



New Decade, New Marketing Plan: How Dental SEO Will Be Different In 2020

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If your dental website is still struggling to recover from Google's "Medic" algorithm update of 2018, there is a good reason. The algorithm is still changing, and therefore so are the rules of SEO (Search Engine Optimization). In fact, BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers), one of the most significant updates in several years – according to Google – was introduced in October of 2019. Many webmasters noticed a sudden ranking change in early November, suggesting even more impactful core algorithm updates followed BERT.

This means we are entering not only a new decade on the calendar, but also a new era in dental SEO. How can you and your marketing team adapt?

Don't over optimize

The BERT update was focused on understanding the context of words in a long, complex query. This is significant due to the rise in voice search popularity, people are using more natural language. They might use a complete sentence or even a couple of sentences, and Google is improving its ability to understand what those queries mean. In many cases, these are lengthy, one-of-a-kind queries that your site probably isn't optimized for in the first place.

What can you do to optimize for BERT? Not much. According to Danny Sullivan of Google, "BERT doesn't change the fundamentals of what we've long said: write content for users."

Focus on overall quality

As for the nature of additional updates in November, Google has been more tight-lipped. According to Google's John Mueller, updates are meant to help Google determine which pages are more relevant, better, higher quality. He went on to advise against focusing on purely technical aspects, and instead, "really focus on the site overall and kind of improving things overall."

For many years, Google has recommended creating content for users, not for computers. However, that advice has largely been ignored, because the simplistic nature of Google's ranking factors made it easy to give a website a technical advantage. Now, Google is getting better at detecting tactics such as keyword-stuffing, and it has more sophisticated methods of measuring quality. Improving individual aspects of your website is fantastic, but it won't help much if the site isn't generally high-quality and high value to the user.

Re-vamp your local SEO plan

Some of the most significant November algorithm updates seem targeted to local search results. Industry analysts have noted that it appears ranking factors have changed a bit, with more weight given to actual proximity, and less given to your chosen categories on Google My Business. For example, a search for "orthodontist" might feature a dental practice that did not even select it as a category. What does this tell us? Google is pulling more clues from your website – and possibly from other third-party listings – in order to determine the most relevant result.

The lesson here is simple. Don't count on a Google My Business listing alone to help you rank on local search. Your website should include substantial content about each of the services you offer, or at least the ones you want to market.

Most of all, stay relevant

There is a common thread among recent (probably and future) Google updates. They are looking for relevancy. Sure, your keywords might be in all the right places on the page, but does the content actually answer the user's question? Are you targeting informational queries, but serving up promotional material? Are you marketing to "nearby" communities that aren't convenient to your practice? Are you trying to sell a service while providing little to no relevant content about it? These are the types of strategies you might need to re-think in coming years.

Conclusion

Google isn't changing so much as getting better at accomplishing the goal of serving up content that will please the user. The best way to position yourself for success with current and future algorithm updates is to make that your goal as well.

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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