

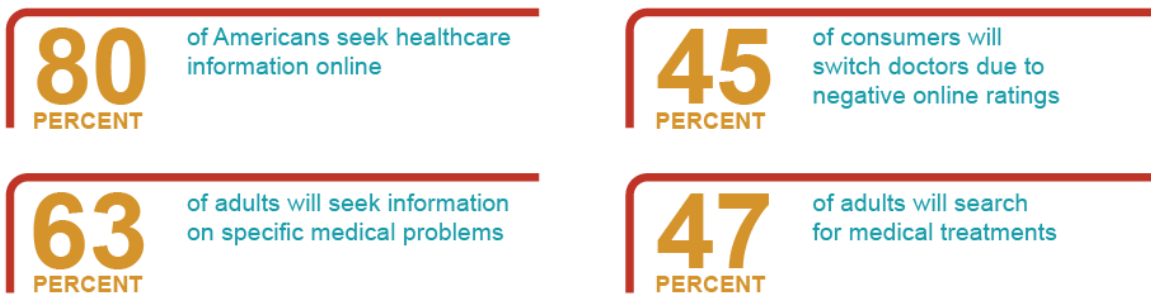


LEVERAGING DIGITAL MARKETING TO ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE

As a physician or a practice administrator, it is critical to implement a digital strategy to grow your practice, communicate expertise, promote the reputation of your practice's patient care, and reach potential new patients searching for medical information and physicians online. Marketing a medical practice has dramatically changed over the years. It is important that practices, both small and large, stay current with new trends and keep pace with the information your competition is posting on their website and through social media channels. How? The following summarizes key tips to help you leverage social media and your website to increase your potential digital reach. As with all matters involving patients, digital marketing should be ethical, professional, and accurate.

Why Is Digital Marketing Important?

Your patients are leveraging the internet and social media more and more to gain information on conditions, treatments, and potential providers in their area. Data shows:



Source: Pew Internet, 2019

An informative website and active social media accounts help build a strong online presence. A strong online presence is a win-win for your patients, physicians, staff, and the public because it:

- Improves your practice's exposure to a wider pool of potential patients and your patient-centric culture
- Demonstrates your practice to be on the cutting-edge of patient care
- Builds the reputation of your practice by showcasing your areas of specialization, practitioners, and staff
- Enhances patient engagement by educating them with accurate information on conditions and treatments
- Gives you the opportunity to reach a broader audience, ranging from policymakers to insurance payers
- Leads to higher patient satisfaction

Getting Started: Assessing Your Current Digital Efforts

You should already have a website and be aware of the many social media opportunities available to promote your practice. The first step in maximizing how effectively you are using your website and social media channels is to work through a digital content audit. The audit should assess the following areas:

- Website
- Search
- Reputation
- Social Media



Before you jump right in, it is important to understand how social media and an online presence will benefit your practice and how it contributes to a holistic digital marketing strategy. An audit can be accomplished quickly and lead to a short-, medium-, and long-term plan based on available practice resource. When accomplished, it may also lead to a discussion on whether the practice has the staff expertise and budget to focus on growing a digital footprint.

Your Website: The Front Door to Your Practice

Your website is the most important part of any digital strategy. A potential new patient's experience begins with your website. If your site does not make a good first impression, visitors will likely leave and seek information and consultation elsewhere. Ask yourself: Does my website promote, educate, orient, and welcome? Your website should revolve around building a positive perception of your practice. Remember, 80% of Americans (93 million) have searched for a health-related topic online.

■ Responsiveness and User Experience

Is your website responsive? A responsive web design will ensure web pages render well on a variety of devices and window or screen sizes, including desktop, tablet, and mobile phones. Mobile is the number one platform for consumer engagement on your website. Your website should be designed with a user's phone in mind. Some quick tips to check for:

- **Click to Call:** Link your phone number so a potential patient can click and automatically call you.
- **Connect to Maps:** The user should be able to click a button to access a map with directions to your office.
- **Prioritize Speed:** If webpages take too long to load, users will become frustrated and will abandon your site. You have a short time to engage visitors and delays due to slow speed are one way to lose potential new patients.
- **Know Your Competition:** Spend time evaluating what other practices in your area are showcasing on their website and compare it to what the user experience is for your practice.
- **Highlight Your Brand:** Be sure the "brand" you want to convey to new patients, existing patients, and other visitors matches your culture, image, and mission. Your website is an important opportunity to connect with your community to highlight your practices' staff and expertise.

