



**Marketing Musts for
Health and Dental Care
Businesses Today**



6

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It's funny to think that many health and dental care professionals practicing today can recall seeing patients before "email," "iPad," and "Obamacare" were even words, not to mention when marketing required little more than hanging out a shingle and placing an ad in the Yellow Pages, then waiting for patients to start streaming in.

Now, in what seems like only recent years, a bevy of technological advances, changing healthcare legislation, the switch to electronic records, and tighter FDA and HIPAA regulations have forever changed the healthcare industry's landscape. And, while hospitals and other large-scale organizations have added big budgets and dedicated, trained marketing staff, many physicians, dentists, and other private practitioners spend their own time—and money—navigating hurdles like content creation, search engine optimization (SEO), social media, and online reviews.

To ensure that you and your staff are expending most of your time and energy caring for patients—as opposed to marketing and administrative duties—we've isolated and demystified many of the current marketing activities that produce the best return on investment (ROI) in healthcare and beyond. If you're still formulating or refining your business's digital marketing strategy, what follows should provide a basis for what to do, and how to do it.

We've isolated and demystified many of the modern-day marketing activities that produce the best return on investment (ROI) in healthcare and beyond.

1

Have an Optimized, Mobile-Responsive Website

The cornerstone of an effective healthcare marketing strategy, a properly imagined and built website should help attract prospective patients, engage current ones, offer valuable content, establish brand identity, and actively grow and promote your practice. More than just being eye-catching for the use of high-tech design features, flash video, and multimedia, today's most effective consumer websites blend form with function to create utility for visitors and patients alike.

Key features of modern-day health and dental care websites include:

OPTIMIZED FOR SEARCH ENGINES (SEO): Research, select, and implement relevant keywords—the search terms your target audience will use to find you on the internet—for each page of your site, and continually refine them based on analysis, performance measures, and changing search rules published by Google and other search engines.

RESPONSIVE ACROSS ALL DEVICES: Responsive site design means the pages and functionality of your website adjust depending on the size of the screen being used to view them; it is not the same as mobile sites or even mobile-friendly sites. This will ensure that your site can accommodate desktop computer, tablet, and smartphone

users, which is especially important considering that up to one-third of patients prefer to conduct research and book medical appointments using their mobile devices. In addition, Google now penalizes sites in their search rankings for not being responsive.

SECURE: Be sure to allocate funds to protect your website and patient data against cyberattack, for hacking is big business, and healthcare is a prime target! In fact, 35 percent of all data breaches in 2015 compromised hospital and healthcare provider systems. So when investing in website and IT infrastructure, don't cut corners on encryption, data backup and storage capabilities, and install lines of defense against hacking, phishing, and ransomware. Any upfront cost will be more than worth it compared to the potential negative press and loss of patients and productivity that could result from a security breach.

INTERACTIVE: Starting on the homepage of your practice website, patients and site users should be able to easily contact the office, open a map, access relevant educational material and download forms, among other things. More advanced interactive features may also include online check-in, online bill pay and even estimator tools for out-of-pocket costs.



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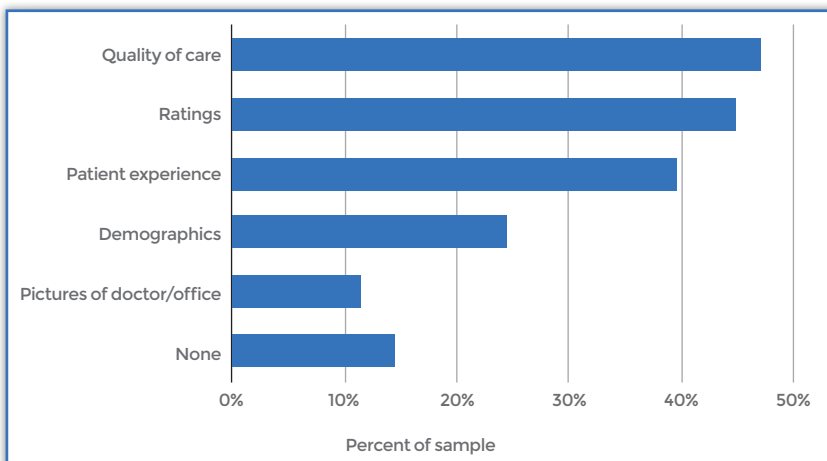
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Manage Reviews and Online Profiles

By placing a literal wealth of information at the fingertips of those who need it, the internet has helped revolutionize healthcare consumption patterns, thus enabling and empowering patients to become more informed consumers.

