

S **W** **E** **E** **T** **S** **P** **O** **T**
M A R K E T I N G

SEO Survival Guide for Audiology Practices:

How Branding and Search Engine
Optimization Work Together
to Achieve Results

Introduction:

In the not-too-distant past, branding and search marketing were often treated as mutually exclusive business marketing endeavors—where business brand planning, marketing, and management efforts were rarely influenced by search marketing interests or needs. When businesses engaged in branding activities, the efforts were often seen as part of a "business identity development" undertaking, an internal process that was accomplished by the highest-ranking stakeholders and governed by a widespread belief that the result of business brand development was an expression of core company competencies, strengths, and values. In this mindset, "brand" was a cornerstone in the foundation, not a product or an asset that could be leveraged for something as neoteric as search marketing.

In many respects, the reverse was also true. The previously-held notions regarding search marketing, content marketing, and social media were that they were tactical efforts that existed only at the edge of a complex and ever-changing digital front line. But these were the days before the digital tipping point of 2010, when spending on digital marketing finally surpassed print marketing, and businesses across all industries woke to the dawn of a new era in marketing—one in which search marketing was fully integrated with brand identity and message. Suddenly, branding and search marketing were inextricably linked online, but it would be a few years before practice owners and practice marketers learned that their brand had *also* become an online product that required continual upkeep to maintain its character.

The effective management of an online brand identity across the Web—where false information thrives and trust is a hard-won commodity—requires a strategy based on

market research, time, patience, creativity, knowledge of search engine marketing tools and techniques, a modicum of technological competencies, and, *most of all*, vigilance.

“Successful Audiology practice owners and marketers who have leveraged the power of the Internet to their search marketing and branding benefit come in two varieties: those who were inherently skilled or those who trusted skilled web marketing professionals to do the job for them.”

If you are contemplating crossing the Rubicon for the first time—wanting to enter the search market *and* grow your brand—you should know that, depending on your market, competition can be fierce. But a strong effort to grow visibility and differentiate your brand from those against the competitive backdrop is the surest strategy for success.

The rest of this white paper provides an overview of branding and search marketing recommendations for medical or healthcare practice owners and practice marketers, with examples and advice drawn from search marketing professionals who have openly shared their knowledge and experience.

Know that prospective customers use search. Let's look at some data.

There are over 100 billion global searches being conducted each month through the Big Three search engines (Google, Yahoo! and Bing). Studies show that 76% of adult Internet users typically use search engines to find the information they need on local businesses of all types—including medical and healthcare providers—and that 93% of all web traffic starts at a search engine. Given that 86.75% of people in the United States use the Internet, according to *Internet Live Stats*, that represents a significant portion of the

population whose first contact with your practice is likely to be through an Internet search. That's not even taking into account the rising ubiquity of smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices, which let consumers search for information on healthcare products and related services while on the go. Search is the new storefront. *And search is first.*

Multiple studies have confirmed that around 80% of consumers (age 14+) report using the Internet first when they are in need of a new product or service. In 2010 alone, search drove 25% of all online purchases in the United States. That number is growing steadily.

Content discovery and engagement reports have shown that search is the #1 driver of traffic to websites, far above traffic from social media sites (Facebook, Twitter), portal sites (AOL.com, MSN.com, Yahoo.com), and referring links from other content pages. With 93% of all online experiences beginning with search, Google is by far the most utilized search engine—commanding anywhere from 70% to 80% of all searches.

Taking the preceding information into account, there is no question that an Audiology facility or a private practice should have a search-friendly traditional website and a mobile website dedicated to their business.

Given the power and the draw of search, the Internet is an essential tool for businesses. Customers and prospects *expect* businesses of all types and sizes to have a website that can provide them with the information they need to make a "buying decision" without having to pick up the phone or visit a physical location first. In addition, those businesses that build their brand online—through search-friendly web development, search engine

optimization (SEO), mobile marketing, and social media marketing—give their businesses *legitimacy* in the eyes of their prospective customers and clients, while businesses without an online brand identity may not be taken as seriously.

Now, more than ever, healthcare organizations are judged on professionalism, quality of information provided on their websites, and relevance to search interests. For those looking to grow or aggressively compete in their markets, they must *first* come to the realization that a great percentage (if not the largest percentage) of their new patients and opportunities will come to them through search. In addition, they must be prepared to meet the needs of those performing search requests for their services by committing not only to building a strong online brand identity, but also to maintaining that identity.

"Relevant" and "Up to Date" are *always* in keeping with an online brand strategy geared toward success, competitiveness, and growth.

The online landscape is constantly shifting. Not all information found online is reliable. Brands are the solution.

In a recent article featured in *Advertising Age* magazine, Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google, explained to a conference of magazine executives that "Brands are increasingly-important signals that content can be trusted. Brands are the solution, an essential element that helps people navigate the world."

What Eric Schmidt is responding to is the well-known fact that, although the Internet is the *go-to* resource for most information about businesses and their products or services, user-generated websites and user-generated content (such as Wikipedia, blogs, forums,

etc.) are lacking in accuracy and credibility. This signals a call to action for businesses to evaluate their brand identity, as well as the perceived needs of their prospective customers or clients, and begin to develop (or re-develop) their web-facing assets for greatest effect.

