

WEBSITE GUIDELINES

What should be the primary purpose of our website?

The Internet offers an exciting new vehicle for reaching abortion-vulnerable women. Before creating a website, however, your center should carefully consider the purposes for using this technology and the corresponding limitations. The primary purpose of a website should be to attract clients to contact your center or another center that may be more conveniently located. While it is appropriate to include on your website certain information for the benefit of clients, this information cannot take the place of a one-on-one client relationship. Therefore, you should view a website primarily as a means for facilitating one-on-one peer counseling in the center and not as a means of replacing it.

How can our website assist clients who live in other areas?

Because of the nature of the Internet, it is likely that many, if not most, of the prospective clients that will visit your website will be from outside your community. Therefore, it is recommended that your homepage include some means for referring these clients to centers that are located in their own community. One easy way to do this is to prominently display the Option Line number (800-395-HELP) or website (www.pregnancycenters.org) on your homepage. Another way is to invite clients to contact your center so that they may be referred to a center in their own area.

What information should we include on our website for prospective clients?

A website can potentially include a wide range of information for prospective clients. The most critical categories of information include: a basic description of the center's ministry, a description of the services provided, and sufficient information to help the client in contacting your center or another center. Because the visitors to your website may frequently be from other areas, it is recommended that you also explain your center's relationship to the Heartbeat network and the availability of pregnancy centers offering similar services in other areas. In addition to basic information about their centers and services, some centers include additional educational information on pregnancy, fetal development, abortion risks, and parenting. The inclusion of basic educational information may prove helpful to clients and the public. It may also help demonstrate more clearly the type of assistance that can be offered by the center. Again, however, the inclusion of such information on a website should not be designed as a substitute for direct one-on-one peer counseling. Finally, some centers include links to other websites as well as lists of referral agencies.

What concerns are there in listing our services?

It is very important that your center's services be accurately described so there will be no possible confusion or ambiguity about the nature of these services. The same concerns that apply in creating Yellow Page ads also apply in developing a list of services on your website. Therefore, you should always refer to offering "pregnancy tests" as opposed to

“pregnancy testing.” You should also avoid listing “abortion” or “abortion information” since these headings may be wrongly construed as indicating that you provide or refer for abortion services. Instead, consider listing “abortion education” or “facts about abortion risks.” Regardless of the specific headings you may include that refer to abortion, it is strongly recommended that you also include somewhere within your website a specific disclaimer stating that your center does not provide or refer for abortions or abortifacients. For example, one center currently uses this disclaimer:

Our counsel is that abortion compounds rather than solves the problems associated with a crisis pregnancy. The center never advises, provides, or refers for abortion or abortifacients.

In referring to your center’s counseling services, you should avoid any suggestion that your center is staffed by professional counselors (unless it is). Therefore, it is recommended that you describe these services as “peer counseling.”

How much information should we include about pregnancy, fetal development, and abortion risks?

Offering basic educational information about pregnancy, fetal development, and abortion may provide valuable assistance to prospective clients as well as to the public at large. If your center chooses to include educational information about pregnancy, fetal development, or abortion on its website, it is very important that this information be accurate and up-to-date. You should have this information carefully reviewed in advance by one or more qualified medical professionals. After the information is placed on the website, someone should remain responsible for monitoring it and ensuring that it remains up-to-date. You should be particularly sensitive about the manner in which information concerning abortion risks and complications is presented. This information should be reported in a highly clinical and objective fashion and devoid of any descriptions that may be construed as inflammatory or as scare tactics. Also, to avoid potential claims that a client has wrongly relied on any such educational information, it is recommended that the following disclaimer be included:

This information is intended for general educational purposes only and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional medical advice.

Should we include an e-mail function for clients?

Websites can be created with a feature that allows visitors to directly communicate with your center through e-mail. Before incorporating this feature into your website, you should consider the fact that by having such a feature you may be subjecting your center to greater legal exposure, including the possibility of being sued in another state. The courts have recognized a distinction between “passive” websites that merely provide information about a company and “interactive” websites that allow for direct communications. Several courts have held that the implementation of an “interactive” website may subject a company to being sued in the state in which a client or consumer

resides. These courts have said that a company's continuous and repeated contacts with persons in another state may be sufficient to create legal jurisdiction against the company in that foreign state.

