Introduction to Dental Marketing

Chapter 1: What Makes A Dental Website Effective?
Dental marketing strategy plays an enormous role in the success or failure of a lot of dental practices, and it’s power is only increasing as patients to continue to become savvier users of the internet. If you’re not completely convinced of this fact, consider that a whopping 73% of healthcare consumers use search engines to research treatments. After finding information about the care they seek, the competition doesn’t become any less stiff– 61% of patients visit at least two healthcare provider websites before booking an appointment.

The key takeaway from these statistics is that nowadays, most patients search online for a dentist and make decisions on which practice they’ll choose very quickly. If your practice doesn’t appear prominently in internet search results or if your practice’s website is poor or unappealing, you’re potentially shutting the door on the vast majority of new patients.

There’s a lot of information online about dental SEO and practice marketing, but it’s hard for well-intentioned business owners to make sense of it all without understanding the online environment that dental marketing efforts rise and fall within. That’s why we created this exhaustive guide to dental marketing. Instead of providing a few out-of-context tips, we’ve opted to take a deep dive into dental practice marketing in order to explain the art and science of achieving visibility on the web.
Introduction to Dental Marketing

While this guide takes an exhaustive look at the main factors for achieving dental marketing success, it purposefully doesn't attempt to cover everything. Dentists and practice managers are busy people, so this guide will take a thorough look at only the most effective ways to move the needle for dental practice marketing. Where additional in-depth resources exist, we've linked off to them on many of the points we touch on to allow you to gain a better understanding of the marketing factors facing your practice and take actions on your own, or just to better understand what your dental SEO and practice marketing agency is working towards on your behalf.

The Most Important Dental Marketing Activities:

When it comes to succeeding at dental marketing on the web, dental practices need to focus their efforts on a few important fronts. This isn’t to say that marketing efforts that fall outside of the material covered in this guide are not important— they are— but we’ve found that the most effective ways to attract more patients focus on these three inter-related fronts.

The key factors in the success of any dental marketing campaign center on the ways a practice attracts traffic and how well their website turns visitors into patients once it’s found. An effective dental website, a strong dental SEO campaign and a smart paid search strategy are the three most important factors affecting the online visibility of dental practices, and we’ve dedicated chapters to each of them. If you want to jump to any of these sections, just click to them directly using the links below:

1. The Elements of an Effective Dental Website Design
2. Dental SEO Ranking and Visibility Factors
3. Paid Search Strategy for Dental Marketing

Because of the way online marketing works, each of these three factors can rely on and influence one another. For instance, the rate at which patients bounce affects your website’s ability to rank highly in search results. Since none of these marketing factors exist in a vacuum, having a concerted dental marketing strategy can help your practice achieve the best results possible.

So without further ado, let’s get into the first, and arguably most important factor of a successful dental marketing presence, a dental practice’s website.
The Importance of a Great Dental Website:

A great dental website is the cornerstone of any dental marketing plan. In order for your dental marketing plan to be effective, your website needs to do a great job of attracting patients through search engines, keeping them on your website once they find it and getting them to book an appointment. As mentioned before, online marketing is metrics-driven, and if you drop the ball with your website, achieving results with your marketing efforts can be an uphill battle. More on the specifics about how website engagement can affect SEO can be found in this great blog post from Moz.

Website technology and the factors that search engines look at are always changing, so keeping up with technology and continually investing in your website are a must, but there are a few needs every dental website has to satisfy in order to succeed at attracting new patients:
Essential Elements of a Dental Website:

- **Dental websites need to be mobile-optimized**: Dental websites absolutely must work well on mobile devices. Lots of patients search for dentists on their smartphones, so having a mobile-optimized website is an absolute necessity. If a mobile visitor can’t read the text on your website, easily navigate the site or see information about the services you offer without zooming in and out on their phone, it’s very likely that they’ll click the back button quickly, an action which can drag down your search rankings.

- **Dental websites need to load quickly**: If your website takes more than a couple of seconds to load, patients won’t stick around. If your website takes more than 2-3 seconds to load, you could be losing up to half of your visitors before they even see what you have to offer. The need for fast load time becomes even more important when people are visiting your website from a mobile phone, which could be using a slower cellular network connecting.

- **Dental websites need to be secure**: Aside from basic patient privacy concerns, Google has begun highlighting websites that don’t use SSL certificates as unsecured. Dental websites should have a valid SSL certificate at all times, which is an inexpensive way to build trust and convey authority.
- **Dental websites must have clear navigation:** Choosing a dentist is a big decision for many patients. During the course of their decision, they’ll need to find information about the services you offer and your credentials. Clear and user-friendly navigation is essential to any dental website to help facilitate the patient’s search for information.

- **Dental websites need to include the practice name, address, and phone number (NAP) in the website footer.** Since dental practices are location-based businesses, it’s important that patients and search engines alike know where to find your place of business. Include your dental practice name, address and phone number in your website footer and take extreme care to ensure your NAP is accurate and formatted consistently everywhere it appears online. More on this in our dental SEO section, which appears later in this guide.

