



What Is The Google 3-Pack, And How Can Your Dental Practice Get There?

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How would you find the best place to get a haircut, eat lunch, or have your car repaired? Most likely, the answer is Google. You know that a quick search will yield a short list of top-rated local businesses nearby, with the ability to see reviews, travel distance, services offered, and more. People in search of a dentist turn to that same short list. That list is known as the 3-pack, and it is a primary driver of traffic to all types of brick and mortar businesses.

How Google picks a pack

When trying to understand Google's ranking methods, it always helps to think about the company's end goal. They want to serve up exactly what the user is seeking, as quickly and efficiently as possible. In local search, users have three primary criteria.

- **Proximity** – Most people don't want to travel any farther than necessary, so the closest businesses automatically have an advantage in local search results. How does Google know the searcher's location? That depends on the device. For desktop searches, Google will favor any businesses within the person's zip code. When searches are performed on mobile devices, it uses geo-coordinates, which pinpoint the person's exact location at that moment.
- **Reputation** – Everyone wants quality service, especially when seeking medical or dental care. This is one of the most complex aspects of Google's algorithm, using many different factors to determine which websites are most prominent. Some of the most important ranking factors include external links pointing to your website, online reviews, citations (mentions of your practice), check-ins at your location, social engagement, and more.
- **Relevancy** – A great pediatric dentist right next door is useless when the individual needs dentures. As you might expect, keywords and related phrases are a major factor in relevancy. This includes terms found in your website content, meta tags, and other areas.

Your business description, services, and categories on Google My Business and other online listings are also important.

What you can do

Some of the criteria mentioned above are out of your control. There might be a dozen dentists between your office and a person who is searching. They have the advantage of proximity, but that doesn't guarantee ranking. For example, if their information is inconsistent Google might not be sure of their location, or if your practice has more and better reviews you just might outrank them.

Here are a few of the best ways to earn your spot in the coveted 3-pack:

- **NAP (name, address, and phone number) consistency** – As basic as this might seem, it can make a big difference in your local search ranking. To the human reader, slight variations in spelling, inconsistent abbreviations, and formatting differences are inconsequential. However, to an automated algorithm, any discrepancy is a warning signal. Google has the highest confidence when it finds exact results. If there are variations between your website, various listings, and other mentions of your practice, the benefits of those citations are diluted.
- **Citations** – There are two types of citations. The first are structured, which are easy for Google and other automated systems to read. Structured citations come from listings on Google My Business and other websites where you have a profile with specific fields for name, address, business types, etc. Add your practice to all appropriate review platforms, local business directories, and industry-specific sites such as WebMD's Doctor Finder. The other type of citation is unstructured. These citations come from blogs, social posts, news articles, and virtually any other online mention of your practice. Essentially, if the internet is talking about you, Google will notice.
- **External links** – It is easy to build up links quickly, using methods such as commenting on blog posts around the web and including your URL. Don't do it! Google is well aware of these techniques and considers them spammy. In order to boost your rankings, you need a diverse portfolio of inbound links from credible sources. One of the best ways to earn links is by creating high quality, sharable content. When a news article cites your research or a blogger recommends your video, Google notices.
- **Keyword optimization** – The rules of keywords have changed considerably over the years. Google's algorithm is much more sophisticated, no longer relying on exact phrases or keyword density. It is looking for relevant content that matches the user's search intent. Additionally, keywords aren't just for website content. Particularly in local search, the

words used in your business description, services, and content on platforms such as Google My Business is important.

- **Reviews** – Completing your profiles on Yelp and Google is just the first step. Next, you need patients to add positive reviews. Timing is important when asking for reviews. When a patient has just left the office delighted with your work, he or she is likely willing to share a few positive words. However, he or she might not, a week later the initial joy of a new smile has passed, and the person has other pressing matters to think about. Timely text or email reminders can work wonders.

Conclusion

The first and most important thing you need to do is claim and optimize your listing on Google My Business, but don't stop there. Optimizing a dental website for local search is both easier and more difficult than general SEO. Due to geographical limitations, your competition is narrowed. However, due to the high value of these limited top spots, competition is fierce. If you want to dominate your local market, optimize everything from reviews to social media.

About the Author:



Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren.

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