

Using PR to Improve Your Eye Care Website Search Rankings

Boost inbound links to enhance your credibility.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH WITH VIKAS VIJ

Online searching is going through a transformational phase, with Google and other leading search engines making crucial algorithmic changes to refine their search capabilities. How a website is able to generate media buzz makes a key difference to the search engine rankings of the website.

Public relations (PR) skills can help marketers generate media exposure for a website. PR engagement has become an important part of today's search engine optimization (SEO). PR in an online environment is much more than mere online distribution of press releases: Marketers need to find innovative ways to get their websites linked in digital and print media.

MEDIA AND THE PR INDUSTRY

Internet marketers have traditionally found it challenging to build mutually beneficial relationships with print and electronic media outlets. There has been, however, a gradual shift in this equation, with media members and journalists warming up to the idea of engaging with creative websites that offer compelling content that is of mass interest.

Success in PR is about being a great storyteller and generating unique and relevant content that will get picked up by various media channels and leading blogs, forums, and websites. Most of the print and electronic media channels have a dynamic online presence, which boosts the synergy between media and Internet marketing.

The way Google and other search engines evaluate content, it may not be long before SEO will be more about an Internet marketer's ability to tell a great story than the ability to use the latest SEO techniques to put a website on top of the search results. Media organiza-

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tions are increasingly keen to link to content that contains an informative and insightful story that has not been told before.

Many Internet marketers are still not fully aware of the positive impact that media coverage can have on SEO. They believe that once they have received coverage in a publication, their objective is achieved. If the coverage does not provide a link to the website, however, the SEO advantage may be lost. A majority of media outlets do not mind providing links, so it is not a difficult task to get them once the news item or article has been accepted for publication.

KEYWORD-RICH PRESS RELEASES

A press release should contain localized keywords so that the search engine crawlers can pick up the story as it gets circulated in the online media. Successful and targeted keyword placement will generate search engine traffic and bring more local readers to the eye care professional's website. PR efforts should create a compelling story, identify synergistic publication opportunities, and cultivate relationships with journalists and correspondents.

PR campaigns help boost inbound links from respected sources to enhance the website's credibility with leading search engines. The SEO angle to a PR campaign

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makes it more measurable, and it is easier to analyze the impact. In the eyes of potential patients, the credibility of an eye care practice improves when it shows up high in the results along with leading news publications for a particular targeted keyword.

COLLATERAL BENEFITS

Apart from the direct media exposure and SEO benefits of an effective PR campaign, the eye care practice can often gain numerous collateral advantages. Once a good story featuring the eye care professional or the practice has been circulated online, it is likely to get picked up by other online and offline media outlets in the future. Comments and quotes from the original story may be used as references in other news stories, articles, and editorials across the media spectrum.

Leading websites and blogs may cite the story and provide valuable back links for the eye care website. This can be a long-term advantage, which can continue to bring in quality exposure and links long after the story has been published. If a particular story goes viral on the Internet, it has the potential to generate high volumes of traffic and useful links that can go a long way in building online recognition, trust, and brand equity for the eye care practice.

SKILLS TO ENGAGE WITH MEDIA

A large number of Internet marketing and SEO experts have never really explored the PR route and have little knowledge and understanding of how to engage with journalists, reporters, and editors of leading online, print, and electronic media outlets. From the perspective of eye care marketing, there are usually two choices available. The eye care professional may hire an Internet marketing and SEO firm that has the necessary skills and experience to develop successful public relations and media exposure, apart from building search rankings through SEO.

The other option may be to hire the services of a dedicated PR and media specialist with a proven track record of handling successful PR and media campaigns for doctors. The good thing from the point of view of Internet marketers and SEO experts is that it is not dif-

ficult to learn PR skills, because ultimately PR is about cultivating relationships and using them effectively for mutual benefit. Forward-looking online marketing companies are training their existing marketing teams by partnering with recognized PR experts because the future is going to make it harder for any marketer to ignore the power of PR and media promotions.

CULTIVATING THE MEDIA NETWORK

Media traditionally thrives on a close and personalized network of contacts. Reporters, journalists, and editors are more comfortable working with known sources that they can trust and rely on. Simply sending out impersonal press releases into their e-mail inbox may be a common practice, but it is not likely to yield real results unless the sender is recognizable to the journalist. Therefore, it is worth the effort to build a degree of familiarity with key reporters and bloggers that the marketer may be targeting.

The question is how to cultivate a relationship with someone in the media industry. A good first step can be to keep track of the articles of a particular journalist and get a sense of the stories and headlines that may excite his or her imagination. Many reporters and editors have official social media accounts, and that can be a good place to engage with them and create a level of familiarity. Building a relationship is a gradual process, but the payoff can be significant and long-term once a relationship with a media person has been developed.

It is a good idea to maintain a regularly updated database of contacts in the media, and keep notes on the kind of areas each one of them likes to focus on. Sending news stories and press releases directly to a close network of media persons can be more effective than doing it through a paid press release distribution agency. The road to building contacts in the media can be long and arduous, but the dividends are enormous in the long run. ■

Naren Arulrajah is the president and CEO, and Vikas Vij is the marketing manager of SEO services at Ekwa Marketing. Contact Ekwa Marketing at (877) 249-9666; naren@ekwa.com.

