How to Improve Web Search Rankings for Your Dental Practice

08 Sep 2016 **Naren Arulrajah** Todays Dental News *1519 times*

Search engines continuously upgrade their algorithms to enhance the user experience (UX). To this end, technology advances such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning are quickly gaining ground. Companies like Google and Apple are now focusing on upgrading search engine logic to align more closely with UX.

Everything from the moment that users type in a query to the route they take to their destination and the kind of activity they indulge in while on a site is captured to enable search algorithms to anticipate human intention and deliver results accordingly. Content definitely matters.

However, other ranking criteria that are being closely monitored include site speed, mobile optimization, site structure, and social signals among a host of other factors. These signals collectively inform search engines how a website is performing by way of delivering an optimized UX. Obviously, sites that deliver on UX and search engine expectations will rank better.

SEO and UX

Up until a couple of years back, search engine optimization (SEO) was all about keyword density, backlinks, and meta descriptions. SEO mainly was designed to please search engines. And since SEO was so data intensive or data-bound, the use of black-hat strategies—aggressive techniques that focused on the search engines themselves and not on reaching an actual human audience—was largely prevalent.

But that was then. Now, the best way to rank high in search results is to deliver an optimized UX. Your site's design, structure, content, and social engagement all have to be about pleasing the visitor first. If you can do that, search engines will find you.

Today the search experience is all about the "human experience." User search habits have become more semantic and people are actually typing in questions in their search bar. Look at Google's entire search updates and you will find that the search engine giant has been making changes on a priority basis in keeping with addressing UX both on the desktop and now more specifically for mobile.

Your big focus therefore should be on answering questions that potential dental patients are asking. If you are going to create a new page, consider reader value, ease of access, and the kind of audience interaction you are hoping for. Not only will this help drive UX and boost your conversion rate, it also will help you rank better and higher in search results.

Instead of obsessing about keyword density, create content that naturally uses keywords and, more importantly, provides answers to your potential patients' questions. Put up content that is fresh and offers solid reader value, and search bots will be happy to rank your site highly.

Understand and Capitalize on UX Data

Understanding visitor behavior is critical if you want to continue attracting and converting the right kind of visitors to your site. Google Analytics data can provide you with information on what kind of activity visitors engage in when they are on your site.

While it is important to focus on content and mobile optimization, UX metrics such as pages per site, conversions, and bounce rate are signals that should be carefully and constantly evaluated. These signals indicate the kind of experience your site provides to visitors and potential patients. By keeping a track of these metrics, you can easily identify site areas that need improvement.

Social giant Facebook is known to mine user data extensively. Each user action is used in delivering personalized results by way of ads, marketing messages, and news feeds. Search engines such as Google and Bing also mine user data by observing the Internet browser activity of users on various sites.

This kind of user data sends signals to search engines that enable them to understand whether or not a site is delivering positive UX. So, everything from your site's bounce rate to conversion rate is mapped for ranking purposes.

You can optimize your dental website by:

- Using a clean and simple design as opposed to something that is visually intensive;
- Testing site navigation on a constant basis to understand or identify what needs to go or which areas need improvement;
- Making sure your dental website is technically optimized: watch out for duplicate content, redirect chains, and 404 errors;
- Ensuring your backlinks are organic, credible, highly relevant, and clean;
- Making sure your website architecture is strong: search engines find it easier to find, browse, and index sites that feature a clear architecture.

Optimize for Mobile Users

Any kind of digital branding activity is incomplete without mobile optimization. Smart-phone searches already account for greater search volume than desktop searches, which means a large majority of your dental audience is using mobile devices to browse the Web. Many leading brands took a hit when Google announced its mobile friendly update simply because they were not optimized for mobile users.

Mobile proliferation is also the reason why Google is so completely focused on mobile optimization and has been pushing for a faster mobile Web for all. Bandwidth differences between mobile and desktop users as well as data limits and slow Internet speed easily hamper mobile experience.

Obviously, if your patients come across a page that is laboring under tons of data and visuals, page load speed will nose dive. Also, keep in mind that mobile users have even shorter attention spans than desktop users. Most users will prefer going back to search results to pick up on links that load faster or are mobile optimized.

And now with Google's AMP program up and running, the need to focus on mobile optimized pages has only grown. The message is clear: if you want search engines to rank you high, go mobile.

Don't Ignore Blogging

Blogs can prove to be very effective in generating social signals. Content that is interesting or valuable not only encourages interaction but also social sharing. Search engines will look at this way: if your audience is actively sharing your content, then the site is delivering positive UX. Understand the needs of your audience, create content that aligns with their expectations, and distribute your content. That's your basic blogging optimization formula.

Actively Engage on Social Media

Social engagement has become a digital marketing priority. Your patients are active on various social channels and are engaging in a variety of activity including interacting with a brand, taking part in conversations, liking and sharing content, and crowd-sourcing content. These kinds of actions are indications for search engines that a particular site is actively engaging with its audience and building a strong social footprint.

To ensure search engines pick up on your social engagement, make sure you send links back to pages on your dental site anytime you post on social media. Distribute your social links to various sections of your site such as your information page, your homepage, and your special offers or new products and services page among others so search engines can pick up on these signals.

Naren Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete Internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education and the online reputations of dentists. With a team of 140+ full time marketers, ekwa.com helps dentists who know where they want to go get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.

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