

# IN DEPTH: Spread Your Spend

by David Evans, PhD, MBA

## Diversification is key to any Internet marketing strategy

Your practice has a \$10K budget for Internet marketing. The search engine optimization companies obviously say the money should be spent on improving your Google rankings. The social media gurus say it is better spent on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Google+, and the like.

Who should you believe?

In a sense, there is some truth to both sides.

A year ago, when the battle between Facebook and Google was white hot, the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS) reported that 35% of their members' patients used Facebook to research plastic surgery procedures and providers. But that was then. In 2012, AAFPRS members found that only 7% of their patients used social media networks to research plastic surgeons and plastic surgery procedures.

So where are prospective patients doing research these days? These same AAFPRS surgeons found that 57% were getting their plastic surgery information online, while 33% relied on word-of-mouth referrals.

This dovetails with recent PEW research that found that 72% of Internet users looked online for health information.



Of these, 77% said they started on a search engine such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo!. Thirteen percent started on a general health care site such as WebMD, and only 2% began on a generic topic website such as Wikipedia. Less than 1% said they started their search on a social media network like Facebook.

## THINK LIKE A PATIENT

This makes perfect sense if you think about it. What do you do when you want to research a restaurant, a 2009 Bordeaux, a travel destination, or a large one-time purchase (similar to plastic surgery) like a car? You probably don't start on Facebook or review recent Tweets with hashtags like #bestnewcar. Instead, you go online and talk to your friends—just like your prospective patients do. Word-of-mouth referrals often lead to the search engines, and ultimately to your website (not to mention those of your competitors).

Of course, social media is not without value. It does allow you to keep up with past patients, and ensures that your practice remains

at the tip of their tongues. In other words, diversification is where it's at when it comes to your online marketing strategy. eMarketer reports that consumers are two-thirds more likely to convert if they see your information in more than one place online. This means that part of your online budget should be spent on directories, patient portals, pay-for-click advertising, website upkeep, and a strong social media presence. You have to be in it—all of it—to win it.

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