For example, consider that the third most popular activity among internet users—behind only checking email and using search engines—is searching for answers to health-related questions. This demonstrates the modern-day role of the internet as the primary information source among current and prospective patients. And another recent poll sheds light on what destinations, specifically, the majority of patients are visiting, and what information they're looking for in doing so:

- **77 PERCENT** of patients use online rating sites as a first step in selecting a physician or healthcare professional
- **19 PERCENT** use reviews to validate their selection, and yet another 19 percent seek out ratings for their current physician to decide whether to stay with him or seek a new care provider



Among the most popular destinations are the websites **Healthgrades.com**, **Vitals.com**, **Yelp.com**, and **RateMDs.com**. Ensure that your photo, biography, contact information, and medical certifications are correct and current on these

Up to 77% of patients use online review sites prior to choosing a physician.



sites and others, and at minimum, it's advisable to continually monitor ratings and customer reviews on the top sites; respond constructively to all feedback, be it positive or negative. Doing so will positively impact your ratings and public perception, not to mention elevate the overall patient experience. Studies have even shown that unhappy customers can be satisfied and retained as much as 95% of the time if they receive swift and appropriate responses to their online feedback.

The qualities that have been deemed most valuable to patients on rating and review sites are:

From a big-picture perspective, these are considered the foremost standards for comparing healthcare providers and selecting the best fit. Ironically enough, the problem with online reviews and ratings is the very reason why physicians need to monitor and address theirs so closely: only 10 percent of patients leave reviews in the first place. The end result is that online reviews tend to portray only very positive, or very negative, experiences among patients. The rest, as they say, get lost in the shuffle, and this tendency alone is why physicians should be taking steps—including creative (but non-monetary) incentives—to encourage patients to submit reviews of their own and make it easy.



3

Stay Active in Social Media (Organic & Paid)

Exploding social media use among hospitals and other healthcare organizations means that social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, and others are no longer just informal destinations for mundane content. They are now outlets for initiating meaningful, two-way discussions about health and dental topics with interested members of your target audience who, as the stats below prove, value what you have to say:

- **60 PERCENT** of all healthcare consumers—and 90 percent of Millennials—say they trust medical information from doctors posted on social media
- **41 PERCENT** of consumers said social media would affect their choice of a specific doctor, hospital, or medical facility

For those who wish to begin leveraging, or better harnessing the power of social media as a marketing tool, here are answers to some critical and frequently asked questions:

WHICH SOCIAL NETWORKS SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

With a wide array of social networking sites all competing for attention, it's better to focus your efforts and excel at a couple, rather than try to have a presence on them all. Due in large part to their size and popularity, you can be certain that members of your target audience are active in higher numbers on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, so those are likely the top social media sites on which you should concentrate, especially when just beginning to pursue social media marketing.

WHAT SHOULD YOU POST? Share only genuine content that's specifically of interest to members of your target audience. So, if you're a dentist, for example, share articles, video, and the latest research and advice on oral health, common conditions and how to treat and prevent them, and the latest products and technology affecting the dental patient experience. Don't be afraid to post about thought-provoking or even controversial topics, either, as those can be good for initiating conversation. Social media content can be organic, which means created

by you, or shared from other reputable sources with proper credit given.

In addition to what you post, however, pay close attention to the feedback you receive from site users. Respond quickly and appropriately to questions, comments, and feedback, and do not engage in conflict or argue openly with followers. Private discussions and sensitive matters should be taken offline or in private, either by direct message, or via phone, email, or another, more suitable contact method.

FINALLY, KNOW YOUR HIPAA GUIDELINES: while patients can post and discuss details of their own medical or dental care, you can't. You can only discuss medical care in general terms.

HOW DO YOU BUILD YOUR FOLLOWING ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Being attentive to questions and feedback is a fine way to start building a social media presence and earn new followers. While in and around the office, though, be sure to ask current patients in person to follow you on social media. Also, include your social media pages on printed pieces and in digital marketing materials, and encourage medical and office staff to spread the word for you as well.

There are essentially two components of your complete social media strategy: Organic and paid social. Organic means content that is unique and originated by you, and is seen by your own followers once published. This content will appear on your practice's pages as well as in the news feeds of your followers, but it will not be promoted to users outside of your own network or sent to the top the way that paid social media content is.

Paid social media is a worthwhile complement to organic because it uses hundreds of thousands of variables in order to serve your custom, sponsored ads and promoted content before precisely the right audience at the right time. Add in distinct advantages in areas like targeting, analytics, and scalability, then paid social rivals the overall functionality of many other digital marketing activities.