ENTHEALTH+ TRUSTED PATIENT HEALTH INFORMATION ON DEMAND AND ONLINE

ENThealth+ gives you access to ready-made content from ENThealth.org that has been developed and vetted by clinical experts in the otolaryngology-head and neck surgery specialty. In addition, all materials are published with the patient's comprehension in mind. The program includes all conditions available on [Conditions & Treatment A - Z](#) as well as any new conditions added throughout the timeframe of your subscription period.

ENThealth+ offers two subscription programs to choose from – ENThealth+ On Demand and Online and ENThealth+ On Demand. Each allows you to offer ENThealth.org content in a way that meets the needs of your practice. Whether via printed handouts (*On Demand*) or via content feeds to your practice's website (*Online*), ENThealth+ helps extend your quality patient care.



CONTENT IS ESSENTIAL

Millions of users are looking for information on specific medical conditions and connecting to the physicians they believe have the experience and expertise to help them. You can design a visually stimulating online presence, but unless the content is written well, easily understood, and easy to navigate, you will be working at a disadvantage. As important as it is to develop an inviting design, the education content you supply is key.

- **Match Content with Patient Needs:** If a searcher is looking for information on allergies, make sure your site has a page devoted to that topic with resources, profiles of your physicians, and other information. The goal is to impress visitors with your practice and experience.
- **Write to Your Audience's Understanding:** Visitors to your site will not have the type of background to understand overly complex resources. A good rule of thumb is to write your website content at an eighth grade reading level to ensure information is easy to comprehend.
- **Add a Contact Form:** Visitors should be able to easily communicate with your office through a basic contact form.

Keys to Managing a Successful Brand Reputation

Every interaction you have with your existing or potential patients has an impact on the reputation of your practice. Most people believe what they read on the internet. It is vital that you consider managing your reputation in print and online. Remember, 94% of patients use online reviews to evaluate practitioners and practices (Software Advice, 2019), and 45% of consumers will switch doctors over negative reviews (Pew Internet, 2019).

Your practice needs to be mindful of general review sites like Google, Facebook, and Yelp, but also healthcare specific websites such as RateMD, WebMD, Vitals, Zocdoc, and Healthgrades. You should consistently check these sites to monitor any reviews. You are responsible for managing your online reputation. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Invite Patients to Review Their Experience:** This can be accomplished in many ways from mailing them a survey after their visit, sending an email with a link to a survey, asking them to post an online review on one of the review sites mentioned above, or requesting a testimonial for the website. Be vigilant that the information you post does not violate HIPAA.
- **Monitor All Reviews:** Set up a schedule to help you check the sites mentioned above to know what your patients are saying about your practice and specific practitioners.
- **Respond Offline to Negative Reviews:** Get in touch with the patient offline, find out more, and respond appropriately. If the result is positive, you can always ask the patient to post an updated review/outcome.
- **Utilize a Review Management Platform:** These types of platforms help your practice increase the number of reviews by assisting in collecting testimonials and feedback, responding to negative feedback, and improving patient perspectives of your practice.

HIPAA AND YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY: IMPORTANT REMINDERS

As you put together your digital strategy and manage online reviews, here are some important HIPAA reminders:

- Never divulge a reviewer as a patient
- Avoid messaging systems outside of a secure patient portal (e.g., Facebook Messenger)
- Always gain consent when utilizing reviews, testimonials, and/or patient stories in marketing materials, both online or offline



Why Does Search Matter to Your Practice?

Google receives more than one billion health questions every day (Google, 2019). These types of inquiries include conditions, medications, symptoms, and insurance questions. Leveraging social media has many benefits for a medical practice. It allows you to:

- Grow your practice and increase visibility to current and potential patients
- Manage your brand and increase patient loyalty
- Demonstrate a patient-centric culture
- Educate your patients on ENT-related conditions, treatments, and options
- Communicate regularly within your community

Organic and Paid Search: The difference between organic search versus paid search is simple: it's the cost. While organic search focuses on unpaid rankings in search results, paid search focuses on paid ranking. With organic search, practices use search engine optimization (SEO) to optimize their website's visibility or rankings in search results. For practices: Integrate a search engine function into your website and social media platforms, which means having a vibrant SEO and search engine marketing (SEM) strategy. Consider these tips as you develop your search strategy:

