

Best Practices for Developing a Medical Website and Increasing Your Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

What is SEO and why does it matter?

SEO stands for search engine optimization. According to a 2017 research report by BrightEdge, 51% of traffic was from an organic search, meaning it was driven by search engines.¹ When conducting an online search, the search engine returns a list of sites related to the search ranked by relevance.² The ranking of search results is based on various factors.² The more popular a site, document or page, the more valuable information the search engine assumes it contains.² The popularity and relevance of a site is not determined manually, rather it is based on an algorithm that factors a site's relevance, and then ranks them by popularity.² Basically, a search engine is the pathway that guides readers to your site. Users rarely scroll to the second page of search results.³ In fact, the top Google results get 33% more clicks than any other listings on the search results page.⁴

What affects the SEO algorithm?

Factors that affect your SEO algorithm fall under three main categories, including your site's SETUP (back-end), STRUCTURE and your CONTENT). Often, your website developer will take care of your Setup and Structure, leaving you responsible for your content.

SEO Algorithm Factors

- **Keywords, meta description, titles, URLs**^{2,3,5}
 - Unique, descriptive, accurate⁶
- **Alt tags**⁷
 - Describe visual and video media with alternative text descriptions
- **Broken links, bounce rate, load speeds**^{5,8,9}
- **BackLinks**
 - Links on other sites that go to your page. The more backlinks, the better, and they should come from different domains.⁵
- **Site visits**
 - Duration of stay on site, number of pages visited, repeat visits and bookmarking^{5,6,9}
- **Mobile friendliness**^{5,6}
- **Quality content**
 - Relevant, fresh, in-depth, unique^{6,9}

Improving SEO

Even if you're not a web developer, there are things you can do to improve your SEO. One way is to ensure your site meets the five E's criteria. By meeting these criteria, you can improve the user's experience and increase the amount of time readers spend on your site, subsequently improving your SEO. The five E's are:¹⁰

1. Effectiveness

- Can users achieve their objectives for visiting the site?
- Can they find what they're looking for?

2. Ease

- How easily can they achieve their objective?
- Can users navigate the site easily – is it user-friendly?
- Are “call-to-actions” consistent and easy to identify?

3. Engaging

- Is the information interesting and unique?
- Do readers have a reason to visit your site?

4. Everlasting

- Is it memorable?
- Can users re-find the site?
- Do you get repeat traffic? How likely are users to go back to the site?

5. Error prevention

- Are there broken links or does the site contain invalid information?
- Is the site frustrating to users?

Attain EFFECTIVENESS and EASE through the presentation of your content

According to LifeLearn, “people only read about 20% of text on an average web page.”¹¹ So if readers are overlooking 80% of your content, how do you ensure that the information you want to convey to readers actually gets read? Good formatting allows users to find the information they need more easily, improving EASE.^{8,12} Consumers value EASE of use over trust when comparing different providers online.¹³

1. Use images, infographics and videos rather than text and lengthy paragraphs to increase views of your site, shares of your site and ENGAGEMENT with your site.

Images and Infographics

- Content that contains images gets 94% more views than content that doesn't¹⁴
- Social media posts are 10 times more likely to receive ENGAGEMENT with images than without¹⁵
- According to 3M, visuals are processed 60,000 times faster than text¹⁶ increasing EASE
- The brain processes images more EASILY than text and, as a result, increases the EASE by which one processes information^{11,15}
- Using infographics, which are graphic visual representations of data, information or knowledge, allows readers to process complex information more EASILY.^{11,15} Make sure the infographics are relevant to ensure EFFECTIVENESS.
- People can better retain information when it's paired with a visual aid¹¹
- Eye tracking studies indicate that webpage readers spend more time looking at images than they do reading text¹¹

Videos

- Search engine algorithms put a priority on video content, which helps increase site ranking¹⁷
- According to Forrester Research, sites are 50 times more likely to make it to the first page of Google results if it includes video¹⁸
- Videos increase the length of stay on a site¹⁰
- 62% of Google searches include video¹⁹
- According to a 2015 study by Animoto, people are 4 times more likely to watch a video than read about a product²⁰
- Video search results have a 41% higher click-through than plain text results¹⁹
- On average, people spend 2 minutes longer on sites that have video than those that do not²¹
- 88% of short videos (around 30 seconds) are watched to completion on a mobile device¹⁷

Tips and ideas:

- Make videos that answer patient FAQs
- Make a web series with related videos
- Keep videos short
 - About 2/3 of consumers prefer videos under 60 seconds²⁰

- 5% of viewers will stop watching a video after one minute, and 60% will stop watching by two minutes²¹
 - Cross-reference with YouTube, Twitter and other social media sites⁵
 - Have readers vote for the next video topic to ENGAGE
 - Allows readers to feel involved and invested
 - Helps ensure topics are what is relevant to readers
- 2. **Vary the types of media (video, images, audio, etc.) on your site to increase SEO**¹⁰
- 3. **Use simple language and explanations rather than lengthy, academic descriptions to improve comprehension**^{13,22}
 - Write to your audience, not your peers¹³
- 4. **Change presentation of the text to improve EASE**¹³
 - Utilize tabs, rollovers and drop-downs to limit appearance of text but still provide content^{8,12}
 - Break up long paragraphs into shorter paragraphs and use subheadings
- 5. **Be conscious of your color choice and site design**⁸
 - Use a white as the primary shade of your site²³
 - Try using blue as a complementary color as it has a positive connection in all cultures and evokes feelings of calmness and reliability²³
- 6. **Make sure you have a clear call-to-action to improve EASE**⁵
 - What do you want your readers to take away from your page?
 - Do you want them to make an appointment or opt-in to your newsletter?