One possible way to minimize this exposure is to include a disclaimer on your website. The following disclaimer is offered as an example:

The purpose of this e-mail function is to assist you in making an appointment to personally visit this center or to help you identify another center that may be more conveniently located for you. This center does not intend to enter into any client relationships or to offer any client services outside of the state in which it is located.

Also, you should consider the specific purposes that will be served by allowing such e-mail communications. Remember that your website's main purpose is to assist clients in making arrangements to come to your center or one near them. Therefore, if you permit clients to contact your center by e-mail, such communications should be confined as much as possible to facilitating such arrangements. For example, your e-mail invitation could state:

If you would like to make an appointment to visit our center or to find out more about other pregnancy centers in your area, please e-mail us. For your protection, we strongly discourage you from sharing any personal details about your situation over the Internet. When you visit this or another pregnancy center, a peer counselor will be available to personally discuss your situation in a confidential setting. [You may then include a section that requests the client to give her name, address, and other information that will allow you to contact her.]

Before you reply to an e-mail communication, you should make sure that the prospective client has given specific consent to your reply. It is recommended that your webpage include appropriate check-off boxes so that a client may acknowledge this consent and may also identify the specific forms of reply communication that are being authorized (e-mail, phone, or regular mail). In this connection, it is also appropriate to alert the prospective client to possible confidentiality concerns. The following warning is an example:

In granting us permission to reply to your e-mail, please consider the confidentiality of any reply that you may receive. If you are giving us permission to make a phone call, will there be anyone else who may be present to receive that phone call? Does anyone else have access to your e-mail or regular mail? If there are special confidentiality concerns we need to be aware of in responding, please spell them out so that we may be sensitive to your needs.

Beyond the limited use of facilitating appointments, e-mail communications with clients present significant concerns. As the scope of these communications increases, so does the potential for legal exposure. Heartbeat International believes it is unwise to allow e-mail to be used in a way that encourages clients to provide detailed descriptions of their personal situations or which otherwise invites them to make detailed inquiries for assistance. This type of dialogue should be reserved for the counseling room where appropriate one-on-one peer counseling can be offered. One problem with allowing substantive communications to be initiated with clients over the Internet, and prior to direct center contact, is that these communications will necessarily occur before the client has been given and has acknowledged the center's important disclosures concerning limitations of services and qualifications on confidentiality. Further, a prospective client from another state could share information such as a statutory rape situation that may invoke reporting requirements under the laws of that state.

Can we send clients free pregnancy tests?

Some centers have received e-mail requests from clients for pregnancy tests. Pregnancy tests should only be distributed to clients at the pregnancy center and after a one-on-one client relationship has been properly established. Sending pregnancy tests to unknown clients in response to e-mail inquiries precludes the center from developing an appropriate relationship with the client and also may subject the center to greater legal exposure.

What precautions should be taken in listing referral agencies?

If you choose to list referral agencies on your website, you should abide by the same principles that apply any other time that you make referrals. Whenever possible, you should ensure that there are two or more agencies listed for each service. You should make a reasonable investigation in advance to ensure that any agencies listed are reputable, competent and properly insured. You should periodically review your referral list to ensure that the information is up-to-date and to determine whether any particular agencies should be added or removed. When listing referral agencies, it is also suggested that you include the following disclaimer:

This list of referral agencies is intended solely for your convenience. None of these agencies are affiliated with this center, and no express or implied warranty is made concerning the quality of services or goods offered by them. You are therefore cautioned to make your own determination as to the fitness of any such agency and of any services or goods offered by them.

Should our website serve purposes other than reaching clients?

