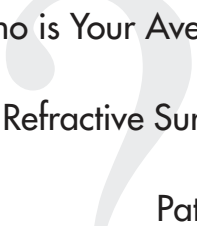


INTERNET VISIBILITY

The Core Of A Great Refractive Surgery Marketing Plan

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Who is Your Average Refractive Surgery Patient?

The average refractive surgery patient is young-minded, upwardly mobile and progressive. Refractive surgery patients range from members of Generation Y and Generation X (21 to 40 years old) to Baby Boomers (40 to 65 years old), but they all share one thing in common: the desire to change their lifestyle and eliminate their dependence on glasses or contact lenses. They usually have well-paying jobs and some disposable income. They use the Internet routinely at work and/or home and it is their primary research tool. Information they glean from the Internet has a significant impact on their decisions – particularly those pertaining to elective surgery, which they are paying for “out of pocket.”

Internet usage is BOOMING! Statistics from Nielsen/NetRatings show that more than 210 million people use the Internet in the United States, and usage is increasing at a rate of 10 million users per year. Internet usage also increases with education and income. According to eMarketing, most consumers now have broadband access in either their home or office and the rate of access increases dramatically with education and income. Daily Internet usage among broadband users is extremely high; in excess of 75% use the Internet every day.

If your practice marketing strategy does not target the Internet user, you are missing a very important socioeconomic component of your potential audience. The Internet is now a vital element of our culture and may be the most powerful tool for building your practice.

Our Practice Has
Always Relied on
Word-of-Mouth
Referrals!
What Should My
Practice Internet
Strategy Be?

Word-of-mouth referral is a potent form of advertising for any refractive surgery practice. A happy patient who talks to other potential patients is a great source of marketing. However, today many prospective patients use the Internet as a way to confirm or support a word-of-mouth referral, particularly when more than one doctor or practice is recommended. If two different friends recommend two different doctors, the Internet is the tool the prospective patient uses to learn more about each practice and make a decision. If one friend recommends a doctor, and then the prospective patient hears a radio advertisement or reads a newspaper advertisement about another doctor, the Internet is where the decision is made.

Pew Research recently found that more than 80% of the consumers who look for health care information online start their search on a search engine. The major search engines are Google, with 70% of the search market, Yahoo with 18% and MSN (BING) with 8%. One reason Google has such an “iron grip” on the search market is that other important search engines offer Google results, including AOL, Netscape Search and a number of others.

To be effective, your practice Internet strategy needs to include a way to boost the visibility of your practice website on the major search engines for the refractive surgery terms most often used by potential patients.



How Do Consumers Search?

To develop an effective Internet visibility strategy, you first must understand how consumers search online for refractive surgery-related information. Consumers find websites by searching using specific keywords on the major search engines. When “listings” appear on a keyword search results page, consumers select one or more websites to investigate the topic related to the search term. For your Internet strategy to be successful, **your practice website must be listed in highly prominent positions on the search results pages of Google, Yahoo and MSN.**

The keywords or phrases consumers use to search for elective health care information fall into two broad categories. The first category consists of root or base search terms, such as “LASIK” or “laser eye surgery.” The second category consists of key phrases that are used to find local surgeons to perform a procedure. These local or specific searches include the name of the procedure plus a location, as in “LASIK Los Angeles” or “LASIK NYC.”

A common misconception is that consumers primarily search using local search terms. This could not be further from the truth. In reality, **base search terms make up about 80% of the consumer searches** related to a refractive surgery procedure, while the local or specific searches encompass only about 20%. This is why a search term like “LASIK” typically has 60,000 searches a month, whereas a local search term, even one related to a large market such as “LASIK Chicago,” has only about 1,500 searches per month.

This search pattern is reminiscent of the research methods of consumers making other important buying decisions. If a consumer is thinking about buying a new Mercedes, the first thing he or she searches for is not a local Mercedes dealership. The first area of research relates to whether this type of car is best suited for him or her, including information about the various models of Mercedes, the features and benefits of each model and how these models differ from



How Do Consumers Search?

continued

Two Ways to Make Your Website Easy to Find by Consumers

the competition. Only after the consumer has narrowed the decision down to one or two models does he or she actively look for a local dealership.

