the website available for viewing. Individuals who are interested in joining the SIG can apply for membership online, and current members can renew their memberships online. In addition, we have included a "Members Only" category that lists contact information for Anxiety SIG members (the password is "AABT"). Other sections update visitors on SIG events such as the SIG Poster Session at this year's AABT convention, and include application information and descriptions of awards the SIG sponsors. This section also includes profiles of this year's Anxiety SIG award recipients. Other available features of this site are a reference list of anxiety-related journal articles published in the past year, an online version of this newsletter, and links to an array of anxiety-related sites with descriptions of the contents of each of the sites.

The maintenance of a website is an ongoing project, and we are working to include many additional features on this website. For example, we have created a "Research Programs" section in which interested individuals can learn about the activities of active anxiety research programs throughout the United States and Canada. Several researchers have provided us with descriptions of their research programs, and we