Beyond an appeal to prospective clients, some centers include information on their website for the purpose of promoting community relations. This may include providing general information to make the center more visible to the Christian community. Also, it

may include information specifically designed to recruit volunteers. Some centers may use their websites to post their Form 990s under relevant disclosure requirements. If you include this type of information, it should be segregated in such a way to avoid distracting from those portions of the website designed for prospective clients.

Most center website's goals are to reach clients. If this is the case, Heartbeat recommends a separate site for any information that does not pertain to clients (i.e. statistics, financial information, or anything that could potentially turn away a client). An easy way to educate clients and donors is to create a page within your website that cannot be linked to from the client site. For example, promote www.pregnancycenter.com for clients and www.pregnancycenter.com/donors for donors. This way, all non-client center information is available where applicable.

It is recommended that your center be extremely careful in seeking to use its website to generate financial support. Most states now have charitable solicitation laws that regulate charitable financial solicitations that occur within their boundaries. Because a website has the capability of reaching all 50 states, what may be intended as a local appeal may have much broader ramifications, and website appeals may be deemed to "trigger" these laws.

DO'S AND DONT'S FOR PRC WEB SITES

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the statistical gathering arm for Planned Parenthood, the highest abortion rate is among women 18 to 19 years old. At this stage of life many are enrolled in college. The typical college age woman is known as an "independent woman." She is characterized by her confident, independent and eclectic style. Before she makes a decision she wants information. To make an informed choice, she is known to gather data from the Internet. Because time is a factor to this "independent woman," she is naturally attracted to visually stimulating and concise Web sites. Here are a few "Dos and Don'ts" making your CPC Web site more effective.

Dos:

1. **Focus on Your Target Audience:**
This is vital to effectively conveying the CPC message.
2. **Incorporate Real-Life Photos:**
This will allow the target audience to identify with the women portrayed.
3. **Use ethnically diverse pictures.**
Pictures should display a confident hopeful woman.
4. **Attractive Color Schemes:**
The use of sunlight will portrays hope.
Colors should be inviting and restful, not bold and judgmental (like red or black).
5. **Create a User Friendly Web Pages:**
Have organized, uncluttered photos and information on the Web page.
6. **Make sure that information about resources and services are easily accessible.**
7. **Provide general directions to your center along with a contact phone number.**
8. **Educate the Perspective Clientele:**
Give factual and concise information that will allow women to make an educated decision.
9. **Advertise the classes and incentives that are offered at your center.**
10. **Use Quotations and Statistics:**
Surprising statistics add to the message you are trying to convey. Incorporate quotes from authoritative sources. Provide testimonies and/or quotations from clients.

Dont's:

1. **Do Not Use Bold Color Tones for the Web site Background:**
Examples are black, red and fluorescent colors.
2. **Do Not Use Traditional Text:**
Use various fonts and colors. Stay away from black text on white background if possible.
3. **Do Not Focus on Sorrow and Sadness.**
Throughout the Web site instill hope in the potential client.
4. **Do Not Minimize Your Web Site's Potential:** Avoid making the font size too small and lengthy explanations pertaining to the information.
5. **Do Not Use Advertisements that Might Take Away From Your Center's Message.**

RULES FOR WEB DESIGN

1. Content Rules. Only content matters. Content drives traffic. Update your content frequently. Nothing on your Web site is more important than content. Nothing.
2. Your opinions don't matter. Only those of your visitors. Love feedback. Use every opportunity to get your visitors to tell you what they want, like and need. And then provide it.
3. For non-profits, very, very few organizations are raising money on the Web. Build relationships instead.
4. **Ten Seconds** - that's how much time you have to convince someone to stay. On the Web you really get only one chance to make any impression.
5. Web writing is different from off-line communication. Learn how to write for the Web. Remember, content rules.
6. While it isn't about the web design technology, slow loading pages, big graphics, confusing navigation, and useless downloads will kill your chances to keep visitors. Everyone knows how to use their "Back" button
7. Every Web site from Amazon.com to the local community center has one objective – return visitors! Continue to ask yourself, why should someone return?
8. Invest in a good Web statistics program and use it. Know everything you can about your visitors.