What does this mean for your Internet visibility strategy? It means you need to be found on the search results pages of both root word searches and local or specific searches.

On each search engine, there are two types of listing positions: free (“organic”) listings and paid listings. In order to build Internet visibility for your practice, information about your practice and/or your practice website must be easily found by consumers through the organic listings, the paid listings or both.

Free Organic Listings

Organic listings are filled by websites selected by the search engine to appear in response to a keyword search. These listings are not paid for by an advertiser. They are typically listed down the middle of the search results page. Yahoo, MSN and Google use different methods to choose which websites are listed in prominent positions. This is why the websites listed on the first page of search results for a given search term are different on each search engine. All three engines use a complex and unique algorithm to rank websites and place them in a database. When a search term is typed into the search box, the search engine pulls the websites from the database depending on the ranking developed by the algorithm. The process of optimizing a website so that it is ranked highly by the search engine algorithms is called search engine optimization, or SEO.

Two Ways to Make Your Website Easy to Find by Consumers

continued

In order to optimize your practice website for good search engine ranking, it has to be designed so that it is compatible with the algorithms and databases used by the search engines. Website SEO can focus on the two types of search terms described above: root terms, such as “LASIK,” and local terms, such as “LASIK Dallas.”

Paid or Pay-Per-Click Listings (PPC)

Paid listings are listing positions that are purchased as advertisements. These listings are also known as pay-per-click, or PPC, listings. Businesses interested in developing a PPC strategy purchase advertising positions on the search engines for each keyword of interest. Each time a consumer clicks on one of these advertisements, there is a cost to the advertiser, thus the name pay-per-click. The listing positions of the advertisements depend on several variables, including the cost each advertiser is willing to pay, how much the advertiser has budgeted and how popular the advertisement is with consumers (as determined by how often the PPC advertisement is clicked compared to similar advertisements). Keyword PPC costs can be quite expensive; for example, the first advertising position for the key search term “LASIK New York” has been as high as \$51 per click. PPC ads usually appear at the top and along the right side of the page, and are labeled “Sponsored Links.” Anyone can purchase PPC advertisements directly from the search engines.

Your PPC campaign should include both root search terms and local or specific search terms. Recently, search engine technology has changed such that advertisers can purchase PPC ads that only appear to consumers in a specific local market, such as San Diego. Previously, when an advertiser purchased PPC ads, the advertisements would appear nationwide. If a practice tried to target the high traffic terms that most consumers search, such as “LASIK,” this strategy was not cost effective. Since the ads appeared nationwide,

Two Ways to Make Your Website Easy to Find by Consumers

continued

If a practice tried to target the high traffic terms that most consumers search, such as “LASIK,” this strategy was not cost effective. Since the ads appeared nationwide, most of the clicks on the PPC advertisements were from consumers outside the practice market area. The practice paid for a lot of clicks from non-local patients who probably would not visit the practice.

Therefore, to control costs, many practices limited their advertisements so that they focused solely on local search terms like “LASIK San Diego.” Although these ads appeared nationwide, non-local consumers would typically click on the PPC ad only if they were planning to travel to that area to see a doctor, or if they were looking for a doctor for a friend or relative who lived in that market. But, this strategy had tremendous drawbacks, because as stated earlier, local search terms are relatively low volume and provide limited Internet visibility, since they account for only about 20% of the consumer searches related to a given topic. The recent changes in search engine technology have allowed practices to cost-effectively advertise for the full range of search terms.

Organic Listings Versus PPC Listings

Both organic listings and PPC listings can be effective for driving traffic to your website. The advantage of the organic listings is that 6 out of 7 consumers click on them. Also, because there is no cost per click, there is also no cost per visitor. Finally, once the website is listed in the organic listings, it provides a long-term strategy. The disadvantage of organic listings is that it takes time to obtain first page positioning. The implementation of an organic listing strategy cannot take place without a person who is an SEO expert. SEO is not a simple task that can be easily learned by an office staff member. It requires considerable expertise, constant vigilance and continuous revision and updating of your website.