- **Research Keywords:** Use Google's Keyword Planner to figure out what ENT-related conditions people are searching for on Google. Compile a list and develop a plan to produce and post content matching to as many of the keywords as possible. With longer content, you're not only more likely to mention keyword phrases and prove your expertise to Google, you might also start ranking for those terms. Remember, most successful pages don't rank for just one keyword, but for multiple and variations.
- **Write Relevant Content:** Make a list of top conditions that your practice treats and create information on separate webpages for each. For example, you can write an explanation on the treatments for nasal obstructions or septoplasty authored by one of your physicians. Include a short bio of the physician.
- **Focus on Content Length:** The length of your web content is important. Search for each main keyword you have identified and look at the sites that rank at the top.
- **Optimize Your Pages with Keywords:** The most important places for keywords are title page, url, and main headline and subheadings. These are the first places Google will look to get a sense for what your page is about.
- **Ensure Your Site Speed Is Sufficient:** The best way to gauge this is by using a tool such as bytecheck that indicates how long it takes for your server to respond to a request. If it is above 400-500 ms, it is time to start looking for a new hosting company.
- **Take Advantage of Map Pack:** Use this free listing to incorporate your business information and website in local searches.
- **Keep "People Also Ask" Boxes:** Google's strategy, at the writing of this primer, is to get users to spend more time on their site by adding a related question section. For example, if you search "allergy treatments," not only do you see paid and unpaid links but also related questions with additional links to similar content.



If organic searches are not yielding the results you hoped for, you have paid options. Pay per click ads in the healthcare space are very competitive and coupled with stringent HIPAA regulations and a ban on medical remarketing make the medical space a tough one to break into. If you are just getting started, here's how to take the first steps:

- Start with Google AdWords and set up an account.
- Make your keywords as specific as possible and add location. For example, if you are an ENT in Boston, then users searching the keywords ENT Boston are much more likely to make an appointment than ENT and Massachusetts. Specific keywords bring qualified traffic to your site and help you pay less for advertising.
- Optimize your landing pages. Link to the specific webpages that users are searching for instead of linking to your homepage. If you're creating a paid search about allergies, then set up a landing page with common allergy symptoms and treatments. Make sure your contact information is on every page.

Steps to Developing Your Social Media Strategy

There are three social media steps to complete when developing a strategy for your practice.

■ Step 1: Determine Social Media Platform(s)

For medical practices, consider narrowing down the social media platforms to five including: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. If you have resources for just one, Facebook is the best option as it has the greatest number of users (2.23 billion), is used by 51% of U.S. adults several times a day (Emarsys, 2019), and offers options for content, pictures, videos, and images, making it the most versatile platform. It provides you with the ability to target your posts to a specific demographic group, provides more options to promote engagement, offers the opportunity for reviews and advertising (if you so choose), and has both organic and paid options.

■ Step 2: Create and Execute a Strategy

Just as you did for your website, you should also set up your social media using specific brand standards, usable content, complete business information, and the ability for patients to leave reviews or send notifications. Most successful social media users develop a content calendar to maintain a level of consistency in the delivery of content. Take time and research your colleagues and competitors as it could invite ideas or discourage you from doing something with which you do not agree. **IMPORTANT: turn off the instant messenger for HIPAA compliance.**

Content is vital and Facebook, for example, is versatile and allows a variety of media to be used. If you are having difficulty creating content, we suggest you:

- Have a team meeting and brainstorm different subjects.
- Plan for one to three posts per week on a variety of topics that match the keywords ENT patients are searching.
- Post office news and events, promote awards and give recognition to your employees, conduct surveys, and engage in general community outreach and involvement.
- Video continues to grow in popularity, and you have several options for running short engaging videos. These include instructional (explaining the condition and using informative images), information on the patient experience, and an introduction to the practice.
- Avoid controversial topics such as politics, religion, and patient-specific subjects.



■ Step 3: Review Results

Data and analytics are a great strength of social media and allow you to gauge your activity against industry benchmarks that might be difficult to determine due to market-specific conditions. Reviewing your results also provides insight into the demographics of those viewing your site, monitor your activity and watch for positive (or negative trends). Use the data you receive to revise your strategy, if necessary. Sometimes, small changes in content or messaging can create a huge shift in social media following and the success of your efforts.

Digital Marketing Summary: Top Takeaways

As you move forward with creating your digital marketing strategy, consider these key takeaways for your website and social media.

■ Website Takeaways:

1. Creating a strong digital presence will help increase your exposure to potential patients
2. Your website should be designed with the user's preference in mind, ensuring it is responsive for all devices and easy to navigate
3. Content drives engagement, so when developing webpages write to your audience's needs and understanding
4. Consistently monitor your online reviews to help manage your digital reputation
5. Investing in your search strategy, both organic and paid, will help increase your ranking on Google and other search sites, ultimately driving more visitors to your website

■ Social Media Takeaways:

1. Create a content schedule using a variety of messaging to promote all facets of your practice
2. Post consistently with a mix of topics and mediums
3. Drive consumer engagement with increased social following and engagement with content (e.g., views, likes, shares, etc.)
4. Connect all digital activities and coordinate your social activities with other marketing initiatives to ensure consistency
5. Determine if your practice can handle the implementation in-house or if you need to partner with a digital media firm with medical practice experience