4

Employ Paid Search

Many marketers in healthcare and other industries are still somewhat surprised to learn that search—not social media—is the number-one driver of traffic to websites, and in fact, it's not even close. Search traffic actually outpaces social media by as much as 300 percent, which helps explain why:

- **50 PERCENT** of all digital marketing budgets are now being spent on search marketing, with 31 percent being devoted to paid search results and sponsored ads, and 19 percent to SEO activities, and...
- **85 PERCENT** of retail marketers report paid search and SEO as their most effective customer acquisition tactics

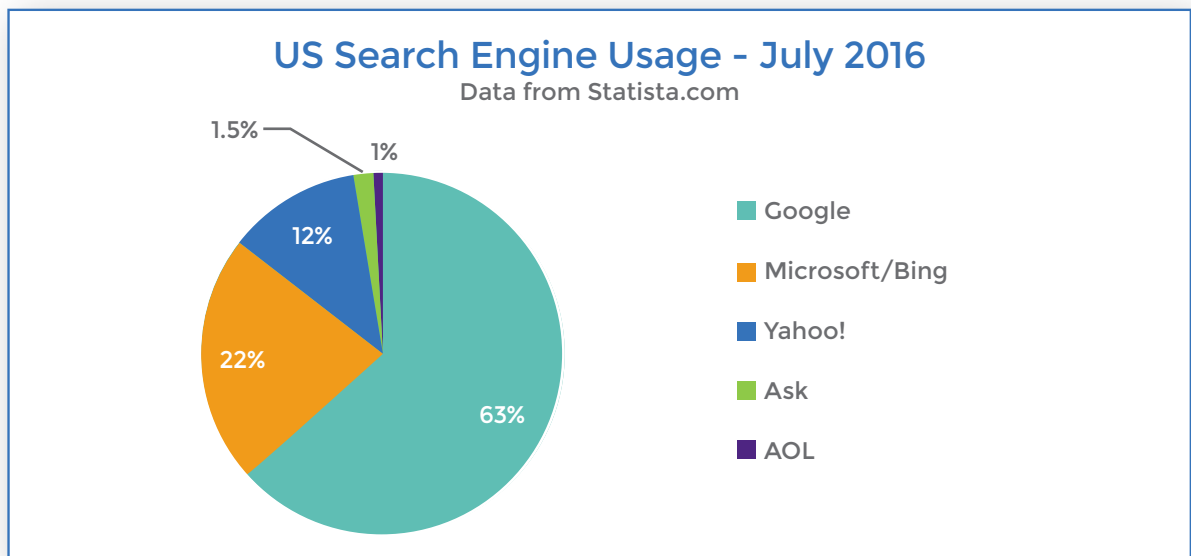
The continued use and expansion of mobile devices and technology is the key reason for the sustained growth of paid search, and because as many as 93 percent of all online activities begin with a search query, paid search marketers are able to realize benefits including low relative cost and an exceptional ROI by committing their marketing dollars in this manner. The key questions to answer when doing so, however, relate to which search engines to use, and which keywords to target in order to best reach and appeal to your target audience.

As shown, Google search sites dominate the U.S. search market, with a 63 percent market share, followed by Microsoft (22 percent), and Yahoo!

(12 percent). Ask.com and AOL account for only 1.5 percent and one percent of market share, respectively, meaning that marketers would be well justified in limiting paid search activities only to or among "The Big Three."

It takes science and continued refinement to land on the right paid search strategy, though, with in-depth keyword research, precise targeting, and plenty of testing and optimization needed to get the most bang for your pay-per-click (PPC) advertising bucks. Healthcare providers first have to consider what long-tailed search terms are being used by their desired audience and then set up campaigns based on keywords like, "Dentist in Davenport, Iowa," for example, or "Phoenix Primary Care Physician," depending on their own unique objectives and what's popular among search engine users at the time.

In addition to the back-end work like software set-up and ongoing management, copy creation and landing page design and implementation are often overlooked components that weigh heavily on the success of paid search campaigns. When considering that search engine users spend only about 1.17 seconds, on average, scanning each search result, it's crucial to have an appealing headline and benefit-oriented description, and perhaps a thoughtful, dedicated landing page that will help compel the desired result, whether it's sharing contact details, or even scheduling an appointment.