- **Dental websites need conversion tracking.** If you’re not measuring, you’re not marketing. Install Google Analytics on your dental website and create goals that correlate with revenue-producing actions on your website, like when a patient completes a booking. Use this information to calculate whether your dental marketing plan is making you money.
Essential Pages on a Great Dental Website:

Every practice is different, and each dental practice website should be too. The best way to convey your practice’s unique selling proposition, or the reasons patients will pick you over your competitors, is with a custom website that lets your expertise and personality shine. That being said, each dental website needs to have a few key building blocks in order to satisfy the needs of patients who are searching for information. Here are some of the main pages a dental website needs to include and information on what kind of things they need to include in order to be most effective:

Homepage:

A dental website’s homepage is the most important page in its site architecture. Your practice’s homepage is the most-likely page to show up in search results, making it the perfect place to make a great first impression. It’s also one of the largest pages on your site, and the one that will be best designed to direct patients to other pages on your website which hold the kind of in-depth information they need to know about the services you offer.

Because a homepage will typically have the highest page authority on your website, the homepage of your dental website is probably going to be one of the most high-
traffic pages on your whole site. It’s important that your homepage sets the tone for the rest of your website.

The primary purpose of a dental website’s homepage is to efficiently & effectively direct users deeper into your website. It’s important that your homepage mention the types of services you specialize in very clearly, lest a new visitor get confused about what your practice does and decide to leave your website.

A dental website homepage needs to have a sufficient amount of text on the page in order to satisfy search engines, which can’t exactly read images and rely on context and image alt text to know what an image depicts. Balancing the needs of patients, who prefer cleaner, image-focused websites, with search engines, who require text-based content, is a key design consideration for dental homepages. A good amount of text for a homepage is at least 300 words, which doesn’t sounds like much, but can be difficult to achieve when including images and a healthy amount of white-space for aesthetic attractiveness. Simply put, if your homepage doesn’t have a sufficient amount of text content, it will be difficult to get your website to appear in search results.

While the aim of your homepage should be to entice visitors to dig deeper into the services you offer, your homepage needs to have options for patients who want to get in touch or book an appointment quickly. Displaying your phone number, a contact us link or a booking button prominently on your homepage is important. Many dental websites even add a booking button to a sticky navigation bar, which always appears at the top of the page even as the user scrolls, assuring a way to get in touch will always be available quickly.

Reviews are a great component to include on a dental website homepage, as they let patients know about the great experience others have had at your practice.
Dentist Profile Pages and About Us Pages:

After the homepage, the pages on dental websites that receive the most traffic are typically profile pages for the doctors. Before booking, most patients will want to read about a dentist's education, understand their background and see a photo of them. Having pages about each of the dentists at your practice in an easily-accessible location is important to the success of your website as a whole.

When writing profiles about the dentists at your practice, take care to include information that conveys their authority in the field and their expertise. Mentioning their education and industry affiliations can help ensure the dentist seems like a credible and experienced provider of care. Mentioning the doctor's family, hobbies and charitable activities are important as well. These personal details help patients see the doctor as a real, compassionate person and can aid in putting them at ease, especially if they're nervous about seeking dental care.

Aside from knowing about the dentists themselves, patients often want to know about a dental practice team as a whole. Use fun photos to show off your team’s friendly personalities and include attractive photos of your office on your About pages to reassure a patient that your dental practice is the best option for their care.
Service Pages:

Web pages which detail the individual services your practice offers are important to include on your website. Aside from providing in-depth information about the different treatments the practice specializes in, individual service pages target specific keywords, which make them more likely to appear in search results than pages which target more general, highly-competitive keywords, like “dentist in [city name].”

When planning out the service pages on a dental website, it’s important to provide sufficient detail without getting carried away with specifics. Dentistry is a complex field and dentists are extremely intelligent people, so it’s easy to get hung up on whether or not to have separate pages for all of the different varieties of services you offer. Always consider the amount of information an average patient would need when making a decision about your services. While a patient might know they need a dental implant, it’s not always helpful to create a separate page for an impression implant and a CAD/CAM implant, even though a dentist would probably consider them to be two different services. A single page focusing on dental implants can provide enough information for the patient without bogging down the navigation of your website.
Service pages should contain a good amount of text-based information about each service your practice offers. 300-500 words is a good target to aim for. Good service pages can contain information that explains things like the basics of a treatment, what the patient should expect and how they should prepare for an appointment.

Since service pages can appear in search results, it’s important for them to make a good first impression and include much of the information a patient needs to know before making a decision to book an appointment. Service pages that either include or easily link to doctors’ profiles, patient reviews, and booking links tend to perform better than those which don’t.

**Contact & Booking Pages:**

Of course, the goal of any dental website is to get patients to call your office or book an appointment for your services. A website should have an easy to use contact page or booking portal that’s accessible from anywhere on the website.

It’s important to recognize that patients are busy people and accommodate a variety of ways for them to book an appointment. In addition to a standard contact form, many dental practices are providing convenient ways for patients to request an appointment on their website, or even message or text their practice. Selecting a booking process that works well for your practice is important and is a must-have for any dental website.
Aside from the essential pages every dental website needs to include, many dental practices opt to include additional website pages that provide patients with more information and can improve how often their website appears in search results.

