

Organic vs. Paid Marketing: What Is the Difference and Which Is Better for Your Dermatology Practice?



Advertising and marketing, organic and paid, inbound and outbound—which better serve your practice?

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>> At its core, a dermatology office is a medical practice, and dermatologists dedicate their lives to medicine. However, excellent clinical skills and patient care are not enough to survive in today's economy. Your practice is also a business, and savvy marketing is essential for success.

The problem is that dermatologists are trained in medicine—not business and marketing—so terms such as organic marketing can be confusing. What exactly is organic marketing and how does it differ from paid marketing? Most importantly, which one is best for your dermatology practice?

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORGANIC AND PAID MARKETING

Your budget will dictate available options to some extent—especially if your practice is a start-up. So, we'll start by clearing up a common misconception: organic marketing is often referred to as an alternative to paid marketing, which is misleading in two ways.

First, this is not an either/or decision. Organic marketing is essential while paid marketing can be a beneficial adjunct. Secondly, organic does not equate to zero budget. The difference is that organic marketing does not rely on paid advertisements. This makes it far more economical, but there are costs associated with website and content hosting and hiring skilled employees or a marketing firm to do the work.

What Is Organic Marketing?

Essentially, any marketing strategy or tactic that does not include paying for advertising (or otherwise “buying” an

audience) is considered organic. Some of the most common components of organic marketing consist of the following:

- Unpaid posts on social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn
- Blogging, podcasting, and other content distribution (without paying to promote your content)
- SEO (search engine optimization) tactics such as earned backlinks, technical optimization, the addition of fresh content, and other techniques to improve a website's position in SERP (search engine results pages)
- Acquiring online reviews and other reputation management activities
- Newsletters, mailing lists, and other email marketing tools

What Is Paid Marketing?

Any technique involving purchasing advertisements or spending money to reach an audience is paid marketing. It typically includes:

- PPC (pay-per-click) Google Ads
- Buying ad space on a website or in a print publication
- Running advertisements on social media platforms
- Paying to “boost” your posts or content on third-party platforms

UNDERSTANDING THE MARKETING MIX

There is a common misconception that marketing a dermatology practice, or any other business, involves nothing more than advertising it. However, marketing is a much

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broader concept than you might realize and advertisements are just one slice of the pie.

The “four Ps,” otherwise known as the “marketing mix” include¹:

- **Product.** What are you selling? In the case of a medical practice, your product is your services.
- **Place.** Where do you find and engage with customers (patients)? You may interact with patients online, but services are provided in a specific location, which makes dermatology marketing uniquely local.
- **Price.** An important and sometimes overlooked aspect of successful marketing is matching your price point with the appropriate target audience.
- **Promotion.** This is when you convince and convert the lead; paid advertisements, as well as unpaid promotional campaigns, fall in this category

A successful marketing strategy begins with an analysis of your services, price points, and the available patient base in your location. Narrow down your target market to people who want or need your service and then understand why it is valuable to them. Once that is done, you move on to the promotional phase, which involves crafting the right message and getting it to the right people.

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR MARKETING SUCCESS

Statistics show that a whopping 96% of people distrust ads.² They know that you are paying to promote your product and so they are automatically suspicious of the message.

Paid marketing may be (and usually is) a quick way to reach a large, targeted audience; however, it is not an effective way to win over your audience and convert them to patients. Additionally, the benefits of advertising are proportionate to how much you spend. The results do not improve over time and do not continue after you quit running an ad.

Organic marketing includes promotional elements and focuses on building your practice’s online presence and reputation. Tactics such as optimizing for local search, asking patients for reviews, building an online community, and developing relationships with local media outlets take time. The results develop gradually, and the benefits continue to increase. A recognizable brand, a good reputation, and

abundant positive reviews are the facts that draw patients to your practice.

The Time and Place for Paid Marketing

Do you even need to pay for advertising? The short answer is probably not. In truth, an established dermatology practice with a solid organic marketing plan does not need to buy advertisements. Patients find them easily enough, and a sterling reputation speaks for itself.

However, if your budget allows, advertising can be a helpful adjunct to—although never a replacement for—your organic strategy. The cost per lead may be significantly higher but buying ads can quickly fill appointment slots. This makes sense in situations such as:

- **Start-up practices.** Ads can help fill the gap while your organic marketing gradually grows.
- **Rapid growth.** If your practice recently expanded, you may need advertisements to temporarily fill the new slots.
- **Recovery.** COVID-related shutdowns, staffing problems, and other circumstances can cause a practice to lose a portion of its patient base; ads can help fill the void until the business recovers.

INBOUND NOT OUTBOUND

Paid advertising is a form of outbound marketing, meaning that you are reaching out to potential leads. It may be advantageous as a stop-gap measure in the short term, but a strong long-term marketing strategy should not rely on buying ads.

Organic marketing is inbound, meaning that the potential leads come to you. In other words, a reputable dermatology practice with a well-established organic marketing strategy does not have to look for (or pay for) leads. ■

Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of <https://www.ekwa.com/>, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dermatologists, 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. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing - Lila, by visiting <https://www.ekwa.com/msm/> or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.

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2. Forbes. 7 reasons people hate your ads and what to do about it. Published June 27, 2022. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avidan/2022/06/27/7-reasons-people-hate-your-ads-and-what-to-do-about-it/?sh=1914b3224eaa>