

# What's New With Google? How Recent and Planned Updates Impact Dental Marketing.

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The average dental office has many sources for new patients, one of the most significant being Google. That means ranking well for local searches is one of the most critical marketing tactics. Unfortunately, most dentists are very well aware of that fact, and competition for the coveted top spots on Google Maps can be fierce.

An effective SEO (search engine optimization) strategy requires time, effort, skill – and constant changes. As Google evolves, your strategy and your website need to evolve with it. Here is a brief look at some of the new and upcoming changes to Google's search and features that you should be aware of.

## Organic SEO – Increased focus on user intent

Google has been moving away from exact-match keyword searches for years, with the goal of better understanding searcher intent. One of the most recent major updates, MUM (Multitask Unified Mode), took this concept to a new level, with unprecedented ability to cross language, format, and context barriers.

The long-awaited MUM update uses advanced AI (artificial intelligence) to analyze complex queries more accurately. Its predecessor, the BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) update of 2019, focused on natural language processing, helping Google interpret the context of each word within a phrase. MUM can translate languages, gather data from images, and use other clues to match relevant and related information better.

Simply stated, Google's search is getting much better at understanding what a searcher wants and discovering appropriate web pages, with or without exactly matching keywords. In the future, expect keywords to become more like key topics. Do not simply include the term, but provide high-quality content with unique, in-depth information relevant to that subject. If your content offers good, solid answers to the questions that searchers are asking, then Google is likely to find it.

## Local SEO – Google Business Profile

While many factors are involved in optimizing local search, one of the most important is your business listing on Google. This feature has gone through many facelifts and rebrands through the years. It has been known as Google Places, Google Local, Google+ Local, Google My Business, and – most recently – Google Business Profile.

The transition, which is slated to be completed sometime early in 2022, is more than just a name change. Google is introducing some fundamental changes in feature availability and user interface. If you have a single office location and manage your profile, the most significant change will be how you go about doing that. Google now prefers that individual businesses use update options available directly on the map and search pages, thus reserving the Google Business Profile console for those managing multiple locations.

New and expanded features for business listings include:

**Profile management** – When you are logged in using your Gmail account, you can claim or fully manage your business listing directly from the Google Map app or search page.

**Call history** – Easily track calls received via the “call” button on your Google profile. You have the option to enable or disable this feature.

**Messaging** – In addition to other management features, you will be able to access the messaging interface directly from the Google search page.

...and more – As Google is known for constant adjustments and upgrades, it is very likely that even more changes are coming. Keep a close eye on the business profile features as the transition continues.

## **Technical SEO – Page Experience Update**

Getting people to a webpage is just one step in the patient journey. From there, you want your website to help convert the lead into a new patient. Of course, that is not likely to happen if the person has a poor experience with slow loading times, glitches, or other problems. User experience, known as UX in the world of marketing, has long been considered a critical aspect of website design for those reasons. However, its importance in SEO was a topic of debate – until recently.

The Page Experience update was first announced back in early 2020, though it did not begin rolling out until the summer of 2021. The update is already fully implemented in mobile search, and the desktop version is expected to be complete by early 2022. With this update, UX becomes an undeniably important ranking factor.

## **What comprises a good page experience, according to Google?**

**Security** – This is a top priority. None of your pages will achieve the status of “good” page experience if Google finds any security issues with your website.

**Hypertext transfer protocol secure (HTTPS)** – The vast majority of marketers and webmasters had already transitioned their sites some time ago. If your website still uses the old HTTP protocol, it is time to upgrade NOW.

**Ad experience** – Since the goal of your dental website is marketing your practice, it is unlikely that you host advertisements on your website. However, if you do, you should avoid interruptive or distracting ads.

**Mobile experience (does not apply to the planned desktop Page Experience update)** – There cannot be any usability errors for the mobile version of your website.

Core Web Vitals – These are the important metrics that the Page Experience Update measures. They are also the most technical. Cumulatively, the Core Web Vitals are primarily focused on speed and stability during loading and interactivity. To summarize, these points include:

- LCP (Largest Contentful Paint) – The typical loading time for a site’s main content
- CLS (Cumulative Layout Shift) – The degree to which the location of elements on a webpage change as the page loads
- FID (First Input Delay) – The lag time between a user taking action or inputting data and the website’s response

With hundreds of algorithm updates every year, Google will continue changing. Equally important, people’s online habits will keep changing, as will trends in popular dental procedures. Having a top-performing marketing strategy is terrific but be careful to avoid the trap of “sticking with what has worked in the past” because what works is always subject to change.

There are many different qualities that comprise a successful dental marketing strategy. One of the most important is flexibility. Always analyze, track results and make adjustments accordingly.

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## About the Author



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