Many dental websites include a blog or resource library to provide patients with additional information and to help increase the search visibility of their website. The primary value of a blog on a dental practice website is to provide additional information to patients and prospective patients.

Including a reviews page on your website or a process by which patients can review your practice is also a great idea. Gaining authentic, positive reviews is a great way for a practice to stand out and gain more visibility in search results. Review aggregation tools can help pull a stream of live-updating reviews from Google, Yelp and Facebook relatively easily and inexpensively. The dental SEO section of this guide elaborates on why reviews are important to dentists.

Lots of dental websites also include patient information pages on their website, which are great places to include information like insurance policies, privacy policies and new patient forms. Including patient forms online is a great way to streamline a patient’s experience in your office.
**Chapter 2: Dental SEO**

**Ranking and Visibility Factors**

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**How to Create a Dental SEO Strategy**

The power of local search visibility for dentists is undeniable. 80% of consumers use search to find local information, so neglect this valuable dental marketing channel at your own peril. When patients are searching for a dentist, they go to local search first, reading reviews, looking at photos and vetting the websites of different practices. A well-run dental SEO campaign is critical if you want to capitalize on this steady stream of new, interested patients.

When it comes to local SEO for dentists, succeeding is competitive. Lots of practices engage local SEO strategists or work hard to keep their practice ranking in search results on their own, so outdoing your competition can be tough even in small local markets. However, the factors that Google uses to determine the search visibility of dental practices aren’t a secret; they’re actually part of a well-published body of knowledge on local search which applies to all location-based businesses. With a good knowledge of ranking factors and a will to work hard at achieving local search visibility for your practice, you’ll be on your way to bringing in more patients through this high-quality medium.

In this part of our dental marketing guide, we’ll focus on how to practice good dental SEO to attract patients who are actively looking for a dentist. To provide some clarity, we’ll be going over the main local ranking factors that Google uses to determine search engine ranking, which come from the Local Search Ranking Factors study, a body of research that’s published regularly by Darren Shaw and Moz, a leading SEO software. Based on the findings of the study, we’ll break down each of the search ranking factors for dentists one by one, in order of their importance in local pack/finder rankings. To help you make the information more actionable for your dental SEO strategy, we’ll cover what dentists can do to use the factors highlighted in this study to their advantage.
Dental SEO Ranking Factors:

Google My Business Signals:

Google My Business is a free way for dentists to list their practice on Google. It consists of a profile that contains things like the practice name, address, phone number, website, reviews photos and more. Google continues to make Google My Business more robust for users and adds features to it from time to time, so it’s good to assign profile access to the agency or person in your office who handles your dental marketing so they can keep up on new developments.

Google is in the business of serving up information, so naturally, they want to ensure the information they provide searchers is accurate. When you create a Google My Business profile, Google will send you a post card to verify your address, which is part of the way that Google helps ensure its local results are correct. Because this information is verified, Google feels more comfortable serving up information about your practice when you have an active, verified and optimized Google Business Profile, making this the most important ranking factor for dental marketing.
If you haven’t already set up a Google My Business profile, set one up here. It’s the best thing you can do towards increasing the visibility of your practice and achieving success with your dental SEO strategy.

Here are the things you’ll want to pay attention to when optimizing your Google My Business profile for dental marketing purposes:

**NAP Accuracy:** Ensure your dental practice name, address, and phone number (NAP) is exactly correct and appears in a consistent format anywhere it appears online. Pay attention to the details in your NAP, like commas in your business name or whether or not abbreviations exist in your address. Exact accuracy is important here, so do sweat the small stuff.

**Photos:** Photos are one of the most viewed part of any Google Business profile. Add attractive photos to your listing. The best photos to add are pictures of the interior and exterior of your office, photos of your team and photos that reflect your brand.

**Hours of Operation:** Make sure you add accurate hours to your profile and keep up with them to ensure that you add correct hours for holidays and days that you might be closed for team training.

**Reviews:** As you’ll see later in this guide, reviews themselves are part of the local ranking factors and your Google Business profile is the best place to collect them. Ask happy patients to leave reviews on your profile in post-appointment follow up communications and then respond positively and professionally when they leave a review, good or bad.
Description: Google allows dental practices to write a description of their practice that appears on their Business profile.

Q&A: Google encourages people who are familiar with your business to provide information about it or ask questions. Keeping up with Q&A on your Google Business profile is important.

Google Posts: Post about specials, information about your practice and more using Google Posts. Posts are 100-300 word snippets that accompany a photo and appear on your profile when it comes up in search or maps, making it a great place to encourage visits to your website. Learn more about how to use Google Posts on our blog.

Messaging: Messaging is an option that dental practices can enable to communicate directly with patients who’ve found their Google Business profile and have a question or want to communicate quickly with a member of your team. If you enable messaging, it’s important to have a team member in your office ready to respond to patients in a timely manner.

