

PR Is the Next Big Thing for Online Dermatology Marketing

Dermatology marketers should evaluate current SEO to make room for public relations strategies.

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Online search is undergoing a rapid transformational phase, 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, dermatology marketers need to revisit their existing SEO strategies and make public relations (PR) a critical part of SEO.

External factors such as successful public relations for a dermatology practice are set to make a much greater impact on dermatology website rankings. PR in an online environment is much more than mere online distribution of press releases. Marketers need to recognize this reality and find innovative ways to create a powerful public relations buzz for a dermatologist. The efforts in this direction 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 have traditionally found it challenging to build mutually beneficial relationships with both print and electronic media channels. However, now there is a gradual shift in this equation, with media personnel and journalists slowly warming up to the idea of engaging with creative websites that offer compelling content of mass interest.

Public relations engagement of dermatology 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

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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, it seems the day is not far off when SEO will be much more about an Internet marketer's ability to tell a great story than the ability to use the latest SEO techniques to put a website on top of search results. Media organizations are increasingly eager 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 do not mind providing links, so it is not a difficult task to gain one 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 gets circulated in the online media. Successful and targeted keyword placement will generate search engine traffic and bring more localized readers to the dermatologist'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.

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

Leading websites and blogs too may cite the story and provide valuable back links for the dermatology website. This can be an ongoing advantage, which continues to 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, trust, and brand equity for the dermatology practice.

SKILLS TO ENGAGE WITH MEDIA

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

The other option may be to hire the services of a dedicated PR and media specialist with a proven track record of handling successful PR and media campaigns for doctors. The good thing from the point of view of Internet marketers and SEO experts is that it is not difficult to learn the PR skills because ultimately PR is about cultivating relationships and using them effectively for mutual benefit. Forward looking online marketing companies are training their existing marketing teams by partnering with recognized PR experts because the future is going to make it harder for any marketer to ignore the power of public relations and media promotions.

CULTIVATING THE MEDIA NETWORK

The media industry traditionally thrives on a close and personalized network of contacts. Reporters, journalists, and editors are usually more comfortable working with known sources that they can trust and rely on. Simply sending out impersonal press releases into their email inbox may be a common practice, but it is not likely to yield real results unless the sender is recognizable to the journalist. Therefore, it is worth the effort to build a degree of familiarity with key reporters and bloggers that the marketer may be targeting.

The challenge usually is where to make a beginning with a media person to cultivate a relationship. A good first step can be to keep track of the articles of a particular journalist and get a sense of the stories and headlines that may excite his or her imagination. Many of the reporters and editors have official social media accounts, and that can be a good place to engage with them and create a level of familiarity. Building a relationship is a gradual process, but the payoff can be significant and long-term once a relationship with a media person has been developed.

It is a good idea to maintain a regularly updated database of contacts in the media, and keep notes on the kind of areas each one of them likes to focus on. Sending news stories and press releases directly to a close network of media persons can be more effective than doing it through a paid press release distribution agency. The road to building contacts in the media can be long and arduous, but the dividends are enormous in the long run. ■

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