Make your page ENGAGING and EVERLASTING with your site's content

Below is a list of content to include on your website.

1. Publish original, interesting and new content to ENGAGE and keep your site EVERLASTING¹²

Benefits:

- Helps to differentiate you from other sites
- Gives people a reason to visit your site
- Provides content that adds value to readers
- Improves likelihood they will bookmark your site and return
- ENGAGING content draws people to the site and keeps them there longer
- Increases feeling of involvement with site and practice

Tips and ideas:

- Feature a "FAQs about the implant" section on your website
- Present interesting facts about the implant or men's health
- Provide tips for men to stay healthy as they age

2. Make sure content is not hidden inside media²

- Using your logo does not allow your company name to be indexed because it is an image

3. Produce content regularly to ensure that it is relevant, current and EVERLASTING⁹

- New content gives your readers a reason to keep coming back
- Continuously updating your page helps ensure there are no broken or outdated links

4. Ensure your content is sharable by linking all of your social media accounts⁹

5. Remember your audience

- What is the goal of your site? If it is to educate patients, you want to make sure that you are producing content that is relevant to patients.

6. Feature Patient Testimonials and Reviews

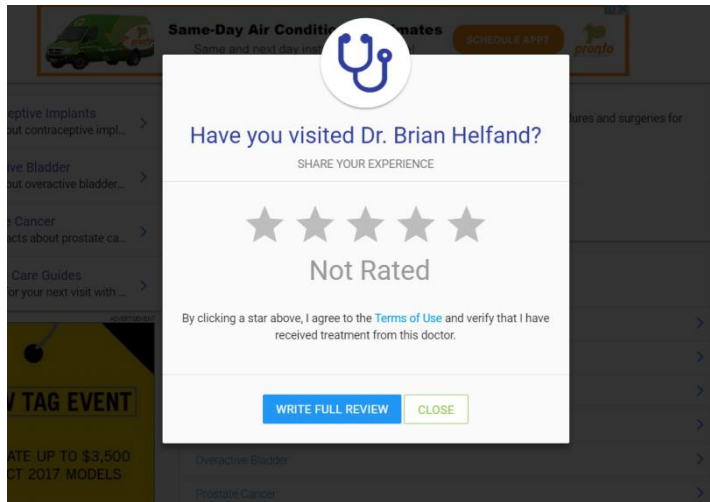
Benefits of reviews and testimonials:

- Increases trust, credibility and transparency^{4,24}
- Reviews are the next best thing to a personal recommendation⁴
 - 80% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations⁴
 - Because these are men's health issues that are not openly discussed, personal referral might be more difficult to attain⁴
 - Reviews carry more weight than self-promotion, so let your patients promote you
- Boosts SEO as reviews are heavily weighted by search engines²⁵
 - Affects organic search rankings in search engines
 - Each review increases unique site content
- Differentiates you from other physicians

- Think about when you are trying to choose a restaurant, typically you look for the restaurant that has the most reviews and highest rating
- Patients may lack knowledge about urology and assessing physician credentials, so the rating system can act as a guide for their physician selection
- Review volume matters²⁶
 - If choosing between two urologists a patient knows nothing about, and one has reviews and the other doesn't, they will be more inclined to go with the former
- When choosing a new doctor, 72% of patients use online reviews²⁵
- 48% of people are willing to go out of their network because of reviews²⁵
- Provides valuable insight into patient experience and satisfaction²⁴
 - Reviews can highlight what you are doing well or could improve on
 - You gain insight into what patients value most²⁴
 - Patients primarily use reviews to obtain information on wait times, physicians' experience and accuracy of diagnosis²⁷
- Can help increase provider referrals

Ideas to get reviews:

- Follow-up email after patient visit to thank them from coming in with an option to provide a review
- Do the little things to establish a positive connection with your patient and maintain contact
- Send patients a (standardized) happy birthday email
- Add a pop-up to your website asking your readers to write a review
- Feature a couple of sites they can choose from to review



Displaying reviews:

- Utilize star ratings to provide quick, accurate visualization of a patient's experience²⁸
- Readers can glance at the stars and know what the rating is without reading all the reviews
- Feature quotes from testimonials and patient stories on your site to add a human element²²

Where to Review:

- There are over 60 different review sites (Software Advice 2016-2018), but some of the most prominent include:
 - Healthgrades, Google Reviews, Zocdoc, Yelp, WebMD, RateMDs²⁴
 - Healthgrades is most popular²⁷
 - Yelp is the most trusted²⁷
- Patients look at multiple review sites²⁶