Organic Listings Versus PPC Listings

continued

In contrast, PPC advertising requires little skill (anyone in your office can be trained to do it) and the advertisements appear quickly. A PPC campaign can be implemented over a very short time period (one or two days). The disadvantages are that it is very costly and it is difficult to control a PPC budget. Another disadvantage of PPC ads is that they represent a short-term strategy; as soon as you stop paying for the advertisements, your website stops receiving traffic. Finally, a recent study from JupiterResearch shows that **only 1 in 7 consumers click on the PPC listings**. Consumers are aware that PPC listings are paid advertisements, which they consider less credible and therefore do not click on them as often.

Gaining Visibility For Both Root Word And Local Searches

For a comprehensive Internet strategy, your website should have prominent visibility for both local and root search terms. As mentioned previously, root search terms account for 80% of consumer searches. Unfortunately, obtaining visibility for these root terms is one of the biggest SEO challenges medical practices face. It is much easier to optimize a website for a local search like “LASIK Houston,” than for the root terms “LASIK” or “LASIK eye surgery.” Since it is virtually impossible for a private practice website to obtain organic listings for root search terms, it is best to purchase listings in LASIK directories that have root search term visibility. (To learn more about how to assess which LASIK directories are best, see the information below about how to choose a LASIK directory.) We recommend that your practice website SEO strategy focus on local search terms.

For PPC advertising, you can purchase both the local and root search terms. Since the root search terms have much higher traffic than the local terms, it is important to monitor your PPC program carefully to

Gaining Visibility For Both Root Word And Local Searches

continued

ensure that the cost does not accelerate too rapidly. Also, when you purchase the root terms, make sure that the geographic area for these terms is specified, so that your ads only appear to consumers who search in your local area.

Again, this geographic isolation will be important to control your budget and to make the program most effective. For the local terms, from a budget standpoint, you can either specify a local region or leave it unspecified. It is unlikely that someone outside your practice's geographic area would search using a geographic term focusing on your local area, unless he or she is specifically interested in finding a doctor in your practice area. Consequently, visitors to your website who locate the website using a local search term, but are not from your practice area, may have value for your practice, unlike visitors from root term searches who are not from your area.

Together, the strategies described above – listings in prominent LASIK directories that target root search terms, PPC ads for both local and root search terms and SEO for local terms for your practice website – add up to a comprehensive Internet visibility strategy. This strategy can be costly, but provides the most prominent visibility for your practice.

What Makes A Good Refractive Surgeon Internet Directory?

A LASIK surgeon directory is reliable and effective only if it has certain attributes. First, the directory website should have prominent organic listings for the most heavily searched refractive surgery-related search terms that apply to your practice, such as "LASIK," "LASIK eye surgery" and "laser eye surgery," not just for secondary root terms such as "LASIK doctors" or "laser eye surgery specialists."

What Makes A Good Refractive Surgeon Internet Directory?

continued

Secondly, the website should be very informational. Potential patients are looking for the most comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date information about eye care and the refractive surgery procedure that interests them. Consequently, directories that are just lists of doctors have little credibility with consumers and provide limited value for the practice. Directories that use comprehensive eye care information as the foundation for the website become a credible referral point for consumers to find a local or leading surgeon.

Next, the directory should list only surgeons who have well established LASIK practices. It is important that your visibility in the directory be enhanced by other high-quality surgeons who are listed. Some LASIK directories list optometrists and other types of non-surgical practices.

In addition to visibility for the root search terms, the directory should be well positioned for the local search terms pertaining to your market, such as “LASIK Boston” or “LASIK Miami.”

The directory also should easily link to your website and provide an easy way to contact the practice. Some directories require the prospective patient to fill out a form or click on a separate page just to visit your website or obtain the practice phone number. **The goal of the directory should be connecting potential patients with your practice.** Keep in mind that the easier it is for the patients to connect with the practice, the more difficult it is to track exactly how many surgery consultations come from the directory. Some directories place tracking as a higher priority than the ease of getting consumers to contact you.

Directories that generate traffic primarily through PPC advertising usually are not cost-effective. Why pay to be listed in a directory that uses PPC advertising to attract visitors when you can purchase these PPC advertisements yourself and avoid sharing the traffic with other surgeons?



How Do I Choose An SEO Firm To Optimize My Website For Local Search Terms?

