One of the most common questions orthodontists ask me today is, “Why doesn’t my Web site show up on the Internet?”

The first thing I do is compliment them. At least they’ve taken the time to check out their Web site on the search engines and determined something is wrong. Unfortunately, most small-business owners have no idea if their Internet marketing program is a finely tuned Mazarati or a Hugo unavailable in the eyes of consumers on the search engines.

When designing a Web site and Internet marketing program, most professionals have no clue that the search engines, such as Google, Yahoo and MSN (now Bing), can’t read the written words in a Web site or determine if it is outdated or new. The search engines scan your site using a sophisticated mathematical algorithm. This is where SEO (search engine optimization), keywords and meta tags come into play.

You have to tell the search engines who you are, what you are all about and where you want to target new patients in your local demographic in order to be found. The search engines dictate the rules of engagement, and you must follow them.

Does all this sound like Greek to you? It did to me — until I spent hundreds of hours mastering the subject of Web 2.0 Internet marketing.

SEO and keywords relate to the words and phrases prospective patients type into the search engines to find you. Your Web site is the hub of your Web 2.0 marketing campaign. Once a new patient finds you with keywords, you can engage them with your marketing message to visit your Web site or contact your office for a new patient exam.

The focus of your Internet marketing program is to drive new patients to your front door. In order to accomplish this, one hand must wash the other with correct SEO, engaging design and a powerful marketing message.

How do you determine if consumers in your local area are finding your Internet marketing efforts? Simple, Test it!

1. Go to Google and in the search box type in patient keywords — orthodontist [your city name and state]. Orthodontist is the No. 1 key word new patients use to search for treatment providers.
2. Repeat the same steps again with the key words braces (No. 2) and Invisalign (No. 5).
3. Is your Web site, blog posts, Facebook page, e-zine articles, etc., show up on page one of Google?
4. Does your practice name and Web site URL show up correctly on Local Google Maps?
5. Now go through all the steps again, but this time, one by one substitute the names of all the surrounding towns in your area where you target new patients. Are you visible?

No matter how great the design of your Web site and Web 2.0 marketing program, you may be missing a wealth of new patient opportunities to build your practice due to limited local visibility on the Internet. This can translate into hundreds of thousands of dollars you may be losing to your competitors online over the years.

Your Web site and Web 2.0 marketing program are very powerful marketing tools if set up correctly, start to finish. You don’t know what you don’t know till you know it! Find out from an orthodontic Web 2.0 Internet marketing specialist what you don’t know today.

Mary Kay Miller of Orthopreneur ™ Marketing Solutions is an Internet marketing coach specializing in SEO (search engine optimization) and Web 2.0 Internet Marketing solutions. With more than 50 years experience in orthodontic marketing and practice management and 10 years in Internet marketing, she has mastered the attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary to take your practice to the next level.

Access her free marketing e-Guide, “Marketing Your Practice Through Different Eyes,” at www.orthopreneur.com. You may contact her by e-mail at marykay@orthopreneur.com or call toll-free (877) 295-5611 for a complimentary demographic evaluation of your Web site.