

Local SEO to Put Your Practice on the Map



Don't focus just on optimizing for search. Think about your overall online presence.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

>> The digital marketing landscape is ever-changing, but one thing remains consistent: it all revolves around your website. SEO (search engine optimization) is and likely always will be a pillar of successful marketing. However, physical businesses, such as dermatology practices, do not need to attract website visitors from across the country or around the world. You need people who are within traveling distance to your office. That means you need to focus on local SEO.

HOW IS LOCAL SEO DIFFERENT?

Organic SEO is a term commonly used to describe optimization tactics that generally help a website perform better in Google search without paid advertising. Local SEO includes the most common organic optimization tactics and more. The goal is to help businesses appear predominantly on platforms such as Google Maps.

The distinction may seem subtle, but it is essential. Organic and local search results are governed by separate, although somewhat similar, Google algorithms. Local searches have unique ranking factors, such as physical location. Additionally, the local algorithm pulls information about your practice from various sources, including but not limited to your website. Therefore, the scope of local SEO is much broader, which involves optimizing not only your website but also other components of your online presence.

TOP RANKING FACTORS FOR SEO

In marketing, it is often said that Google is not the only search engine, just the only one that matters. It's not too far from the truth. Google has historically dominated the search market, maintaining an approximately 90 percent share for over a decade. It is the most popular search engine and the industry leader and trendsetter that other companies tend to follow.

The key to successful local optimization is understanding what Google wants. That is not as simple as it may sound. There are hundreds of known and suspected Google ranking

factors in both local and organic searches. The most important ones fall within three categories: proximity, prominence, and relevance.

Proximity. Location is literally what differentiates local and organic search. In the case of local searches, your potential audience is limited to people within proximity of your dermatology practice. Of course, you cannot optimize your location. However, you can optimize your website and internet presence to ensure that Google is aware of your location.

Prominence. Google wants to deliver quality results. In the case of local businesses, that means showing searchers the very best establishments. How does your practice compare to others nearby? Are you among the most prominent dermatologists in the area? If so, you meet one of the most important criteria. However, Google cannot assess your offline reputation. Instead, it takes clues from your online presence to evaluate prominence.

Relevance. This is a common thread among all types of SEO. Providing searchers with highly relevant results is one of Google's top priorities. With its ever-advancing AI (artificial intelligence) technology, Google is getting very good at matching the searcher's intent to the provided results. Furthermore, it seeks signals not only on your website but also from various other sources, such as your Google business listing and even the content of online reviews.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

How can you improve your dermatology practice's performance in local search?

- *Keep NAP (name, address, and phone number) consistent.* These are the most basic contact details, and you undoubtedly provided the correct information for your website and online profiles. However, these details can change on occasion. Furthermore, there



DID YOU KNOW?

There are hundreds of known and suspected Google ranking factors in both local and organic searches. The most important ones fall within three categories: proximity, prominence, and relevance.

can be inconsistencies without inaccuracies. For example, the use of abbreviations or variations in formatting can cause NAP to look a little different from one listing to another. These inconsistencies can confuse Google, possibly resulting in duplicate listings or diluted ranking.

- **Optimize your Google Business Profile.** Make sure that you claim your profile and update it with all applicable information. That includes a keyword-rich (not keyword-stuffed) description, current office hours, and all relevant attributes. That is one of Google's primary sources of information about your practice, and the platform changes frequently. Therefore, it is advisable to watch out for new and helpful features.
- **Encourage positive feedback.** The number of reviews your practice has, along with its average star rating, matters to Google. Equally important, it matters to prospective patients who do not want a poorly-rated dermatologist. Fortunately, increasing good reviews is not as difficult as you might think. Whenever a patient compliments your work, simply ask that person to leave a review.
- **Make the most of content marketing.** Content is a staple of SEO, local or otherwise. Unfortunately, far too many people go about it the wrong way. They focus on the keywords, with little thought to the information value or quality of content. However, Google is increasingly prioritizing quality and relevancy over exact keyword matches. That means good content, with accurate, in-depth information relevant to the topic (even without a precise match to the search term), is likely to outperform low-quality content that includes the exact search term.
- **Build backlinks and citations.** Backlinks—links to your website from other sites—are important to all types of SEO. Citations, which are more specific to local SEO, are mentions (with or without links) of your practice

that include NAP. Start by adding your practice to applicable business directories and review websites. Expand your backlinks and citations by earning mentions in blogs, on reference websites, or in the media.

- **Stay active on social media.** While social media is generally not considered a direct search ranking factor, it can make a significant indirect impact. That is a great way to gain a larger audience for your content, leading to sharing (and backlinks) beyond social platforms. Additionally, it is an excellent opportunity to increase brand awareness and build your reputation.

OPTIMIZE YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Local SEO is about optimizing your dermatology practice's online presence. Of course, this includes your website. It also has your directory listings, citations, reputation, and more. ■

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 dermatologists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. Call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren or schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing - Lila; click www.ekwa.com/msm/ or text to 313-777-8494.

WATCH NOW

Into your patients' minds. In doing it shows that you are in touch with their needs and are relatable.



Authenticity matters to today's health care consumers. This Ekwa Marketing (ekwa.com) video walks dermatology practices through five ways to stand out from the pack. All providers must consider how the products they use, the vendors they patronize, and the business practices that they engage will endear patients to them and help to build a flourishing community of "brand advocates."

Watch now: PracDerm.com/GetReal