Booking: While Google hasn’t rolled out booking for dental practices yet, it’s working towards adding this Google My Business feature for many different industries, making it noteworthy to add to this guide as something dental practice marketers should keep an eye on. Until Booking becomes available on Google My Business profiles for dentists, a good workaround is to use Google posts to link patients to your booking page. We wrote a blog explaining how to use Google Posts to get more bookings here.

DOWNLOAD FREE GOOGLE POSTS TEMPLATES
Download our free Google Posts templates to add booking buttons to your Google My Business profile and start getting more appointment bookings today.

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Link Signals:

In dental marketing, getting quality links is one of the most challenging parts about achieving local search visibility for your practice, but as the second most important part of the local search ranking equation, it’s also extremely important to dental SEO.

Link signals refer to the number of quality links that are coming to your website. In terms of search visibility, Google assumes that the more relevant and interesting a website is, the more people will link to it. All other things equal, Google shows pages with lots of quality links higher in search results than those without, underscoring the importance of building quality links for your practice.

In dental marketing, not all links are created equal. Links coming from websites who have more links themselves, or high authority websites, carry more weight than links coming from low authority sites. There are tools you can use to measure the authority of a website, but for the purposes of marketing your practice, a common-sense test can apply just as well. The authorities in the dental industry often have the highest domain authority websites themselves, and links coming from them carry authority to the sites they link to.
Collecting high authority links to your dental website is important, but in dental SEO, getting locally-relevant links is of equal importance. High authority local websites are places like the Chamber of Commerce or local dental industry groups your practice might be a part of. Whenever possible, request a link from these local sites.

Understanding the power of links, many search engine optimization professionals and business owners engage in nefarious link building practices. Over time, Google has gotten better at judging the quality of links and penalizing websites who use them incorrectly. For the purpose of dental marketing, link building should be a fairly straightforward practice. If something you’re doing to get a link feels wrong, it could end up hurting your website in the future, so stick to getting links from reputable, high authority sources, rather than engaging in schemes that require you to pay for links to boost your dental SEO ranking.

On Page Signals:

While the top most important signals in the local search ranking equation are considered "off-page" signals, the third relates to the content you control directly on your dental website. Search engines primarily index the text content on pages from your website, so it’s extremely important that your website includes well-optimized text-based content and checks all the boxes to reassure Google that your place of business is where you say it is.
The on-page signals that this ranking factor takes into account are a fairly complicated part of good local SEO practice, and if you want to dig deeper, more in-depth information about on-page ranking factors can be found here.

Without getting too far into the weeds, this guide will cover the most-applicable on-page ranking factors for dental SEO:

- **Page Content**: The content of your page is what makes it noteworthy in the first place and has to convey the necessary relevance on a topic to deserve a Google search placement. Each page on your dental website should do a good job of covering a single topic. For example, if you’re using a page on your website to talk about a service your practice offers, (ie: dental implants) provide a thorough explanation of what an implant is, the process of placing an implant entails, what kind of patient it might be important for. Keeping the content of each page focused on one topic makes it easier to optimize for search engines to find as part of your dental SEO strategy. When creating page content for a dental website, it’s important to write naturally and consider the patient’s informational needs, not just try to write the page to what you’d expect the search engine to want to find. Good on-page content for dental marketing is at least 300 words in length and mentions the topic of the page about as much as could be expected in natural speech. A good tool to optimize on page content is the Yoast plugin for WordPress.

- **Title Tag**: The title tag is the blue linked text that appears in search results after your page gets indexed by Google. This is an on-page factor because the title of a page needs to be set on your website itself and should accurately reflect the topic of the page.

- **URL**: The URL of your page is the address it can be found at. It’s best practice to include information on what the page is about in the URL, not use the auto-generated URL your website might spit out, which isn’t always very readable to humans. To keep following our dental implant example, an appropriate URL would be something like examplewebsite.com/dental-implants rather than www.examplewebsite.com/post=1004
• **Image Alt Text:** Search engines can’t read images, but patients expect to find them on a good dental website to make the design more appealing and easier to understand. An on-page optimization tactic for dental SEO that many websites neglect is to add image alt-text to each image used on your website. Image alt text is text-based content that gets tagged to an image, which search engines can read and use to understand what the image displays. When writing image alt text, best practice is to include the topic of your page and to write the alt text as if you were describing the contents of the image to a blind person, since of course, the search engine can’t see the image but wants to know what it’s about.

**Citation Signals:**

Citation signals can get messy for dental practices and are a big factor of confusion for Google. Again, since Google’s job is to serve up relevant, correct information, the search engine obviously wants to be as sure as possible that the location of your practice is correct when it sends a patient to see you.

To put it simply, when information about your practice is incorrect, Google trusts the information you provided it with a little bit less and is less likely to display your practice in search results. Keeping your name, address and phone number correct across the web is a big factor in the accuracy of the citation signals Google takes into account.
But how many places could your practice information exist online? A lot more than you might think. Just as Google’s business relies on providing correct and relevant information, many other online businesses called directories make money by assembling business information and play a big role in the dental SEO ecosystem. Directories might be industry-specific (ie: Healthgrades) or could be very broad, (ie: Yelp) but the important thing to your practice is that there are a lot of them out there and you need to ensure all of them have accurate information about you.

