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Can directory listing help solve your SEO problems?

By David Evans, PhD, MBA

If your practice website appears at the top of Google's first page, and your conversion ratio is through the roof, don't read any further. This article is not written for you.

But if your site has been relegated to the depths of Google's search results and your bookings are suffering, you may want to read on and learn how physician directories can help you accrue more patients.

Here's what's happening in a nutshell: Google has pigeonholed plastic surgeons into the same local ranking algorithm as other "local" businesses.

When consumers shop local businesses, they already know exactly what they want and how much it costs. There's not much research involved other than precisely where to buy it and how quickly they can get it. This is not true for someone considering a facelift or other aesthetic procedure. He or she does not wake and think, "I want to get a facelift today. Who is the closest?"

Instead, prospective plastic surgery patients begin the process by researching basic information about the procedure, including cost, recovery, risks, and benefits. Despite these differences, Google ranks surgeons the same way it ranks local businesses: on their ZIP code.

Location, Location, Location

Yes, location matters. The first page of Google's local listings is prime real estate, and getting your site ranked



there can boost traffic to your website substantially. But it does not guarantee that additional patients will end up in your waiting room. It is virtually impossible to get ranked in a market where your practice is not physically located. For example, if your practice is in one of the counties along the Connecticut/New York border, your site will not rank for New York City proper, even though your practice may cater to Manhattanites.

You are out of options. The key to booking surgeries and procedures is to bait interested parties when they are doing their initial research.

Physician directories or portals have an important role to play here. Some listings are offered along with plastic surgery association membership. Key vendors also offer free listings to their providers.

Pay-for-play directories are another option to help boost your site's visibility and conversion ratio. Bing and Yahoo still rank many of the research-based directory sites high on their first page of search results. Also, Yahoo just cut a deal with Firefox to become the default search engine, which has upped Yahoo's market share by 2.5%.

You Better Shop Around

Search for terms such as "facelift," "facelift cost," or "breast augmentation recovery" on the top search engines, including Bing and Yahoo, to get an idea where directories are showing up in the

results.

Before you sign on the dotted line, ask:

-Does the directory offer comprehensive and authoritative information about procedures, including cost, risks, side effects, and recovery?

-Are the articles reviewed by a medical doctor?

-Does the directory make it easy for prospective patients to find you?

-Does the directory list surgeons whom you respect?

-Does the directory list board certification and other credentials?

-Does the directory allow you to list in all the zip codes from which you pull patients?

The answer to all these questions should be an unequivocal yes. Before inking a long-term deal, make sure you are able to try out the listing for a few months, to see if it aids in conversion.

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