5

Generate Fresh, Original, Online Content

It's been well publicized that today, as many as 85 percent of patients begin their quest for health-related information by searching for answers online. Indeed, changing behavioral patterns among consumers means that people value and trust the information they find on the Internet and social media, so much so that an overwhelming 78 percent of chief marketing officers believe that unique content is the future of healthcare marketing!

Timely, benefit-driven content, however, does much more than ensure that you and your practice can be found among popular search results. Regular content is an inbound marketer's best tool for delivering immediate, perceivable value to current and prospective patients, who are searching not just for a physician, dentist, home health agency, skilled nursing center or therapist, but for a continual partner who's engaged and actively participates in their care even between office visits.

Various types of digital content that are useful for influencing the overall patient experience include:

BLOG POSTS: Blogs are candid, informal, and easy-to-access entries commonly posted to a devoted section of a website and discussing a specific topic, like flu treatment and prevention, or the best toothpaste for whitening teeth, or a stretching regiment for those with chronic back pain, perhaps. Informational content such as this establishes you as an expert in your respective field, and by delivering repeated value to readers, it establishes the basis for a continued relationship and return website traffic.

SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATES: Topical and purposeful posts on sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others can be used to quickly and easily direct patients and prospective clientele to published photos or written content, comment on an issue, news story, or the latest medical findings, or make a statement on important or even controversial subjects. It's effective,

instantaneous, and a proven, low-cost digital marketing method that's readily available to today's healthcare marketers.

WHITE PAPERS/SPECIAL REPORTS: Longer-form digital media may include white papers and special reports or e-books, which offer more detailed and extensive solutions to problems like frozen shoulder treatment and diagnosis, or adult braces, or even navigating the complex Medicare environment. Because of their ability



to explain complex subjects in simpler terms, white papers and special reports are excellent incentives that are often used to compel prospective patients to share their email address in return for access to this valuable information.

VIDEO: Considered by many to be a new frontier for digital marketers, streaming live and on-demand video offers even more convenience to users who prefer watching and listening instead of reading and scanning lengthy, written content for the important takeaways. Implementing video on your website and as a periodic content offering creates variety, imparts SEO benefits, and allows for personal communication.

PRINT MEDIA: Even though digital communication methods have far surpassed traditional ones like print, it should be noted that older patients including some Baby Boomers still prefer and respond well to printed materials like brochures, written reports, fact sheets, and infographics. So while not necessarily a component of your digital marketing, per se, print must not become a forgotten component of your overall marketing strategy, either.

6

Make the Most of Email Marketing

In part because content cannot be valuable unless it reaches the proper audience on time, email marketing is another central component of any effective digital marketing strategy. In fact, the capturing of email addresses represents the passage of an essential threshold in what's called the "lead generation funnel," a set of relationships we'll explore in greater detail as we tie all the functions together in conclusion next.

Email marketing, though, calls for coordinated communications directed to or closely targeted for various user segments. So whether it's emailing an article on heart health to patients who are especially interested in that sort of content, or sending a series of automated emails to welcome new subscribers, or mailing your entire database a link to and excerpt from your latest blog post, email represents a go-to medium for communicating with your patients in this, the digital age.

Email marketing campaigns might include:

APPOINTMENT REMINDERS: Email or text message alerts confirming upcoming appointments are widely accepted and appreciated by patients. Email messages of this nature might also contain helpful information such as driving directions, what insurance credentials to bring, and the number to call in the event of a change or cancellation.

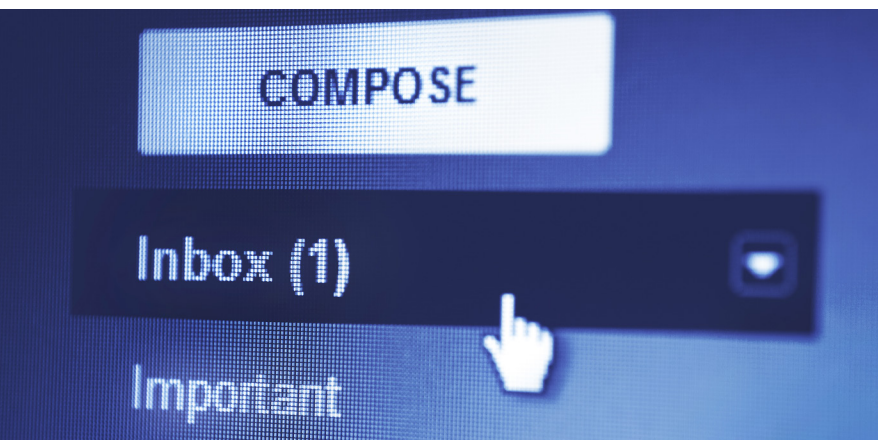
AUTOMATED EMAIL SEQUENCES: Specific actions like an office visit, subscribing to a newsletter, or reading multiple articles on arthritis, for example,

may trigger automated emails. These emails might welcome new subscribers, suggest and provide access to related content, or follow up on the patient's visit to ensure his or her satisfaction and arrange a follow-up. All are valuable in terms of providing a better overall patient experience, and are easy to plan and execute using today's advances in email marketing software.

