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PRACTICE MANAGEMENT | MARKETING

Focus on local SEO or you'll miss opportunities for your dental practice

Dentists keep hearing about search engine optimization, which can truly help build your practice. Marketing expert Naren Arulrajah explains why building local SEO is so important, and also not that hard to do.

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When you read about [search engine optimization \(SEO\)](#), much of the information is geared toward websites such as blogs or national retailers. While much of that general advice applies to your dental practice, there is an important distinction. You aren't targeting the

entire internet, and most likely you aren't selling anything online. The goal of dental marketing is to acquire leads, specifically ones in your vicinity. [That is why you need local SEO.](#)

Local versus organic search

To understand how Google treats different types of queries, search for “signs of tooth decay.” You should see results such as informational websites, blogs, and magazines, many of which are targeted to national or international audiences. In fact, you probably won't see a local dentist in the top results. Optimizing for this type of search is general organic SEO.

Now try searching for “tooth decay treatment near me.” Google recognizes that this term has local intent. The top results are places, specifically dental offices near your location. You will see three places featured (known as the three-pack), along with a map and link to additional places. Optimizing for this type of search is local SEO.

Why local search optimization is different

Organic SEO is about optimizing a website, which is identified by its URL. Generally speaking, something must be on the website or should include a link to the website in order to be impactful. By contrast, local SEO is about optimizing a business, primarily identified by its NAP (name, address, and phone number). A mention of your dental practice, known as a citation, can be important even if it doesn't include a website link.

As you probably know, Google usually finds information by “crawling” the web, exploring every link the bots encounter. How then, does it find information without links? The answer is [data aggregators](#), which pull information from phone directories, utilities, business listings, and other sources. Therefore, an abundance of accurate citations (mentions of your practice) will help build a strong presence on local search. But beware; inaccuracies and inconsistencies can perpetuate and spread, possibly harming your SEO standing.

Local SEO best practices

Much of the marketing advice that you will find online is directed at retailers and other national businesses, focusing on general SEO. In practice, how does local search optimization differ?

- Google My Business—There are many platforms for local business listings, but this is by far the most important. Be sure to claim your profile, add details where possible, and remove any duplicate listings.
- On-site optimization—Typical SEO factors such as page speed, meta tags, content quality, and keyword usage are still important. Additionally, you need to optimize your

location information. This includes having a contact page, a prominent (and ideally clickable) phone number, and adding NAP details in the sitewide footer.

- NAP consistency—Even a minor change in a page URL can break links. Similarly, inconsistencies in your practice details can “break” citations. Avoid variations (i.e., “Your Smile Center” in one place and “Smile Center” in another), and if the details about your practice change, update them everywhere.
- Citations—Where does Google find these online references to dental practices? Sources range from business directories and customer review platforms to local newspapers. Even a mention from a local blogger can help. If you have an opportunity to get your practice out there (with accurate NAP), take it. If you find a reputable directory with an option to add or update your business information, use it. Alternately, you can use a third-party local data aggregator (LDA) to help acquire and maintain citations.
- Reviews—[Statistics](#) show that people trust businesses with positive reviews, and that translates into increased revenue. If that isn’t reason enough to work on building your online reviews, you should know that they are also a ranking factor in local search.
- City landing pages—How far do patients travel to visit your practice? Most likely, your target market encompasses nearby cities and zip codes. Include pages on your website targeting those locations but be mindful of Google’s quality standards. Don’t use false location information, keyword stuff the pages, or add thin and low-quality content.

What local and organic SEO have in common

As brick and mortar businesses, should dental practices focus exclusively on local search and forget about standard SEO? No. In fact, most principles of site optimization apply, no matter what your industry or goal is. These include:

- Efficient site navigation
- Content and meta tags optimized for targeted keywords
- A diverse portfolio of quality backlinks
- Excellent user experience (UX)
- Website free of glitches and technical errors
- Fast loading, mobile friendly site
- No keyword stuffing, duplicate or low-quality content, or spammy links

Standard organic SEO can easily bring internet traffic from around the world. Yet, only people near your practice represent meaningful leads. If you aren’t focusing on local search, you are missing opportunities.

Naren Arulrajah, president and CEO of [Ekwa Marketing](#), has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full-time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call (855) 598-3320 for a free strategy session with Arulrajah.

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