

Link-building — it's more important for dental websites than you realize

By Susan M. Hutson, with Vikas Vij

When the history of the Internet search is written, the years 2012 and 2013 may well go down in history as the watershed years that changed link-building forever.

For several years, Google and other search engines hinted at countering questionable link building practices, but dramatic actions didn't come until 2012 and 2013. Websites that engaged in questionable practices and dominated search engine rankings for years dropped out of Google's favor practically overnight. Dubious link networks were identified and devalued, which caused a hit to the rankings of websites across the spectrum. Smart Internet marketers and SEO experts quickly learned the lesson, and adapted to the new link building environment that encourages organic, or natural, link building.

If your dental website has suffered in search rankings over the last two years or so, it may be because of the misplaced link-building practices that your SEO team may have unwittingly followed. But it is possible to clean up link building, develop new and organic link networks, and follow the latest trends in SEO and link building in order to crawl back to the top of search engine rankings. It's important for your SEO and link building team to know what they're doing. If they're able to follow the new trends in link building, it's actually much easier today to build powerful links for truly remarkable content.



Link networks are out

A surprisingly large number of dental website marketers still go “link shopping” in the hope that it will catapult their website to the top of the page rankings. However, this is a risky practice, considering how hard Google and other search engines have been coming down on those who engage in bulk link purchases, link exchanges, or other such schemes. It is important for a dental online marketer to understand what a link network is, and whether the easy links it offers are too good to be true. Link network is essentially a group of websites that are connected to each other. These sites could be owned by a single person or different people, and may be carefully camouflaged to escape being identified by a search engine.

With Google's Panda and Penguin algorithmic updates, websites involved with dubious link networks, whether wittingly or unwittingly, can expect to be punished severely in terms of their search rankings. Search engines are likely to de-index dubious networks, and the cascade effect can spoil the rankings of websites that have based their link building off those networks. Link networks indulge in a lot of duplication in terms of content and social signals, and make rampant use of cross-linking between sites. Google's Webmaster Guidelines clearly warn against the use of automated programs or services to generate links to a website.

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In the new SEO environment, the most important goal for a dental website is to create "linkable assets" that are outstanding and compelling. Unless the website offers real value in terms of content and presentation, it will be difficult to win useful links organically. It is also important to reach out to key influencers and convince them to link with the website.

Here are some of the ideal links that a dental website should aim for:

Links for authoritative sources

Authoritative sources from a search engine perspective are websites that rank very high in terms of site rank and page rank, enjoy a very strong traffic, and are linked widely. When a dentist's website is linked with a high ranking web page, it adds excellent SEO value to the site. Trustworthiness and credibility of a website goes up because a bit of the top reputation of the linking site rubs off on the linked site.

Links that generate targeted traffic

Relevant and logical links that can help a dental website achieve high local traffic of potential patients remain important. It is immaterial whether such links are powerful from Google's perspective or not. As long as they lead to greater business for the dental practice, they should be vigorously pursued.

Forum and social media links

Natural links from respected online discussion forums remain important. Links from social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are also very valuable from an SEO perspective. Search engines have recognized the massive reach and power of social media, and are willing to acknowledge websites that enjoy significant social network activity and social media links.

Links through column writing and blogging

One effective way for dentists to achieve high quality links is to engage with reputed online publications and top blogs for guest writing. Columns, articles, and blogs published on leading websites can yield superior links for a dentist's website and help build excellent SEO value over a period of time.

Link-building trends

While it is almost certainly futile to indulge in old strategies such as purchasing readymade link-building packages or working with link directories, there are some new trends that can strengthen organic link building.

Infographics

Accurate, creative, and unique infographics can add substantial value to link-building efforts. It is not necessary to create complicated and jargon-filled infographics. The goal must be to deliver relevant information to the target audience in a highly efficient and attractive manner.

Videos

A growing number of readers prefer to view a brief but succinct video as opposed to reading through reams of text. Video links have a better chance of going viral and producing many backlinks for the website. The focus should be on creating high quality, original videos that provide exclusive value to the target audience.

Specialist directories

The days of the generic directory created solely for the purpose of link-building are over. However, this does not signal the end of the genuine, specialist directory that is topical, curated, and purposeful. Directories that do not indulge in any manipulative tactics to outwit search engine algorithms should be valued for link-building. Dentists can look for such specialist directories and websites to generate good links.

Links in press and media

One of the biggest trends in link-building in the near future is the integration between public relations and SEO. Dental marketers that can successfully engage with print, electronic, and digital media journalists may end up achieving links through their publications. Such links can be very powerful and yield value for a long time.

The new Internet search paradigm is less about links and SEO, and more about creating value for readers. Dentists should identify and recognize the innovative ways in which their practice, services, knowledge, and ideas can be shared and linked on the Internet for maximum effect. The Internet marketers who will focus on linking wisely rather than linking recklessly are going to achieve remarkable results for their dentist clients in 2014 and beyond.

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 for Ekwa Marketing. Visit the website at www.ekwa.com.