



Capitalizing on Search Engine Optimization

By Brenna Carroll

In this digital age of electronic convenience, many people are relying on the Internet to assist with health-care decisions and find health-care providers. Recent data indicates that 77 percent of patients use a search engine prior to booking a medical appointment and 52 percent use health information Web sites for research (Matthews, 2013). These high numbers indicate that a strong Web presence will be a vital tool in promoting and marketing your practice. Maximizing your search engine optimization is imperative to standing out in a sea of online entries.

Search engine optimization (commonly referred to as SEO) is defined as the process of making a

site and its content highly relevant for both search engines and searchers (Search Engine Watch Glossary, 2013). The goal of SEO is to provide the best results possible. If irrelevant pages are provided in a search query, searchers will use alternative search engines. A Web site with high SEO will have high visibility through unpaid search results, which is an effective and no-cost marketing opportunity. Sites with a high ranking SEO also generally have increased visitor traffic.

Search engine sites do not publish the exact algorithms applied to determine SEO, and the algorithms used by major search engines are constantly scrutinized and refined.

The SEO algorithm applied today by a specific search engine may not be the same formula applied by the same company in six months. But there are several common themes that appear to be used universally by search engines. Examining these themes in relation to your Web site and applying refinements to your online activities can result in improving your SEO.

Revisiting the statistic provided at the beginning of this column, over three-fourths of patients are turning to search engines to find medical providers. An evaluation of common U.S. search engines indicates that the overwhelming majority are turning to Google to search for this

Keywords

While early search engines relied heavily on this tactic, key words are becoming less critical to the heart of the modern SEO strategy. While less critical, they still play an important role. Be strategic when selecting the key words of your blog and when labeling your Web site's title tags and meta tags (Google, 2010). Your Web site developer can assist with this if you outsource the design of your Web site. It is important to take an active role in the content when these labels are created.

Blogs

As the SEO algorithms shift toward content relevant to Web site visitors, a blog will become more important (Google, 2010). You can use the topic of a weekly or monthly blog to explore a subject in depth and create content that relates to a specifically searched phrase or topic. As your blog gains followers, the likelihood of your blog getting posted to external sites through hyperlinks increases. This also increases your SEO (Fattah, 2013).

Social Media

Forty-one percent of recently polled patients indicated that social media would affect their choice of a health-care provider (Matthews, 2013). Popular sites on social media will likely appear higher in a search query. Sharing information and links often leads to a higher search ranking (Washenko, 2013). A presence on social media is also an opportunity for engagement marketing in addition to SEO. Social media provides the opportunity to learn what is important and trending with your prospective clients. This in turn allows you to create content that is meaningful to your Web site's users, improving your SEO (Fattah, 2013).

Content

At the heart of the search engine lies content. Interesting material will generate interest of its own. Consider creating original material that may be of interest to your site's visitors; information on general amplification, strategies to improve communication with those with hearing loss, or assistive listening devices. Not only can this information be shared through social media and other Web sites, but the relevant and informative content of the information will increase SEO. Posting informative videos to your Web site on topics such as hearing aid insertion or changing a battery can also improve SEO (Google, 2010).

Location

Register your practice's location on mapping Web sites such as Google Places. This not only adds your practice to Google Maps (often used by smartphones, including the iPhone) but also improves SEO. You can further increase your SEO for your location by including testimonials on your Web site that include either the zip code or the city of the person sharing the testimonial. This distinguishes your content as specific to your area, which will increase your SEO if searchers include a specific city or location in their queries. This is particularly helpful for prospective patients who are looking for service providers in your area (Google, 2010).

Overall Web Presence

An active Web presence in general will improve SEO. If you have been featured in news stories or contributed to articles for your local newspaper, share this information online. This information can often be posted to your own Web site in addition to the original site. Share "how to" guides and practice events through all of your online resources, including blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Participation in a wide range of electronic venues translates to higher SEO (Fattah, 2013).

information, with recent statistics indicating that Google receives over 900 million visitors in a month (eBiz MBA, 2013).

The early days of search engines relied on a keyword or phrase. But

the evolution of the Web has adapted into a complex relationship of strategies and tactics to increase the number of visitors to a specific site. Recent updates to Google's algorithm have placed emphasis on content and

social media as the heart of a search strategy (Fattah, 2013). This means that an application of traditional SEO strategies should be utilized, in addition to exploring new frontiers of social marketing and consumer

interaction. The strategies listed below can be used in conjunction with engagement market strategies to increase your SEO.

Conclusion

Strategically including information on your Web site that will improve your search engine optimization can increase the likelihood that prospective patients will be able to find you as a service provider when performing a search query. Enhancing SEO can sometimes feel a bit like chasing a moving target, as algorithms are refined and tailored. Keeping an active presence on social media and frequently updating the content on your Web site can maximize your Web site’s SEO. Maintaining traditional SEO strategies while participating in new online tools can position you as a leader in SEO. 📌

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

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