

Don't Believe the Hype

by David Evans, PhD, MBA



David Evans, PhD, MBA, Devises a simple plan on how to choose an SEO company

How do I choose an SEO company when they all say the same things? Bar none, this is the No. 1 question I get asked by cosmetic surgeons during all of my Internet marketing presentations.

Surgeons are learning much more about the Internet and are starting to focus on more nuanced aspects of marketing—including search engine optimization (SEO). This is a good thing, but many an SEO pitchman can muddy the waters with big words, important sounding acronyms, and misleading minutiae.

Don't get distracted.

Bottom line: SEO is about three things:

- Improving your search engine rankings
- Generating more traffic and leads
- Improving conversion rate

Many companies would like you to believe SEO is about blogging, social media, updating your site, developing unique content, and/or link building.

It isn't.

These are simply tools that SEO companies use to accomplish the above-mentioned goals. The tools don't matter as much as the end results. Think of it this way: When you discuss a surgery with a new patient, you may use some 3D imaging, draw a diagram or show before-and-afters to illustrate what you hope to accomplish with the procedure. You probably don't discuss the needle gauge, nasal forceps or retractors, or the liposuction cannula tips. Right?

Just as your patients do when it comes to surgery, you care about the results and, of course, the cost, when shopping for an SEO company.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

With that in mind, start your search by doing some Googling on the types of search terms that are important to your practice. If "breast augmentation" is important, combine this term with various markets, eg "Breast Augmentation Houston" or "Breast Augmentation Miami." Your results will tell you which SEO company's sites rank consistently well for these terms. It's best to pick a market that is similar in size to your own to identify SEO companies that have done well in same-sized markets. How do you figure out which company is responsible for a site's SEO? Most SEO companies "brand" their work on the bottom of their clients' Web sites so it is easy to tell. Now you've narrowed it down to a handful of solid contenders. The next step is to determine how well their Web sites present your practice. The design and flow should draw prospective patients into the site and encourage prospective patients to come in for a consultation. (For tips on how to shore up a consultation,

see John Hoffenberg's article on page TK.) "Brute force" tactics are typically not effective at converting visitors to patients. The companies that provide the best "user experience," along with good rankings, will provide the best return on your investment. OK, you have most likely weeded a few more out. Which of the remaining few have familiarity with your type of practice? There are many nuances to marketing aesthetic surgery practices online.

Contact some of the companies and ask about the number of other clients from your specialty.

Call or e-mail these clients yourself. Just like you are checking a reference for a job applicant, ask about the quality of the services, the improvement in rankings, leads, and revenue. Make sure to inquire about customer service for Web site maintenance. This is important because your site may need to be updated periodically to enhance conversion.

EXCLUSIVE IS AS EXCLUSIVE DOES

SEO companies promote exclusivity as a big advantage, but what do they mean by exclusivity? Many base it on a geographic radius. This means said SEO company will not accept another plastic surgeon SEO client within a 15- to 20-mile radius. Search engine exclusivity is based on how many practices in an area are targeting the same search terms.

In the Chicago area, an SEO company could have six or seven plastic surgeons that are all 15 miles apart and the same company could also have six to seven facial plastic surgeons that are all 15 miles apart. All of these practices may have geographic exclusivity for their specialty, but not

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search engine exclusivity, since they all want to be ranked for the same search terms, eg "plastic surgeon Chicago." Very few SEO companies offer complete exclusivity—only one client in a metro market. Ask the SEO company how it defines exclusivity and make sure it matches your needs and goals.

Once you know what you are looking for, choosing an SEO company is easy. Trade shows can be a great place to speak to company representatives face-toface and ask detailed questions about their services and rates. You will also likely get a free Web site evaluation.

Remember what you really want out of an SEO provider and it will become a lot easier to separate the wheat from the chaff.

David Evans, PhD, MBA, is the CEO of Ceatus Media Group, based in San Diego. A recognized authority on Internet medical marketing strategies, Evans has spoken at meetings of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, among others. He can be reached via PSPeditor@allied360.com.