

Optimize Your Site for Local Search

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Google and other popular search engines have long focused on delivering individualized results to users. Once users simply log into their Google accounts, the search engine giant takes over.

Access to user search history and geographic location make it easy for Google to deliver results that are customized to each user's preferences. As search engines become more sophisticated, their focus on delivering personalized results to demanding users is going to make local optimization for brands much more important.

Changing Consumer Habits

Every change that search engines make to their search algorithms has the potential to impact how your dental brand ranks in local search results. Improved user experience is the prominent reason why leading search engines regularly update their algorithms. However, the resulting change can completely alter local search rankings for even regular search engine ranking page toppers.

Consumer habits are continuously changing, including how consumers search for and discover local brands. Today, 92% of consumers look up local businesses online. Also, the percentage of consumers who search for local businesses every day has gone up from 7% to 14%.

Consumers are comfortable with searching for local businesses online. Plus, brands are becoming extremely aggressive about building a presence within their local market space. For example:

- 93% of searches with local intent display Google's local 3-pack in the top spot. ([source](#))
- 79% of smartphone owners and 81% of tablet owners use their device to search locally. ([source](#))
- 68% of consumers say positive reviews can influence their trust in local businesses. ([source](#))

Google's "Pigeon" update in 2014 further drove the importance of local search. A number of brands woke up to the necessity of local search optimization and started focusing on giving their inbound marketing campaign a local angle.

Although historically Google has held a certain bias towards brands with a leading market history and presence, the search engine giant has always been clear in its intent to give the people what they want. This is why search results today include rankings for brands that build a strong local presence regardless of their size.

Optimizing for "Near Me" Searches

Anyplace, anytime access to local information is one of the most important aspects of building brand visibility in local searches. Brands that deliver on this consumer expectation stand to win consumer attention and trust and also benefit from faster conversion:

- Google search interest in "near me" has gone up 34 times since 2011 and has nearly doubled since 2014. ([source](#))
- 80% of "near me" searches come from mobile devices. ([source](#))
- 78% of local-mobile searches result in offline purchases. ([source](#))
- 61% of consumers are more likely to contact a local business if that business has a mobile optimized site. ([source](#))

The inference is simple: dental brands need to concentrate on building a strong local presence, and they need to be easily accessible to their patients in their exact time of need.

The most important information that consumers expect from a local business is address and directions. To position your practice for maximum conversion, prime areas of focus are mobile optimization and updating your practice's website, blog, and social media profiles with accurate location information and local markup.

Optimize Your Website

It is vital to have your name, address, and phone number on every page of your website. Other highly useful and relevant information includes work days, opening and closing times, your services and products, special offers and coupons, patient reviews and ratings, and photos of your practice. This information should be updated for all of your online real estate as well as on all review sites and directories, your practice apps, and any other location pages.

Claim and Verify Your Listings

Make sure you claim and verify your listings on all directories and review sites such as Yelp, on all search portals such as Google My Business and Bing Places for Business, and on yellow pages sites. Also, make sure your information is updated and accurate for any industry-specific sites such as Healthgrades because potential patients will use these sites in their search for local dentists.

Earn Positive Google Reviews

Google recently announced the reduction of the number of results it shows in its local pack from seven to three. This means competing for visibility within the top spots has become tougher. Also keep in mind that Google displays the local pack results in the top spot for almost all searches with local intent. The most effective way to be included in the local search pack is by earning positive Google reviews from your patients. Positive reviews also can help swing potential patient sentiment towards your brand.

Patient Needs and Expectations

An effective way to influence the buying decisions of potential patients is by creating content that is highly relevant and specific to their needs. Update your blog and social sites with information addressing the interests of your local patient community. For example, oral health care for different age groups and preventive dentistry are popular areas of interest. Create content that caters to these common areas of concern for your patient population. In addition to including relevant keywords in your posts, include the name of your city and

neighborhood to build relevance in search results.

Build Brand Authority

Building authority for your dental practice via local citations can prove to be highly beneficial as it lends an added layer of trust in your brand. Not only can it help win you favor with search engines, but it also builds brand credibility in the eyes of your potential patient base. So having your brand mentioned on other important and highly visible sites such as review sites and blogs or in press releases can help push your brand presence in local searches.

A great way to do this is by joining local networking groups to gain brand exposure. You can also organize local events, sponsor local charities, or support local causes that show brand value and a more community driven ideology. Any time you win a mention on the website or any online asset of any of these community groups, it serves as a significant and relevant local citation.

Conclusion

Everything from your local listings to your dental website and social media presence can impact how your brand appears in local search results. This is why it is important that you know what your practice looks like online and work consistently towards improving your local brand presence at every stage. Ensure that your practice's brand is up to date when it comes to mobile optimization, and update your Google and all other local listings and citations with accurate and up-to-date information at all times.

Naren Arulrajah is president and CEO of [Ekwa Marketing](#), a complete Internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dentists. With a team of more than 130 full time marketers, Ekwa Marketing helps doctors who know where they want to go to get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call Naren directly at 877-249-9666.

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