Health Information Compliance Alert

Revenue Booster: Target New Patients with SEO Know-How

Put your practice details at the top of the heap with SEO.

The last decade has solidified the internet as most patients' chief source of healthcare information. It's no surprise then that providers lacking an online presence may feel slighted. But there's more to bolstering your digital outreach than a slick website and easy-to-use patient portals. Clinicians in the know utilize search engine optimization (SEO) to enhance their cyber marketing efforts.

Why is SEO Important?

Today, savvy patients utilize the internet as their main resource for finding information and making decisions. Though your practice may be especially skilled in providing care and running a business, you won't get the exposure you need to bring new clients in without some digital marketing acumen. The word-of-mouth advertising many practices have depended on for decades is no longer enough. And despite the advent and usage of social media, many people still use search engines to find a new doctor, so utilizing SEO really matters.

Think about it: As people continue to rely on the internet as their primary resource, the medical information they acquire through search engines often determines whether they seek out a practitioner for whatever health issue they're experiencing. If you have a specialty practice, you should make sure you include relevant symptoms or signs in your SEO, so your practice comes up first in searches.

Master These SEO Basics

SEO is complex, and usually an ongoing process. Different search engines have different formulas for "ranking" websites, but stuffing your website full of relevant keywords (like doctor, health, sick, doctor visit) won't help your practice come up first. Google's algorithm for ranking websites tries to determine and then rely upon high-quality content: trust, authority, and relevance/quality.

Google wants to make sure its users find legitimate websites, and it ranks them accordingly. Its algorithm evaluates length and uniqueness of articles and content, as well as how frequently the website is updated, says **John Johnson**, a writer on Search Engine People's blog.

Tip: Authentic social media interaction can also have a big impact on your website's ranking in search results, so make sure you have accounts on the biggest social media platforms, and try to post content and engage with users.

"Does the site include things like privacy policy, terms, and disclosure? These things don't exactly affect the ranking, but are nevertheless very important. It is a good sign that the site is legitimate," Johnson says.

Feedback and Credibility Matter, Too

Authority is a much more nebulous concept. Google in particular keeps its authority evaluation measures pretty quiet, says **Danny Sullivan**, an analyst writing on Search Engine Land.

"The most it will say is that the bucket of factors it uses to arrive at a proxy for authority are something it hopes really does correspond to making authoritative content more visible," Sullivan explains. "One of the ways it hopes to improve that mix is with feedback from the quality raters that it employs, who were recently given updated guidelines on how to flag low-quality web pages."

Originally, linking to third-party sites was a means of evaluating credibility. Though Google uses many other factors now,

links are still a major component for determining authority, says **Mark Traphagen**, senior director of brand evangelism at Stone Temple Consulting, in writing for Search Engine Journal.

For example: If you write a blog post about flu season and what patients can do to protect themselves, linking to a well-established and relevant page, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), can help your ranking.

"The big innovation that made Google the dominant search engine in a short period was that it used an analysis of links on the web as a ranking factor," Traphagen notes. "Since putting a link on your site to a third-party site might cause a user to leave your site, there was little incentive for a publisher to link to another site, unless it was really good, and of great value to their site's users."

He adds, "Linking to a third-party site acts a bit like a 'vote' for it, and each vote could be considered an endorsement, saying the page the link points to is one of the best resources on the web for a given topic. Then, in principle, the more votes you get, the better, and the more authoritative a search engine would consider you to be, and you should therefore rank higher."

Relevance matters, in that you get "votes" for links that Google believes have authority and focus on your subject matter. For instance, if the CDC linked to your practice's website, the Google algorithm would probably be very skewed in your favor for other search rankings.

While it's highly unlikely that the CDC would ever link to a private practice's page, there are still ways to get your practice more visibility on other pages. One of the best ways is guest blogging on relevant entities' website blogs and providing a link to your practice's website in your author bio information.

Hire an Expert

A basic understanding of SEO is crucial if you're designing or maintaining your practice's website. However, if you're looking for more website traffic or hope to attract new patients through search engine devices that culminate in results, consider hiring an SEO expert to go over your website and bolster your digital presence.