

Is PR a part of your online dental marketing strategy?

By Susan M. Hutson, with Vikas Vij

Online search is undergoing a rapid transformation, with Google and other leading search engines pressing ahead with crucial algorithmic changes to refine their search capabilities. The emphasis on external parameters to determine the quality and rankings of a website is increasingly perceptible. In this changing scenario, dental marketers need to revisit their existing SEO strategies and make public relations (PR) a critical part of SEO.

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External factors such as successful PR for a dental practice are set to make a much greater impact on the dental website rankings. PR in an online environment is much more than mere online distribution of press releases. Marketers need to recognize this and find innovative ways to create powerful public relations buzz for dentists. These efforts are likely to pay off significantly in terms of long-term SEO value and sustainable high search rankings for localized keywords.



Media and PR industry

Internet marketers and link building professionals traditionally find it challenging to build mutually beneficial relationships with print and electronic media channels. But now there's a gradual shift in this equation, with media personnel and journalists warming up to the idea of engaging with creative websites that offer compelling content of mass interest.

Dental marketers should have an eye on building useful back links to achieve higher SEO value. Success in PR is all 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 promotes the synergies between media and Internet marketing.

The way Google and other search engines are viewing content, the day is not far off when SEO will be more about an Internet marketer's ability to tell a great story than the ability to use latest SEO techniques to put a website on top of the search results. Media organizations 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. However, if the coverage does not provide a link to the website, the SEO advantage may be lost. A majority of media outlets don't 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 may pick up the story as it is circulated in the online media. Successful and targeted keyword placement will generate search engine traffic and bring more localized readers to a dentist's website. Public relations is not just about distributing the press release to the largest number of outlets, but also about creating a compelling story, identifying synergistic publication opportunities, and cultivating relationships with journalists and correspondents.

PR campaigns help boost inbound links from respected sources to enhance a website's credibility with leading search engines. The SEO angle to a public relations campaign makes it more measurable and easier to analyze the impact. In the eyes of potential patients, the credibility of a dental 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 dental practice can often gain numerous collateral advantages. Once a good story featuring the dentist or practice has circulated online, it is likely to get picked up by other media outlets. Comments and quotes from the original story may be used as references in other news articles and editorials across the media spectrum.

Leading websites and blogs may also cite the story and provide valuable back links for the dental website. This can be an ongoing advantage, which can 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 amazing volumes of traffic and useful links that can go a long way in building online recognition for the dental practice.

Skills to engage with media

A large number of Internet marketing and SEO experts have never explored the PR route, and have little knowledge and understanding of how to engage with reporters and editors of leading online, print, and electronic media outlets. From the perspective of dental marketing, there are usually two choices available. The dentist may hire an Internet marketing and SEO firm that has the necessary skills to develop successful public relations and media exposure.

The other option may be to hire a dedicated PR and media specialist with a proven track record of handling successful PR for doctors. It's not difficult to learn the PR skills because ultimately PR is about cultivating relationships and using them effectively. Forward-looking online marketing companies are training their marketing teams by partnering with PR experts because the future will make it harder for marketers to ignore the power of PR and media promotions.

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Media industry traditionally thrives on a close and personalized network of contacts. Reporters and editors are comfortable working with known sources they can trust. Simply sending out impersonal press releases to their email may be a common practice, but it is not likely to yield real results unless the sender is recognized by the journalist. Therefore, it's worth the effort to build familiarity with key reporters and bloggers.

The challenge is often how to cultivate a relationship with a media person. A good first step can be to keep track of the articles of a particular journalist and get a sense of the stories that may excite the person. Many reporters and editors have official social media accounts, and that can be a good place to engage with them. Building a relationship is a gradual process, but the payoff can be significant.

It's a good idea to maintain a regularly updated database of media contacts, and keep notes on the areas each one of them focuses on. Sending news stories and press releases directly to a close network of media people can be more effective than doing it through a paid press release distribution agency.

Susan Hutson is vice president of marketing at Ekwa.com, a complete Internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media marketing, and the online reputations of dentists. Vikas Vij is the marketing manager-SEO for Ekwa Marketing. Visit the website at www.ekwa.com.