NEW CONTENT: Email is a preferred delivery method for many who elect to receive new content like blog posts, or health notices and advisories from their practitioner. Clear and concise emails that contain or promote new articles or videos enable that content to be safely received and enjoyed privately at a patient's own leisure and convenience.

COMMUNITY EVENTS: Whenever you or other members of the practice are participating in local health forums, special events, or community outreach programs, be sure to send an email to subscribers promoting your appearance and perhaps inviting them to come see and interact with you in person.

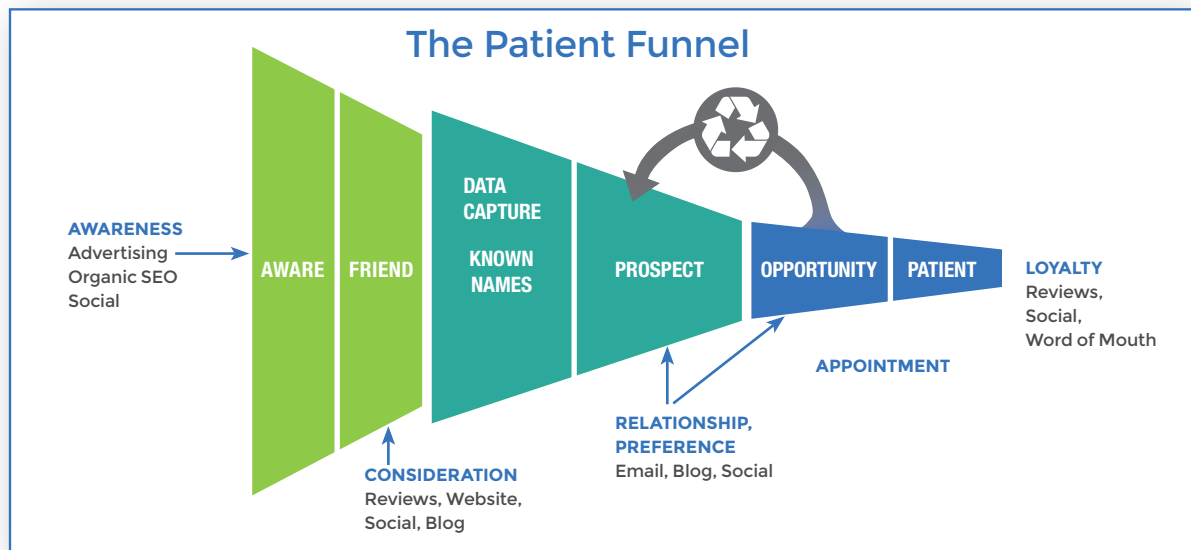
BIRTHDAY OR HOLIDAY GREETINGS: Get closer and more personal with patients by creating—or more likely auto-generating—heartfelt messages deliverable on their birthdays and major holidays like Christmas or Hanukkah. Also consider special campaigns for national health observances (NHOs) like heart health (February), skin and breast cancer (May and October, respectively), or diabetes (November), to name a few.



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Tying It All Together

In conclusion, digital marketing activities like the ones discussed throughout these pages are all being used by today's healthcare marketers to achieve a wide range of desired outcomes, from growing and sustaining their practices, to creating a better overall patient experience. When used individually, though, results will vary, but when joined together as part of a coordinated digital strategy, the power and effectiveness of these functions can increase exponentially, as is portrayed below:



The above image is referred to as a “funnel,” and it’s used to exemplify the movement of consumers through various stages of engagement with marketers, beginning with an initial introduction, and moving through to the narrowest part of the funnel, which represents loyal patients. As shown, all of the activities that facilitate movement from one phase to another are those covered here.

So, for healthcare marketers, the message is rather straightforward: these are the digital marketing functions that should be the pillars of your modern-day marketing strategy. And while you’re certainly free to study and refine each component individually if need be, you must be forever cognizant of how the components work together to achieve optimal results.

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