One of the most difficult things about directories for dental practices is that information about a practice can exist in a lot of different forms. Take for example a dentist who just began their career. After graduating from dental school and getting that first job, they might have created a profile on Healthgrades or made a Google My Business page for themselves as a practitioner to help patients find and review them. Additionally, someone else could have made a page for them, which happens often for dental professionals. After time, a dental professional might change office locations, join a different company, go out on their own, or partner with another dentist, all of which would feasibly change the name, address or phone number of their practice, confusing the many directories and search engines that have built their business on serving up the dentist’s information.
When that dentist finally settles into a practice and begins working on their dental marketing, chances are, their information is very messy, so a crucial part of any dental SEO strategy will focus on untangling and correcting it.

The citation/directory industry works with many aggregators collecting, assembling and passing information to one another, which works as a double-edged sword in dental marketing. On one hand, incorrect information can easily pop up in a lot of places very quickly. On the other hand, correcting that information doesn’t always require finding it and fixing it by hand on each directory it exists on. There are lots of SEO tools that can help a dental practice distribute correct information to directories in bulk. If you’re the DIY type, we recommend using Moz Local.

The drawback of using directory distribution services like these is that once you stop paying for a subscription to them, the information sent to the directories can revert to the old, incorrect information. Best practice for dental marketing is to submit the correct information to directories, but also ensure that the most important directories are accurate by hand.

Citation accuracy is very tedious work, but a big part of a successful dental marketing strategy and should be a part of your regular dental SEO work.
Chapter 2: Dental SEO Ranking and Visibility Factors

Review Signals:

Reviews are an enormously important part of finding the right dentist for many patients. Search engines know this and build the number and attitude of reviews into their ranking formulas. This makes collecting reviews and maintaining a great rating an extremely important part of a dental marketing strategy.

The review collection policies of different websites varies, so before asking for reviews from your patients, know the policy of the site you’re asking them to complete a review on. For example, while Google allows dentists to ask patients for reviews, Yelp strictly prohibits it and will take down reviews that don’t adhere to its policy. For the purpose of this guide, we’ll focus on the most important place reviews can exist—on your Google My Business profile. To learn more about the other places reviews can exist and the rules about getting them, check out this blog on local review sites.

Google allows dental practices to solicit reviews from patients, but it’s never best practice to be pushy about asking for reviews or to simply ask for a review from any and all patients. The best way to go about collecting reviews is to build a review portal into your dental website and send out a review link to patients in post-appointment communications. Owning the system you use to ask patients to review you might help
your team to correct the experience of patients who might have had a less-than-stellar experience at your office before they write about their experience online.

**STAR RATING:**

After collecting a few reviews, Google displays a star rating of the review average, which helps increase click-through.  

**REVIEWS FROM THE WEB**

Google aggregates reviews from sites that use review snippet markup. Keep an eye on your reviews on their major sites to increase the odds of having high ratings appear on your profile.

It’s important to respond to reviews positively, especially if the reviewer has negative things to say about your practice. Reviews are a public forum, but people who read and write reviews are usually pretty rational. Correcting an issue or simply offering a kind explanation or apology can help blunt the destructive power of a bad review or even get the reviewer to change it.

Getting positive reviews and staying on top of the reviews patients leave are a key part to dental marketing and ranking well online. Dig deeper into how to get reviews on the sites that matter to your dental SEO strategy with this post on how to use customer reviews for local SEO.
Behavioral Signals:

At the beginning of this guide, we covered how to create a good dental website and explained why a website is the cornerstone of your entire dental marketing strategy. This section deals with how your dental website is received by searchers and the signals that send to Google about its quality, so you may want to refer back to the section about websites for a refresher if your website scores poorly on any of the metrics mentioned.

Behavior signals on your website refer to the rate at which people click on your website when it appears in search, how often searchers use the click to call button on your Google My Business profile and other on-page factors like, like bounce rate. When your website has strong metrics in any of these areas, Google takes it as a signal that the searcher it sent to your website found the information useful, which validates your placement in its search results. On the other hand, if searchers routinely don’t click on your website when it comes up in search results or if they immediately click back to the search engine results page after arriving on your website, Google takes it as a signal that your content is irrelevant or that there’s a problem with your website.

As you might imagine, improving behavioral signals related to your website can be complex. There are a lot of variables at play, and each needs to be fine-tuned in order to keep a potential patient interested. Here are a few tips dental practices can follow with their websites and search optimization efforts to improve behavioral signals:
To improve click-through:

Write relevant titles for your pages and thorough meta descriptions. These are the two main components of a Google search result that will attract clicks, so if your result doesn’t include these things, your website might get clicked on less often, a negative signal.