How to control reviews, specifically damage control on negative reviews:

- Social media now gives patients a platform to voice their opinion and publicly share their experiences^{4,24,26,29}
 - Most patient feedback is positive or somewhat positive²⁵
 - According to Software Advice (2016-2018), 52% of patients claim to leave “very positive” or “somewhat positive” feedback and 11% claim to write “neutral” reviews²⁵
- Approach patients in a positive way to give a review²⁴
- People are more inclined to write a review when they feel strongly unless you actively seek their review
- If you receive a negative review, promptly address it²⁹
 - Thank the patient for their feedback and address the issue without getting hostile or defensive²⁵
 - It may be better to reach out to the patient individually rather than addressing their feedback on the review board^{25,29}
 - Receive notifications from Google Alerts to let you know when something is written about you so you can promptly address negative reviews³⁰
- Remember that reviews encompass the entire patient experience, which includes their interaction with administrative employees and starts before they even step foot in the office²⁵
 - Offer employee incentives for positive reviews
 - When asked what administrative information patients valued most on healthcare review sites, patients said information about staff friendliness, ease of scheduling and wait times were the most valuable²⁵

Examples of ENGAGING content

- **Feature a Q&A webinar**
 - Direct people to landing page
 - Get contact information during registration
 - You get their data even if they don’t end up attending the webinar
- **Utilize pop-ups to get opt-ins or appointments**

**I would like to be contacted by Dr. Smith’s
office to schedule an Appointment**

Yes, please contact me

**No
Thanks**

I would like to stay up-to-date with upcoming events, specials, and health-related information.

No
Thanks

Yes, please contact me

- **Display upcoming events within an event page**
 - Provide the option to “add event to calendar”
 - Keep the viewer involved with your practice and show them your involvement with the community
- **Have regular Q&A or Town Hall sessions online**
 - These sessions are basically online patient education seminars
 - Little to no cost
 - Patients can remain anonymous
 - Patients can attend the seminar from the comfort of their home/office
 - Record the Q and A session then display the video on the video page
 - ENGAGES your readers and allows them to feel connected
- **Send an e-newsletter to your patients** (*see page 10 for instructions*)
 - Ask patients if they want to opt-in to receive the latest urological and practice news/events on their sign-in forms and/or via your website
 - Allows you to stay connected to patients
 - Keeps patients loyal
 - Allows you to identify who is interested in more information
 - Keeps patients informed about new events
- **Feature an “In the News” section on your website to highlight all of the great awards you’ve won and recognition you have received**

Other important factors

1. Keywords

- One of the biggest contributors to relevance signals is having keywords in your title tag^{5,6}
- Select keywords potential readers might use in a search engine to find information¹
- Use concise description and good titles⁶
- Select keywords patients would use when searching for information. You want your keywords to match the terms they use²²
- 50% of search queries are four words or longer³¹
- Use keywords throughout the website content (organically)⁶
 - Bolden and italicize keywords
 - Embed hyperlinks within pages using keywords
- Avoid medical jargon; save the medical terminology and clinical definitions for your research papers as they typically do not contain keywords the general public uses²²

2. Error Prevention

- Broken links, bounce rate and load speeds can have a negative effect on your SEO^{5,8,10}
- Broken links can indicate a neglected, old site¹⁰
- High bounce rate indicates user leaves the site without venturing further⁵
 - Possible reasons could include: Content is not what they are looking for, they can't find what they are looking for easily, content is not engaging
 - Keep bounce rate low
- Reduce file sizes and plug-ins to increase load speeds¹⁰
- Make sure your site is mobile-friendly
 - Remember that many readers will view your site from their mobile device, so it is important to ensure that your site re-formats properly on a mobile device^{5,8,10}
 - In the US and nine other countries, more Google searches are made on a mobile device than on a computer³²
 - 1 in 5 patients books their appointment via their computer or mobile (excluding appointments made by calling)³³
- Add outbound links from your site to reputable sources to boost SEO^{5,10}
- Ensure your site is free of grammar and spelling errors⁶

E-Newsletter

One way to stay connected to your patients and keep them informed is to regularly send e-newsletters that feature important information about treatments and the practice, upcoming events, interesting content and specials.

How to develop and send an e-newsletter

One way you can create and distribute your e-newsletter is through a free marketing automation program called "Mailchimp." You can access the site at <https://mailchimp.com/>, create your newsletter and upload contacts to email. There are also other programs and companies that you can use.

How to build your database of contacts:

1. Include an opportunity to "opt-in" in new patient paperwork. It can be as simple as adding a statement that states, "I would like more information from the practice regarding up-coming events and health information" and a box to check "yes."
2. Add a button on the website that states, "For more information" and directs viewers to a page where they can enter their contact details.
3. Add a pop-up to your website. When designing a pop-up, make sure that it:
 - Is visually appealing
 - Has clear, clever messaging
 - Has coloring and branding consistent with the rest of the site
 - Has a clear, easy call-to-action
 - Provides an incentive to opt-in
 - Is worded to make it easier to opt-in than not

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