

WHY INTERNET MARKETING MATTERS TO TODAY'S COSMETIC SURGEON

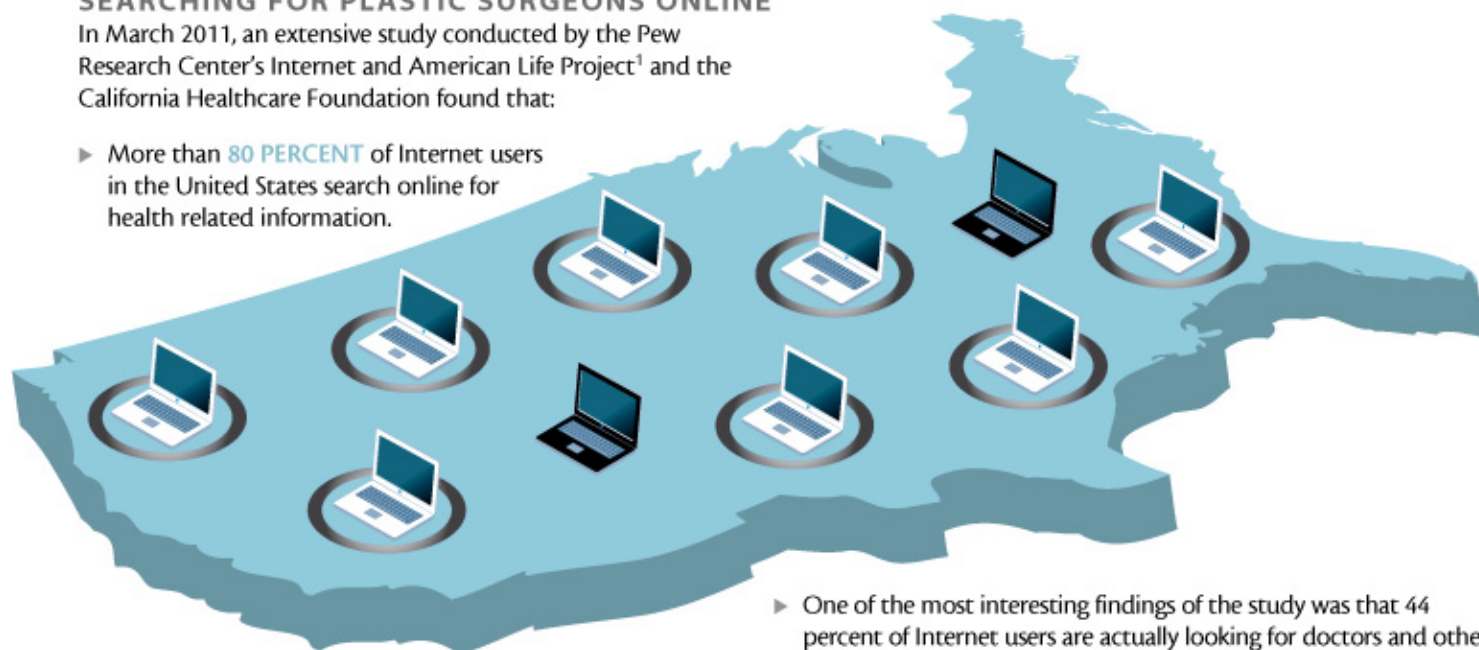
BY NAREN ARULRAJAH WITH VIKAS VIJ

Until the advent of Internet technology, patients relied heavily on traditional means such as suggestions from friends, family and co-workers to find a suitable aesthetic physician. Some would seek referrals from their family physician, while some others would look up the Yellow Pages and try to guess which of the ads appeared more impressive than the others. Some patients would simply choose a cosmetic surgeon from their health plan who happened to be in close vicinity—and hope for the best.

SEARCHING FOR PLASTIC SURGEONS ONLINE

In March 2011, an extensive study conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project¹ and the California Healthcare Foundation found that:

- ▶ More than **80 PERCENT** of Internet users in the United States search online for health related information.



- ▶ One of the most interesting findings of the study was that 44 percent of Internet users are actually looking for doctors and other healthcare providers when they search for health information online.