To reduce bounce rate and improve time on site:

Have a mobile-optimized website. Lots of people search for dentists from mobile devices. If your website isn’t optimized for mobile, it may be difficult to use on a phone making a potential patient click the back button and resulting in a negative signal. Keep an eye on load time: People don’t stick around long for a web page to load when they’re searching for information. Keeping your page load speed below 2 seconds by following best practices with your site and avoiding the use of lots of large images can ensure a searcher stays on your website long enough to read the content you provide. Load time is especially important to mobile users.

Provide clear, relevant information: If you don’t feel like the link you clicked on took you to a relevant page, you leave pretty quickly. Patients are the same way, so be sure that the pages you send patients to announce their topic quickly and clearly. Maintaining a healthy, fast-loading dental website and regularly working to improve your behavioral signals will be rewarded by more prominent search placement and greater visibility for your dental marketing efforts.
Personalization:

When it comes to dental SEO, personalization refers to information about the searcher that Google knows because of their location. Where your practice's website appears in search results is sometimes directly dependent on where the searcher is looking from. When searching in maps or when seeing results from a map pack, Google typically displays results that are closer to the searcher, so even if your website is well-optimized for the town you do business in, you might not appear as prominently to searchers looking from the opposite end of town.

While not many dentists would be willing to relocate their practice based on search placement, practices with a closer proximity to the center of town or to where most patients search from can impact a practice's ability to rank highly.
Social Signals:

Social Signals refer to the level of engagement on your practice’s social media profiles and make up a small piece of the local search ranking pie for dentists. Google takes into account the number of shares and level of engagement on social media content associated with your practice. The science behind social ranking signals is inexact, but most SEO researchers believe it’s focused on links to your website generated by highly shared content, like producing a viral video or highly shared article, which doesn’t fall into the day-to-day for most dental practices. While the primary use of your social media channels should be for engaging with your patients and sharing relevant information, having a well-maintained social presence for your practice could play a small role in your dental SEO rankings.
How Paid Search Can Enhance Dental Marketing Strategy

While achieving organic search rankings with dental SEO takes patience and persistence, many practices seek to supplement their dental SEO strategy with a paid search strategy. Developing a paid search campaign with Google Adwords is a great way to kick your dental marketing campaign up a notch by bidding for keywords that your practice might not rank for just yet, or to maximize your practice’s visibility by taking up more digital real estate for searches that you’re already appearing in. In this section of the Dental Marketing Guide, we’ll talk about how to best use paid search to bring in a steady stream of interested patients who have the intent to find a dentist.

Why should dentists use paid search?

Like organic search, paid search is great medium to use in attracting high-quality traffic because searchers have intent. Simply put, when someone goes to a search engine looking for an “implant dentist in Monterey” there’s a very high chance that they’re going to be booking an appointment with a care provider imminently. Since we know that searchers visit an average of two healthcare provider websites before making a decision, appearing at this crucial moment in the patient’s search is imperative to being considered.

Paid search is great because it allows advertisers to compete for an ad spot at the top of a patient’s search results. The advertiser can place an ad quickly and only pays for the ad when it is clicked. This allows dental practices to ensure that they’ll be considered by patients who are searching for the types of services their practice delivers.
### Paid Search vs Dental SEO

In the most successful dental marketing strategies, paid search is used in tandem with dental SEO to produce results. There are pros and cons to each medium, but when used together, they balance one another out nicely.

**Consider this contrast:**

A practice that engages only in paid search will need to maintain a budget to dedicate to running ads every month. In exchange for its ad budget, Google serves the dental practice’s ads in searches that are relevant to the services they offer, resulting in clicks to the practice’s website and appointment bookings from new patients. The ads appear almost instantly after a campaign is created, which is great when the practice wants to appear for search terms quickly, like when it adds a new service or runs a promotion. Like advertising in a newspaper, if the practice should stop paying for those ads, the ads will stop appearing, leaving it without visibility online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DENTAL SEO</th>
<th>PAID SEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term visibility</td>
<td>Visibility when you pay for it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility is built over time</td>
<td>Immediate visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance in Maps and Search</td>
<td>Appearance in Maps and Ads spots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires more ongoing maintenance</td>
<td>Requires less ongoing maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of multiple results per SERP</td>
<td>1 result per SERP</td>
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</table>
A practice that engages only in dental SEO will need to work hard at its SEO strategy in order to continually satisfy the Local Search Ranking Factors better than its competitors. In exchange for offering the most relevant content in Google’s eyes, Google serves up links to the practice’s website in search results, resulting in clicks and new appointment bookings. Since dental SEO takes time, results appear slowly, so a new service or promotion might take months to reach customers. However, the practice owns the results it generates and doesn’t have to pay each time a patient clicks on its website through organic search results.

Now consider how these two strategies can be employed together:

A practice that engages in both paid search and dental SEO gets the best of both worlds. As its dental SEO strategy creates long-lasting sustainable visibility, its paid search strategy fills in the gaps in its visibility. If the practice is having a hard time ranking its dental implants page above the competition’s, it’s not the end of the world... they can simply run an ad that will appear for searches in their town that are related to dental implants, ensuring that they’ll be visible to patients even as their organic search strategy is built.

