

Who Really Owns Your Web Site?

by David Evans, PhD, MBA

A plastic surgeon acquaintance asked me to review his Web site to see if it needed an upgrade. He was probably looking for a simple yes or no answer, but right from the start, there were some serious red flags that told me there was no simple answer.

Plastic surgeons and other physicians often outsource their Web site development and management. Web sites are works in progress and often need upgrading, revitalizing, or just a general redesign. This keeps them fresh and helps you to maintain prominent rankings on Google and other search engines. As my plastic surgeon acquaintance quickly found out, this can get sticky when physicians find out they don't actually own their

Web site or anything on it. Do you own your Web site? Do you really know the answer to the question? Here's how you can find out for sure and protect yourself in the future.

CHECK THE

A Web site's copyright notice appears somewhere at the bottom of each page. This information tells you who owns the rights to the content and design of the site. The only answer to this question should be you.

If the Web site company registered the Internet domain name (your dot-com Web address) and retained ownership, you may be out a lot of money. You can't move or change the Web site without utilizing the services of that company. In essence, you are being held hostage, and the ransom can be substantial.

If you do not want to be held hostage by your Web site development company, ask these important questions up front so there will be no problems down the road:

1) Who owns the domain name of my Web site?

The domain name of your Web site, such as johnsmithplasticsurgeonmd.com, is very important for branding your practice. It should appear in all of your marketing materials and bro



chures. Like wine, domain names get better with age. Your domain name can influence how well your site ranks on Google. To be an asset, it must be owned and controlled by your practice.

Already have a domain name? Check ownership by visiting www.whois.sc and searching for your domain name. If you are not listed as the registrar of the domain name, you may have a problem.

2) Is there duplicate content on my site?

Customized, individualized Web site content is essential for creating a unique image for your practice. Google is less likely to give your site high rankings if the content is the same as on other sites. Always ask your Web site developer if the content will be unique. Don't take their word for it. You can (and should) check for yourself by copying a sentence or two of content from a page, inserting quote marks around these sentences, and then placing the text into the Google search box. Google will then list any matches. (Hint: You don't want to see any matches.)

3) Do I own the design of my site?

Find out who owns the design when you have a new Web site built. It doesn't matter that you wrote all the content from scratch if you don't own the design—which includes the site's graphic design, layout, imagery, navigation, and content.

4) Do I own the artwork?

Many of the photos that appear on plastic surgery Web sites are from online photo catalogs that require a licensing fee.

Who Really Owns Your Web Site? (Continued)

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Ask your Web developer who will own the photos, and whether there are any ongoing licensing fees associated with these images.

5) Do I own the Flash video files and other multimedia?

Access to and ownership of the source code for Flash and other video files is essential for transferring your Web site without a hitch, glitch, or exorbitant fee. If you don't own the source code, you may have to pay to have these files re-created after you expand or redesign your site.

To fully protect your interests, ask these crucial questions now. My plastic surgeon acquaintance sure wishes he had.

David Evans, PhD, MBA, is the CEO of Ceatus Media Group, based in San Diego. A recognized authority on Internet medical marketing strategies, Evans has spoken at meetings of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, among others. He can be reached at devans@ceatus.com or (858) 454-5505.