Finally, for a directory to be effective, it must limit the number of LASIK surgeons listed in each market. Directories that list an unlimited number of surgeons dilute the value of the market for each listed practice and provide uncertainty as to the long-term value of its listings.

Choosing an effective SEO company is becoming more and more difficult. Every day, new companies contact your practice claiming to have expertise in search engine optimization. To choose properly, several factors must be taken into consideration.

The SEO firm should have specific experience in the LASIK market, so that they can focus their efforts on the proper search terms. For example, it is important that your SEO personnel understand the differences between LASIK, LASEK and PRK. You should ask SEO companies to show you the search engine ranking results from other LASIK related websites they have optimized.

In addition, an SEO company should have expertise in all areas of website production, design and optimization. In some cases, websites may not be constructed and coded properly from a search engine standpoint. The best SEO companies can review a website to determine how “search engine friendly” it is and then re-build certain components, if necessary.

It is also very important that the company you choose set realistic expectations. A company that suggests that your site can be listed on the first page of Google for root search terms like “LASIK” or “Custom LASIK” clearly does not understand the competitiveness

How Do I Choose An SEO Firm To Optimize My Website For Local Search Terms?

continued

of the LASIK Internet market. Furthermore, SEO can take time to implement. For a well established website (at least one year old), it is reasonable to expect improved rankings within several months of beginning the SEO project implementation. If an SEO company promises immediate changes in your rankings, that should be a red flag telling you to stay away from them.

Before you begin an SEO program on your practice website, you should ensure that you own the website, the domain name and the content. In some cases, the fine print of a website contract states that the practice does not own these items. Since SEO is based partially on the content and the longevity of the website and domain name, it makes little sense to pay for SEO on a site that you do not own. Why spend money to optimize someone else's site?

Hire an SEO company only if it offers customized SEO to a limited number of clients in each market. Search engines only offer a few top positions for the search terms related to a market. A company that contracts for more than three or four clients per market cannot possibly provide prominent rankings for all of them. Also, some companies are production oriented; that is, they use the same techniques and SEO strategy for each website. Every practice is different, so each SEO strategy needs to be customized.

If you have a brand new website with a new domain name (less than several months old), your SEO efforts will be fruitless. In April 2004, Google began using a tool called the "Google Sandbox." In response to thousands and thousands of spam websites, the "sandbox" is a method Google developed to hold back the rankings of a website while it determines if the website is legitimate. A new website with a new domain name can remain in the sandbox as long as nine months to a year. If an SEO company contracts to charge you for SEO for a brand new website, that is a red flag.

SEO For A Newly Designed Website With An Old Domain Name


Some unscrupulous SEO companies charge practices for many months or a year of SEO services, knowing full well that a new website will be in the sandbox and will not rank during this time period, no matter what SEO activities are initiated.

If you are redesigning your website, it is very important from an SEO standpoint to keep the same URLs for the pages of the site, if possible. The search engines do not rank web pages, they rank URLs. If you replace the old URLs with new URLs as part of a website redesign, the new URLs will take time to rank; potentially many months. If you do choose to use new URLs, **make sure to implement the proper redirects** so that the search engines can credit your new URLs with the longevity you gained from the previous URLs.

Website search engine rankings now rely substantially on external links to the website. That is, the more external pages that link to a website, the more Google and the other search engines value – and the higher they rank – that website. When evaluating an SEO company, find out how they will obtain more external links to your website. If a company has no external linking strategy, that is a red flag.

Does Video On My Website Improve Optimization And My Rankings

Recently, Google and the other search engines implemented a new search algorithm called “Universal Search.” In the Universal Search scheme, Google ranks not only the content of websites, but also online videos. This type of ranking is very important for topic areas where videos are highly searched by consumers, such as entertainment, news, politics and sports. However, for a health care website, videos have limited SEO value.

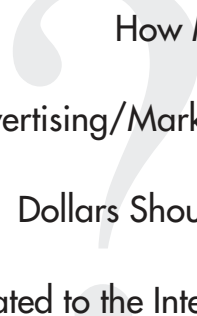


Does Video On My Website Improve Optimization And My Rankings

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Currently, consumers are not searching for videos of LASIK procedures, and as such, these types of videos do not have prominent listings on the search engines. To see an example of the difference in SEO value between entertainment videos and health care videos, type the search term “Darth Vader” and then the search term “LASIK” into the Google search bar. Note that for the “Darth Vader” search, several videos are listed on the first page of search results. The same is not true for the search term “LASIK.”