When the practice decides it needs more patients to satisfy its quarterly goals, it can increase its budget for paid search ads to generate a quick spike in traffic. Or when the practice wants to advertise a special, it can quickly get its offer in front of interested searchers. However, if the practice starts to near a point when it’s happy with the number of patients it’s bringing in, it can stop paying for paid search ads without entirely shutting off the valve on new patients, because it will continue to generate traffic with search placements it’s secured through its dental SEO strategy.

Now that we’ve covered the benefits of paid search for dental practices, let’s get into the nuts and bolts of how ads work and how practices can succeed at deploying them.
How do paid search ads work?

Paid search ads appear in several places in local search results. Let’s continue with the earlier example of our implant dentist in Monterey. If the practice decides it needs to bolster its visibility using paid search, it can assemble a list of keywords that it might expect an interested patient to search for. The list might include terms like this:

- Dental implants Monterey
- Implant dentist Monterey
- Best implant dentist Monterey
- How much do dental implants cost

Aside from these specific searches, patients might search for a hundreds of different variations of these terms. Practices can engage in keyword research to try and find the terms with the highest volume of monthly searches.

After deciding on a list of keywords it would like to target as a part of its dental marketing plan, the practice can create an ad it would like to serve customers who search for the keywords on its list. An ad might look something like this:

![Example Ad](image)

After starting to run the paid search campaign, a patient that searches for “dental implants” on their phone while sitting at home or in a Monterey coffee shop, might be served the implant dentist’s ad. If they click on the ad, the patient will be taken to a page on the dentist’s website and the dentist’s ad account will be charged with the going rate for a click, which can vary by a bunch of different factors we'll cover later.
Where do paid search ads appear?

Google makes its money through paid search ads, so it’s always finding new places to serve paid search ads and make the medium more robust. Traditionally, paid search ads appear above and below the organic search results in certain searches for commercially-viable terms. The ads are marked with a small note that shows they’re paid search results, as opposed to organic results.

In local search, Google recently added an additional placement in its map pack. Now, dental practices that optimize their ads with location extensions can appear in the local 3 pack that comes up on many searches for local businesses and in searches on Google Maps.
What parts make up a paid search ad on Adwords?

Paid search ads in Adwords have a lot of features and parts. Here’s a little bit of information on the elements of an ad that are most important to dentists.

**Headlines**: the headline of an ad is the text that appears in blue on the top of an ad. It’s the most noticeable and important part of an ad, so this is where you’ll want to make your value proposition shine. The headline in an Adwords ad consists of two separate headlines separated by a dash. Each headline can be up to 30 characters long and should include the keyword that the ad targets to let searchers know they’re getting a relevant result. Write your headlines to grab attention!

**Display URL**: The display URL is the website address that searchers will see on your ad. This can differ from the address of the page you’re sending the searcher to and can take up a maximum of 30 characters. If your actual URL is long or confusing, shorten it here and consider adding the keyword that you’re targeting.
Call Extension: Call extensions aren’t something that appear in every ad by default, but they’re really important for dentists to include. Enable a call extension to display your phone number directly on an ad and encourage searchers to get in touch with your practice right away. On mobile devices, call extensions even become clickable buttons to make getting in touch even easier.

Description: The description of the ad appears next and needs to reinforce details about your practice’s offerings. Descriptions can be up to 80 characters long and should be written specifically about the keyword your ad is targeting. Consider including a call to action in your description, like “book an appointment.”

Callout Extensions: If you choose to use them, callout extensions appear next in an Adwords ad. These are short snippets of text you can add to highlight other selling points about your practice. They can be up to 25 characters long each and should be used to tout things that a patient might take into consideration when choosing a practice.

Location Extensions: Location extensions help reinforce the appearance that you’re a local business. They let searchers get directions to your location and help improve the chances that your ad will appear in a Local Pack placement. Location extensions can also pull your business hours from your Google My Business profile.

Sitelink Extensions: Sitelink extensions are additional clickable headlines and descriptions that can be used in an Adwords ad. These are great places to elaborate on extra benefits your practice offers. In the example of a branded ad above, the sitelinks direct patients who’ve searched for the business by its name to explore services that they might not have known about, in this case, pediatric dentistry and sedation options.

How does Google determine ad cost, placement and quality?

Google charges for paid search ads by the click, so each time a patient comes across a dentist’s ad and clicks on it, the dentist will be billed a certain amount of money. The amount of money the dentist will pay for a click is determined by their maximum bid for the keyword and the ad’s quality score.

Naturally, most advertisers will want to appear prominently on a search page and will be willing to pay more for a higher placement, which they expect will generate more clicks and more patients. In general, an ad that appears at the top of a page will cost an advertiser more than an ad that appears at the bottom of a page. But the cost per click of these placements isn’t always correlated the way you might expect because of the second element of ad cost—quality score.
Since Google’s main job is to serve relevant results to the searcher, it needs to make sure that its advertisers adhere to the same quality considerations that an organic search result would, otherwise, searchers will stop clicking the ads which bring in Google’s revenue. The way Google keeps ad quality high is by incentivizing advertisers to advertise quality products and services by offering a somewhat of a discount. An advertiser who consistently maintains high standards can be awarded higher placements for lower costs per click than an advertiser who just tries to pay their way to the top. Google judges quality by how often searchers click on an ad and how long they remain on the page that an advertiser sends them to. All of these signals combine into what Google calls an ad’s quality score, and creating an ad that earns a high quality score can help an advertiser appear higher in results while paying less per click, earning bigger results for their budget.

