

Dental SEO is Not All About Your Website

May 3, 2021

by Naren Arulrajah, Ekwa Marketing

When you think of improving your dental SEO (search engine optimization), you probably think about better content, keywords, or technical factors such as site loading time. There are virtually endless ways to improve and optimize your website, but that is not enough to propel your website to the top of Google's search results. To accomplish that, you need to look beyond your website.

Offsite SEO is exactly what it sounds like. It is optimization that does not occur on your website, and it is just as important as onsite SEO. Just what does it include?

Backlinks

The Google algorithm is infinitely complex, and it analyzes hundreds of aspects of your website. Everything from page loading time to the publication date of articles can impact your placement in search results. However, it does not stop with your website. In fact, one of the most important ranking factors is inbound links, which means links on other sites that point to yours.

Authoritative, reputable, high-quality websites tend to acquire a lot of inbound links because they are frequently cited as reference sources or recommended for further reading. Therefore, an inbound link is akin to a vote of confidence. However, that does not mean all inbound links are good links.

The websites that link to yours could be compared to a person's group of friends. If you have few or no friends, no one is going to think you are popular. However, having a large group of friends with unsavory reputations will be even worse for your image. Yet, if you have lots of friends, all of whom have sterling reputations, people are likely to think highly of you.

Ideally, you want to acquire a large quantity of high-quality links. The most powerful inbound links include those from sites that are:

Popular – The best websites are those with high traffic and good Google rankings.

Authoritative – For example, a reputable reference website or news outlet will carry more weight than a personal blogger.

Relevant – A link from a fashion website might tell Google that your site is popular but it says nothing about your dental expertise. However, links from other dentists, medical reference sites, or dental associations do.

Social media

As mentioned above, links from some sites can significantly improve your search ranking, while other links can be detrimental. You might wonder where social media falls within this spectrum. The answer is, nowhere.

Links posted on Facebook, Instagram, and similar platforms do not add to a website's authority and credibility, because it is so easy to post them yourself. On the other hand, such links are not spammy, because socially sharing your own content is acceptable and even expected for individuals and businesses alike.

Simply stated, social media is not a Google ranking factor. In fact, Matt Cutts and Gary Illyes of Google have confirmed this. Yet, research has shown that websites with a strong social presence and a high number of social shares have better Google rankings.

As a medical professional, you know very well that correlation does not equate to causation. You also know that correlation often signifies an important link. So, what is the association between social and SEO?

Content distribution – People do not just share content to social networks, but also from social networks. Bloggers, journalists, and others may discover your website via their newsfeeds, and subsequently share it on their own websites, creating valuable inbound links.

Branding – When you acquire a following on social media, you are building your brand and your professional reputation. A social presence also makes it easier for patients to review your practice, and positive reviews are important for local SEO.

Think beyond Google – It may be the most popular search engine, but Google is not the only one. Social media is an important ranking factor for Bing, which still retains a small portion of the search market.

Online reviews

SEO is a bit different for businesses such as dental practices that have a physical location. You do not want to attract visitors from other countries, states, or cities. If they are too far away to visit your practice in person, they will never become patients. Similarly, a person looking for a dental practice does not want to see a website unless the office is located nearby. Google knows this. That is why local searches are treated differently, with results filtered by location and even displayed on a map.

The criteria for ranking well in local searches is also different. If the searcher is simply looking for information, then Google is looking for the highest quality website. However, when the searcher is likely to visit the real-world location, Google is looking for more than that – a quality website, and a quality business. Since the algorithm cannot analyze a physical location, it relies on reviews.

Patient reviews might seem beyond your control. After all, you cannot stop people from leaving bad reviews, or force them to leave good reviews. However, there are steps you can take that will effectively improve the quality and quantity of reviews. These include:

Just ask – You might be surprised how many patients will be receptive to a simple request for feedback. It can be verbal or by another form of communication such as SMS message or email.

Make it easy – Try including links to your preferred review platforms in messages along with instructions about how to rate your practice.

Respond to complaints – When an unhappy patient contacts you, take action immediately. Resolve the issue if possible. At the very least, demonstrate that you care. While some people go straight to Yelp or social media to voice their displeasure, many of them will attempt to file a complaint with your office first. Often, negative reviews are the result of someone feeling ignored.

If your SEO plan is simple, then it is not likely to be effective. Search algorithms are complex, and they are getting smarter by the day. If you want to reach the coveted top spots on search results, you need a multi-faceted plan to get there – and that plan needs to include both onsite and offsite SEO techniques.

About the Author

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 Naren.