

The "Google Effect" and how it affects your practice

Remember mnemonic devices or other memory tricks like tying a string around your finger? It seems these forget-me-nots and other memory techniques are now considered as old-school as 8-track tapes or even CDs.

No one jots down information anymore. We don't even try to remember things like the name of a good bottle of wine or a new restaurant, let alone the name of the plastic surgeon a friend-of-a-friend swears by.

Why? It's simple: We don't have to. The tip-of-the-tongue phenomena can now be solved with a single keystroke. In essence, search engines and smartphones have become the de facto memory of the masses. Why try to remember something if you can Google it? And this "Google Effect" may also affect your plastic surgery practice.

WHAT IS THE GOOGLE EFFECT?

Researchers out of Columbia University in New York City recently documented the Google Effect in the journal *Science*.

A series of memory-related experiments conducted by Betsy Sparrow, PhD, an assistant professor in the department of psychology, and colleagues found that participants were much more likely to remember information if they were told it was going to be deleted than if they simply "hit save."

Study volunteers were more likely to remember the storage location when the data was unique and the file names were generic.

Where information is stored seems more important than the actual stored information.

This speaks volumes to how today's plastic surgery patient "remembers" your practice. Patients interested in elective health care procedures—such as breast augmentation, facelift, or tummy tuck—may take up to 9 months to make a decision on surgery and/or the "right" surgeon. This is a long time to remember a name, location, or specialty.

As a result, the patient is more likely to look for your information online using keywords such as "Park Avenue plastic surgeon" to jog their memory. There are a lot of Park Avenue plastic surgeons, and this prospective patient is apt to go with ones that appear on the first page of the search results (even if the name sounds just vaguely familiar).

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Achieving and maintaining good search result rankings on Google and other top search engines is the best way to remain visible to prospective patients.

There is, however, more than one way to harness the power of the Google Effect. Other online locations, such as pay-per-click ads, directories, Google Places, and social media sites (Twitter, Facebook, etc) can also serve as billboards for your practice information.

These are additional ways to make—and leave—your mark. eMarketer data show that conversion is about 66% more likely if an Internet user sees you in multiple



online spaces and places.

Also, don't forget that pictures speak a thousand words—maybe more when it comes to aesthetic plastic surgery procedures. Before-and-after photos that highlight your best work will certainly stand out and should be prominently featured on your Web site, as well as any directories with which you choose to list.

The first step to channeling the Google Effect is to get a better picture of how new patients discover your practice. For example, if a new patient comes in for a consultation and says she found your practice on the Internet, ask for specifics such as which site and what articles she read.

This detailed information will help you understand how patients remember you. In addition, providing procedure-related educational materials that promote you online can drive consumers back to your Web site for more information. These revisits will help make it easier for patients to take a stroll down memory lane.