**What are the elements of Google's quality score?**

When calculating a quality score, Google takes the following into consideration:

- **An ad’s click-through rate**, or the portion of ad viewers who actually click on the ad.

- **How relevant each keyword is to the group of ads it’s a part of**. For instance, an ad about teeth whitening in an implant-related ad group would score high on relevance.

- **Landing page quality**, or how closely aligned the information on page searchers are sent to after clicking on the ad relates to the text of the ad itself. When a searcher clicks on an implant-related ad, they expect to find implant-related information, so sending a searcher to a general services page can hurt quality score by reducing landing page relevance.

- **Relevance of the ad’s text**, or how well the ad copy sticks to the keywords it’s elaborating on.

- **Historical performance of the ad account**, or the average of quality scores of other ads the account has run in the past. This metric helps prevent low-quality advertisers from appearing in searches.

If you’re creating your own ads, check out this resource from WordStream. If you’d like some help instead, consider making our paid search management service part of your dental marketing strategy.
Best Practices on using Paid Search for dental marketing

To make paid search a successful part of your dental marketing strategy, there are a few rules you should follow to keep your quality score high and create consistently high-performing campaigns. Like dental SEO, paid search strategy is an interconnected part of the dental marketing ecosystem, so it doesn’t exist in a vacuum. Instead, success depends on the quality of your website and, indirectly, on the optimization of your website’s pages. Having a good dental SEO strategy will make building a paid search strategy on top of it much easier, as some of the steps a practice will take to improve its dental SEO will overlap with some of the best practices for paid search that we’ll cover in this section.

Create ads for the most important services you offer first.
One of the things dentists realize when taking on a paid search component to their dental marketing plan is that ad costs can accrue quickly. To make the most of your budget, focus your ad strategy on the services you do best, or those that are particularly high margin. This way, you’ll be able to dedicate your budget to the services that are most likely to improve the bottom line for your practice.

Create a landing page for each ad group
Don’t waste money by sending searchers to general pages, like your homepage, when they click on an ad for something specific. If you’re following good dental SEO practice, you should already have a dedicated page for each service you offer. Be sure to set specific landing pages for each of your ad groups so that a searcher will receive the information they were looking for quickly and clearly after clicking on an ad.

Target your ads to your local area
Before beginning a paid search strategy, take a good look at your current patients’ addresses to gain an idea of how far people are willing to drive to come to your practice. There’s no sense in showing ads for routine cleanings to someone who lives an hour away, so keep the location targeting tight for more general services. However, if your practice offers a service that’s more specialized or harder to find, like sedation dentistry or myofunctional therapy, take it into account for your ad targeting. Patients may be willing to travel much farther to seek out your services if more convenient options don’t exist.
Use location extensions to get your ads into the local pack
Local pack ads are excellent placements for dentists because they explicitly let a patient know that your practice is nearby. In order to appear in these placements, you need to have location extensions enabled on your ad. Additionally, link your ad account to your Google Business profile to make the process of creating locally-targeted ads easier.

Measure your conversions
Paid search strategy only works in dental marketing if it makes your practice money. Track important events on your website using Google Analytics and Adwords call tracking to be sure that you know how many patients are coming from your paid search campaign. Use this information to improve your ads and set an appropriate budget.

But what conversions should a dental practice track? If you have an online booking page, track how many people end up on the thank you page that they’ll see after completing an appointment booking. Likewise, if you have a contact form on your website, track the number of people who fill it out and make an effort to understand how many people who contact your practice ultimately become patients.

Enable call tracking through Google Adwords, too. Many patients will elect to call your practice, often directly from a call extension on the ad. Tracking the number of calls you get from your paid search strategy will be an important determinant of the return on investment of your dental marketing efforts.
Conclusion: Get started with practice marketing

Getting started with marketing your practice online can be daunting, but you don’t have to do it alone. The team at Form + Function is here to help with a variety of dental marketing services that match a range of practice sizes and budgets. **Get in touch with one of our dental marketing specialists** to talk about your practice’s unique challenges and how we can help.

Armed with what you’ve learned in this guide, you’ll be better equipped to tackle the most important marketing challenges facing your practice. However, it helps to have a baseline measurement to know exactly how much you’ve improved. Request a free website and local SEO assessment below and we’ll help you understand the current state of your website, the keywords it ranks for and how accurate your information is across the internet.

**REQUEST A FREE WEBSITE AND LOCAL SEO ASSESSMENT**

Request a free assessment to learn how your website stacks up to the competition, what keywords you rank for and how accurate your information is online.

**GET A FREE ASSESSMENT**