IF THE RESULTS OF THIS SURVEY ARE ANY INDICATION:

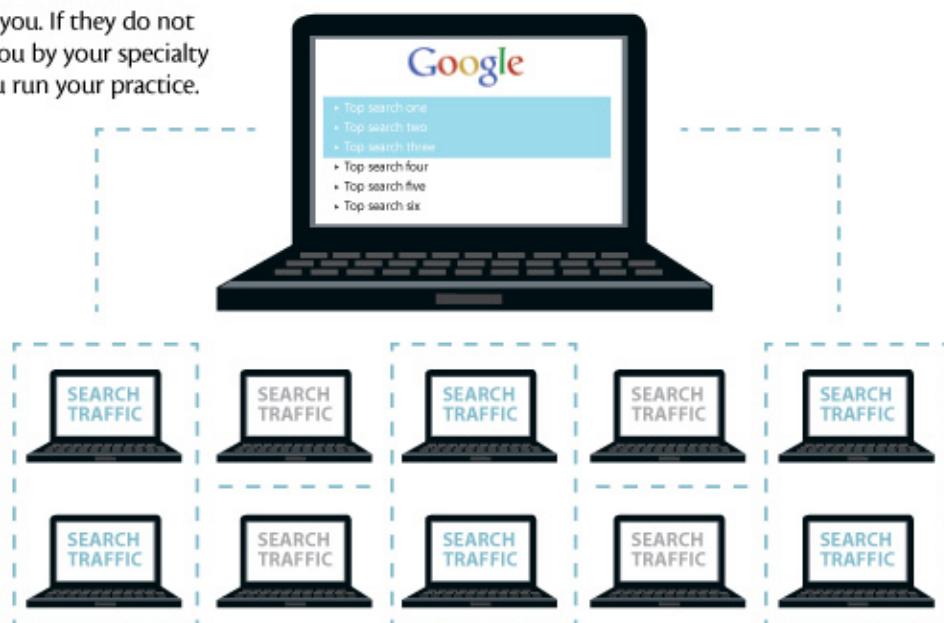
- ▶ Search engine optimization and online marketing are clearly game-changers for private medical professionals in an increasingly Internet-centric world. Traditional means of information, such as Yellow Pages, are almost a relic of the past.
- ▶ With free and easy access to health information, patients are highly aware of what they are looking for when they go to see a doctor.
- ▶ Patients are no longer satisfied with word of mouth recommendations alone. They check the doctor's online reputation, ratings and views of other patients, and even **COMPARE BETWEEN TWO OR MORE DOCTORS BEFORE THEY CHOOSE** the best one for their needs.



If you are an independent plastic or cosmetic surgery practitioner, chances are that scores of potential new patients are searching for you online every day. Even your existing patients may be following you on the Internet and quietly comparing your performance and online reputation against other doctors in your geographic area.

NEW PATIENTS ARE LOOKING FOR YOU

- ▶ If they already know your name or have been referred to you by someone, they are likely to make a specific online search for you before they actually decide to visit you. If they do not know you, they may still be searching for you by your specialty and the name of the city or area where you run your practice.
- ▶ If potential patients do not find you among the top three results of their online search, they will find someone else in your area who is offering similar services as you. According to a recent study by Optify,² the top three search results on Google receive over **60 PERCENT OF ALL SEARCH TRAFFIC**.
- ▶ If you are not highly visible online, you stand to lose a large number of Internet-savvy patients to a competitor who has an outstanding online presence. This online presence and reputation is built primarily around your website, professional listings, ratings, profiles, patient reviews and social media networking.



EXISTING PATIENTS ARE WATCHING YOU

- ▶ Harvard psychiatrists Tristan Gorrindo and James E. Groves suggest that patients want to know more about their doctor. "Many physicians over a certain age never envision their patients Web searching" for personal information about their doctor, they say. The older doctors (mistakenly) believe that "being absent from the Web is the surest way of avoiding disclosure of personal information on the Web."³



- ▶ It makes great sense to satiate their sense of curiosity and provide them with authentic information straight from the horse's mouth by way of a comprehensive website, online patient testimonials, reviews and ratings, Youtube videos, and social networking on Facebook and Twitter. An Internet-friendly and communicative approach can help build more engaging and long-term patient-doctor relationships.

The immense popularity of the Internet and the power of search engines, such as Google, have completely transformed the way patients obtain information about plastic surgeons in the 21st century. Information that used to be scarcely available at one time is now freely available to anyone at the press of a button. Plastic surgeons with old and established practices can no longer rest on the laurels of their past and expect a streaming flow of patients. The Internet has created a level playing field for all and created democratization of information. ■



Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa.com. Ekwa Marketing is a complete Internet marketing company which focuses on SEO, social media marketing and the online reputations of dermatologists and plastic surgeons in the US, Canada and the UK. Visit them online at www.ekwa.com.

1. <http://pewinternet.org/Trend-Data.aspx>

2. <http://www.optify.net/guides/organic-click-through-rate-curve>

3. <http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/300/2/213>