

Improve Search Marketing with Consistent, Accurate Local Listings



Get the inside scoop on local search marketing.

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>> You probably know that external links to your website can boost your SEO (search engine optimization). However, you might not give much thought to general mentions of your practice and contact details. Are they important, too? Absolutely! These references, known as citations, can make or break your local search marketing.

BASICS OF LOCAL SEARCH MARKETING

Increasingly, modern life happens online. That presents both a massive opportunity and challenge for your dermatology practice. You can reach the vast majority of your potential patients in the virtual space without ever running a print ad. However, you can also waste a tremendous amount of time and money serving up your marketing message to people who will never become patients.

There are billions of people on the Internet, but only a tiny fraction of them are physically near your office. Naturally, you don't want to market to someone thousands of miles from your practice. Furthermore, Google knows that people searching for medical practices probably want a place nearby.

To maximize the potential of your website and digital marketing efforts,

you need to target people in your geographic area. There are several ways to fine-tune your marketing and drive local traffic. Some of the most important include:

- Add your dermatology practice to Google My Business and other directories.
- Include your NAP (name, address, phone number) and other location-specific details to your website.
- Mention your location and the names of nearby cities in your website content.
- Accumulate accurate citations.

LOCAL LISTINGS AND NAP

In recent years, Google has ramped up its efforts to deliver complete, accurate, and relevant local search results. If you've searched for a restaurant, grocery store, or any other business recently, you probably noticed that the results offer an abundance of details. You might see hours, location, reviews, products, photos, and more.

Where does Google's business information come from? Ideally, the primary source is the business owner, via details entered in Google My Business. However, the search engine will supplement that information with details found in various places around

the web. It also generates profiles for businesses that don't create their own listings.

Some of the most common sources of information include review sites, such as Yelp!, directories, such as Healthgrades, government websites, and media outlets. Google uses external sites not only to find information, but also to verify its accuracy. The more times a business is cited across different platforms, the more likely it is to be legitimate and reputable. Naturally, that means more citations increase your chances of appearing in local search results.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSISTENCY

At first glance, local search marketing sounds simple, and it would be if you could directly reach your target market. However, a search engine—usually Google—stands between you and your target audience. Therefore, if you don't meet some very specific, very technical requirements, you won't see results. This is where listing accuracy and NAP consistency come in.

Google's goal is to deliver the most relevant, highest quality results. They don't want to send someone to an old address, an office that closed last year, or a business that never existed at all.

Since search results are served up by an algorithm, it must be programmed to filter out questionable listings, so it looks for exact matches.

For example, My Dermatology Practice at 01 Main Street has some citations, and so does Dermatology Practice on 01 Main St. While a human would recognize these as the same business, they look like different names and different addresses to Google. Therefore, the benefits of online citations will be divided between the two. In fact, your own listings could be competing against each other.

THREE STEPS TO BUILDING CITATIONS THE RIGHT WAY

Step 1. Choose your NAP. First of all, you need to decide exactly how you want your listings to appear. Use this precise format on your website and elsewhere on the web, with no variations.

- Name – Is your practice listed under your name or a business name? Do you want to include designations, such as FAAD?
- Address – Is the city New York or NY? Are you on Highway 12 or HWY 12?
- Phone – Is it 1-800-1234-5678 or (800) 1234-5678?

Step 2. Correct NAP variations. Before you start adding your business to various directories and other online platforms, you need to make sure it isn't already there. Google isn't the only site that auto-generates results. Additionally, an employee might have added your practice at some point in the past. Most directories have a search option on their websites. You can also use a tool like Moz Local to check several of the most important platforms at once.

If you find an existing listing, update it to match your chosen NAP format. If there are duplicate listings, have the extras removed. The exact steps will vary depending on the website, but there is typically a link to claim your business or report a problem.

When searching, try all possible variations:

- Previous business names
- Your own name
- Common variations, nicknames, or abbreviations of the correct name
- Five-digit and full zip code
- Old addresses or phone numbers
- Common misspellings
- Abbreviations for street names, city name, unit numbers, etc.

Step 3. Create and expand your citations. When you add or update a listing, don't stop with the basic information. Add as many new details as possible. Depending on the

platform, you might be able to include links, a brief description of your practice, a list of services offered, your logo, and other elements. Some of the most important places to acquire citations include:

- Industry directories such as Healthgrades
- Social media profiles
- Google My Business
- Review platforms such as Yelp
- Company websites such as Botox's "find a specialist" page
- Local websites such as your regional chamber of commerce.

IT'S NAP TIME

The key to success in local search marketing is abundant, accurate, and consistent citations. If you work with a marketing company, be sure to ask them if they are addressing NAP consistency and citation building. If you handle marketing in-house, make sure everyone on your team is using the same NAP and that someone is responsible for monitoring citations and correcting variations. ■

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. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren.

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