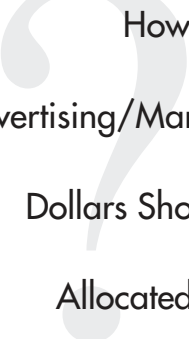
With that said, website-based videos do have value for the practice. Videos on a practice website can be an effective tool for educating consumers about the practice and the surgeon, and have been shown to substantially increase patient conversion. That is, once prospective patients visit the website, the video is a great asset. But the video plays only a limited role in bringing patients to the site through search engine rankings.



How Many Advertising/Marketing Dollars Should be Allocated to the Internet?

The size of your Internet budget should depend on several factors, including the size of the market, the image of your practice in the community and the amount you are spending on other advertising activities. The larger the market, the more you should expect to invest in Internet marketing. A good rule of thumb is to compare the Internet investment with a half- to full-page advertisement in the Yellow Pages.

Also, if your practice is well known, it is important to ensure that your website appears in prominent positions for the practice name and doctors’ names. Keep in mind that the Internet works in conjunction with other marketing efforts. Consumers often look to the Internet to research topics that they learn or hear about through other advertising media, including word-of-mouth. These days, all other forms of marketing and advertising flow through the practice website.



How Many Advertising/Marketing Dollars Should be Allocated to the Internet?

continued

A practice that invests in television or radio advertising also must take steps to have a prominent Internet presence. After seeing or hearing the advertisements, the next stop for consumers is the Internet. If the practice cannot be found easily, then these other advertisements are essentially sending prospective patients to the competitors' websites.

If the practice is just starting out, then a reasonable Internet budget would include a website and one or more directory listings. As the practice matures, use of the full spectrum of Internet visibility tools is very important to maintain practice growth.



What Makes A Good Practice Website?

A premium website is crucial to establishing an excellent Internet strategy. Buying PPC advertisements and purchasing directory listings that send prospective patients to a poorly designed website is a waste of money. An effective website should have six primary attributes. It should be:

- visually attractive
- highly informational
- easy to navigate
- search engine friendly
- easy to contact the practice
- have a prominent call to action

Website design is a broad topic and goes beyond the scope of this white paper. The important point is that a poorly-constructed website can be a drain on the whole Internet strategy. Moreover, websites should be designed from the start with SEO in mind. Websites that are too heavy with underlying code, Flash, and lack sufficient text can be an impediment to SEO success. To more fully discuss factors related to website design, please contact Ceatus Media Group LLC directly at 858.454.5505.

About Us: All About Vision® LASIK Surgeon Directory

All About Vision® is the leading Internet resource for patient education related to eye care and laser vision correction. This one-stop resource was released in January 2000 and is the most widely visited eye care information portal on the Internet, receiving more than nine million visitors per year. *All About Vision* provides in-depth information about many different eye care topics as well as information on refractive surgeries including LASIK, custom LASIK, wavefront LASIK and LASEK.

All About Vision LASIK Surgeon Directory is the only LASIK directory that meets all of the criteria for an effective directory. It has prominent organic listing positions for the high-traffic LASIK-related search terms, and only prominent LASIK practices are listed. A limited number of surgeons are listed in each market, and it is easy for prospective patients to contact the practice through the directory. An added advantage for surgeons listed in the directory is that each practice receives a



customized profile page that is search engine-optimized for the city and state of the practice. This localized SEO saves the practice some of the costs associated with hiring a separate SEO company. However, if the practice has sufficient budget, we recommend that its website be optimized for local search as well.

The LASIK Surgeon Directory is secondary to the comprehensive information provided in *All About Vision* for the consumer. Once consumers learn about refractive surgery and the various procedures and technologies, they click on “Find a LASIK Surgeon” to find a surgeon in their area.

This white paper was written by David Evans, Ph.D. of Ceatus Media Group LLC to help refractive surgery practices learn how to increase their visibility on the Internet. Dr. Evans has been working with refractive surgeons and medical marketing for more than 20 years.

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