

How to Optimize Local Search

To make the most of search marketing, you need locally targeted search engine optimization (SEO).

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High traffic doesn't always translate to viable leads. Your website has potential to reach people around the world, but the vast majority of them are not willing to travel long distances for dermatologic care. To make the most of search marketing, you need locally targeted search engine optimization (SEO).

Follow these simple guidelines to take your local search marketing to the next level.

DEFINE YOUR TARGET AREA

Of course, the city where your dermatology practice is located is the hub of your local optimization. However, you will need to further define target areas. Depending on your location, you may want to narrow or expand the region.

Hyper-local targeting. In a high-population, sprawling city with many dermatologists, people are less likely to travel across town. The average searcher will be looking for an office near his or her home. In this case, you might want to target specific neighborhoods, streets, or districts. Think of terms that locals commonly use to describe your part of town, such as "downtown" or "the park district." These words are likely to be used as search terms.

Suburbs. Many cities are surrounded by suburbs and "bedroom communities," with many residents and few businesses. People in these towns are accustomed to commuting, and are generally more willing to travel for medical care. They can be a rich source of patients for practices located in the heart of the city, or in nearby smaller communities.

Nearby communities. If your practice is located in a rural area or small city, you may need to draw patients from the surrounding area. Look for communities within close proximity, especially those connected by a freeway, public transit route, or other convenient form of transportation.

OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE

Google's smart algorithm doesn't return the same results for everyone. It uses clues, such as the user's location and the nature of the search, to return the most relevant results.

"Many local searches go straight to directories, with Google's being by far the most important. If you haven't claimed your business page and updated your profile, you must."

In other words, when someone searches for a doctor, even if the city isn't included in the query, Google will favor local doctors. That means you need to make sure Google knows where you are, and what areas you serve.

- *Start with the basics:* Your address should be shown on every page, ideally in the header or footer portion of your website.
- *Use meta and title tags:* These basic HTML elements remain perpetually relevant, and should be added to every page. Include your city or region along with a targeted keyword.
- *Images:* Captions and alt tags aren't just for your readers, search engines also use them. Whenever possible, include local references.
- *Map:* Embed a Google Map within your "contact us" page, or even on your main page.
- *Keywords:* Do use city and regional names within the body of an article, whenever it is relevant and sounds natural. Don't "keyword stuff" the text by adding location names where they don't fit within the natural flow.

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

Optimization begins with your own website, but it doesn't end there. Many local searches go straight to directories, with Google's being by far the most important. If you haven't claimed your business page and updated your profile, you must.

The best advice for GMB (Google My Business) success is simple. Be careful and be accurate. A common cause of low

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rankings is NAP (name, address, and phone number) errors.

Like Google’s search algorithm, GMB is designed to deliver the most relevant and credible results. Don’t use a PO box or virtual address. Only use your actual practice location(s), and error-check your listing. Complete all applicable information, and use high quality photos.

Once your listing is optimized, continue to build its strength with posts and reviews. Post is a feature added last year. Use this to announce special offers, events, or the latest news at your practice. It has a generous limit of 300 words, providing plenty of room for details. Lastly, encourage patients to leave reviews on Google.

If your practice isn’t ranking well, search for duplicates. This usually happens if a doctor has left your practice, or an address is entered incorrectly. If you find a duplicate, first have the reviews transferred to your default page. Then merge the pages, or delete the erroneous listing.

BUILD REFERRAL RELATIONSHIPS



Referral relationships need to be maintained.

Communicate with referring doctors and give feedback about their patients.

Physician referrals are an important revenue stream for dermatologists. Learn more in the latest educational video from Ekwa Marketing.

Watch now: [DermTube.com/video/physicianreferrals/](https://www.dermtube.com/video/physicianreferrals/)



From the publishers of Practical Dermatology

SOCIAL IS LOCAL

Facebook and other social networks may have global reach, but their appeal is uniquely local. People will use social media to ask friends to recommend a good dermatologist, discuss their skin concerns, and review your practice.

Build a community around your practice with engaging, locally relevant content. For example, you might remind people to use extra moisturizer due to forecast winds, or offer a “back to school spa special” for tired parents during the first week of the school year.

Facebook and most other networks also offer geotargeting of paid advertisements. Select the city of your practice location, as well as other targeted communities. Further define your audience by interests, ages, and other criteria.

ADDITIONAL OFF-SITE OPTIMIZATION

Although it is the most powerful, Google is not the only local search directory. Bing, Apple, and others offer business postings very similar to GMB. Claim your business and customize your profile on as many of these as possible.

Also look for local business directories specific to your city or region. In fact, inbound links from any reputable, truly local website can be beneficial. National organizations, publications, and other websites may receive more traffic and have more general authority than locals. However, inbound links from these sites do not confirm your location, so they won’t have an impact on local search rankings.

Businesses with inbound links from the chamber of commerce, hometown news media, community organizations, and similar sites tend to rank higher in local search. Join applicable organizations in your town; participate in local forums. If you sponsor an event, partner with a nearby business, or support a local charity, request a backlink from their website to yours.

Finally, never underestimate the power of earned media. Send press releases whenever something newsworthy happens at your practice. Introduce yourself to local health and beauty reporters, invite them to events that you host, and make yourself available for expert interviews. Of course, don’t forget to share any media coverage on your website and social media. ■

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 dermatologists. With a team of 180+ full time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps dermatologists who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.

