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Cover Your Assets: Weighing the Pros and Cons of Central Cloud- Based Web Assets

By David Evans, PhD, MBA

In recent years, more and more Internet marketing companies have decided to manage their clients' websites and other online assets via central cloud- or web-based systems. These platforms can have a number of advantages, but they are not without their potential drawbacks.

Here, we weigh some of the basic pros and cons associated with the systems, and provide tips on how to navigate through this uncharted water.

Pro: One-Stop Shopping

These software platforms allow the practice and its Internet marketing company to manage your website from one location. Companies can create new functionality, and then readily upload these resources, and your staff can log in and make updates or changes as needed.

Con: Unless you can't. Some systems don't provide access to the website files, only to the database. Without direct access to the files, your website is not in your control. In this scenario, your hands are tied if you want to make minor, but important updates to the look or functionality of your website. This can be incredibly frustrating.

Cover your assets by asking about and insisting upon direct access to your website files upfront. If the system does not make them available, be prepared

to stick with the website look and structure you initially contracted for.

Pro: Off-Site Storage

Con: You can't take it with you. Much of your data and content is not transferable. If you become unhappy with your marketing firm and want to make a change, you lose. Consider the example of Internet marketing firms that combine all of their clients into one big Google Analytics account. (Google Analytics is a free statistics package that all practices should attach to their websites.)

This is great for the firm, but not for your practice. If you want to part ways with your marketing firm, all of this data stays put in the firm's general account. The firm can continue to maintain your Google Analytics account, but this means your practice is totally dependent on them. Can you trust them? They may simply deactivate the account anytime they want and wipe out the history. This is also true of your photo galleries, videos, reviews, and blog.

Some companies offer proprietary software additions that allow for central management of the content and presentation of these assets. These are great features, unless you move to a different Internet marketing company. If you do, the gallery will need to be rebuilt, videos re-edited, and the player redeveloped, and the reviews and blog content may disappear.

Cover your assets by requesting an individual Google Analytics account that is transferable with the website upfront, before signing a contract. If it's too late to arrange for your own account and you are switching firms, start fresh with an independent Google Analytics account. The old data may be gone, but going forward you will have

complete control of all new data.

The same is true for galleries, video players, reviews, and blog posts. If they are not transferable and you are planning to take your business elsewhere, cut the cord now. The longer you wait, the more assets will need to be re-edited, redeveloped, and recreated.

Pro: Cheaper to Keep Her

Cloud-based systems are generally less expensive than private servers, and the savings are typically passed on to your practice. What's more, all functionality and design can be easily integrated and updated across all sites.

Con: Oftentimes, the first few websites generated by a cloud-based system are unique in terms of their look and feel, but eventually they tend to take on a cookie-cutter-like design.

Cover your assets by checking out all of the websites hosted by a marketing firm before you sign a contract. Make sure they look and feel distinct from one another to prospective patients—even if they have the same bells and whistles.

In general, asking the right questions upfront will help you get all of the benefits of these systems, and avoid, or at least have a good understanding of, the potential downsides.

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