Your brand online is more than your core practice competencies, strengths, and values. It includes all web-facing aspects of your organization—anywhere someone may find a mention of your practice, doctors, staff, or facility online. It also includes every position that you take on a website, a blog, or a Facebook page, the competitiveness of your service pricing or the quality of your care, your practice history, your "likes" or rankings in social media circles, your level of patient service, even your logo or practice slogan. If that sounds like a lot to consider, *you're right*. That's why those who have been successful in building an indelible online brand identity were either those who were inherently skilled *or* those who trusted skilled web marketing professionals to do the job for them.

Yes, building an online brand identity takes consideration, planning, and effort. But with so much at stake, it stands to reason that no healthcare practice should consider their branded web assets to be transitory—a marketing afterthought. A report from comScore recently stated that when consumers were exposed to both search and social media influenced by a brand, the organization's overall search click-through rate (CTR) went up by 94 percent. *That's a real opportunity*, and one you can't afford to pass up!

Web design can help balance brand identity and search engine friendliness. And when a search-friendly website is developed alongside a brand message creation effort and a

search engine marketing campaign, the potential to dominate over competitors in the marketplace is greatly increased.

Stay vigilant. The online landscape is free and open and searchable. Your competitors can profit from your branding efforts.

The keywords you use to define your practice's brand, as well as the content on your website or blog, can be easily discovered and leveraged by your competitors through a variety of web-marketing strategies and tactics. Let's use pay-per-click advertising (PPC) as an example.

PPC is a form of online advertising in which relevant ads appear when a particular keyword or phrase is entered into a search engine. For example: if you're looking for an Audiologist in Kansas City, Missouri that can provide comprehensive hearing procedures, you're likely to enter the search term "Audiologist Kansas City" or "Hearing Center in Kansas City" at your favorite search engine. This search term will return a list of organic search results for Audiology practices that brand themselves as an "Audiologist" in the Kansas City area, and it will also return a number of PPC ads for Audiology practices that have spent a few dollars on those specific keywords. Those PPC ads were *absolutely* created by competing practices in the Kansas City area from a list of keywords they *knew* would be likely used by prospective clients.

Many practice owners and managers are shocked to discover the following information: A number of keyword search and click-through studies have shown that 85% of branded keyword searches will result in traffic to your site. However, that leaves 15% of branded searches that ultimately go to your competitors. All things being equal, it would be hard

to find an audiologist that would feel comfortable with the idea that 15% of their patient prospects (or potential for revenues, just to make it absolutely clear) somehow wind up going to the competing practice down the street. Of course, that 15% is a number that can increase *greatly* if the practice owner is not in the habit of purchasing branded paid search keywords as part of an ongoing PPC campaign.

"You have to spend money to make money," is an adage that most practice owners know to be true. So, armed with the knowledge that a great percentage of your new patient opportunities will come to you through keyword-driven search results, why not spend a few dollars on a pay-per-click ad that will help convert an interested searcher into a paying client before your competitors have the chance to lure them away?

Your keywords are part of your brand. Define them. Utilize them to your greatest benefit. Protect them from your competitors.

When growing your brand, go where the traffic is heaviest. Visibility is the key to success.

In the time it took you to read this single sentence, there were 670,000 searches performed on Google, 228,200 Facebook updates, \$90,700 spent shopping online, 33,300 tweets on Twitter, 1,040 pictures uploaded to Flickr, 500 new blog posts posted, 200 new videos uploaded to YouTube, and 190 new websites created. And it's a fair bet that *every one* of those online actions can be somehow tied to a business opportunity for a company that has high online brand visibility.

Any bestselling marketing and branding book will tell you that visibility is the key to success. According to a 2012 report from *Search Engine Watch*, SEO traffic accounts for 94% of all search traffic. That same study also found that 75% of all search traffic goes to the first 5 sites listed, with 33% going to the *very first listing*. With thousands of searches being performed every second, you can see how SEO can make a huge difference in the visibility of your healthcare practice.

That same marketing book will tell you that it takes 7 branding impressions to make a sale. With over 100 billion global searches being conducted every month, and nearly 100 new clients or customers delivered to businesses every second via search, think how quickly (and cost-effectively) you could create those 7 branding impressions via any combination of the following online services: search-friendly web development, search engine optimization (SEO), mobile marketing, social media marketing, pay-per-click advertising (PPC), and search retargeting or site retargeting.

When it comes to brand awareness and conversion (sales), you can't afford to miss out on the opportunities that SEO can bring to the table.

Conclusion:

For those Audiology practice owners or managers who want to create a highly-visible brand identity, there is a lot to learn about how technology, market research, vigilance, and knowledge of search engine marketing tools and techniques culminate in the development of a toolkit of best practices.

If you're running a practice today, it's a sure bet that in order to succeed you are going to have to leverage technology and professional search engine marketing services to stay on

top of your competition and grow your business. Ignoring either of these may prevent you from realizing your full potential.



Sweet Spot Marketing is a Kansas City based Search Engine Advertising Agency that is focused on developing, implementing and optimizing Search Engine Marketing campaigns. We specialize in Search Engine Optimization and Paid Search Advertising.

Sweet Spot Marketing was founded on a single vision: to provide the best Search Engine Optimization and Paid Search Advertising support to small businesses, mid-sized companies, and our partner agencies across the nation.

Strategies from Sweet Spot Marketing include:

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Brand Development and Message Creation
- Mobile Marketing and Advertising
- Search-friendly Website Design
- Social Media Marketing
- Pay-per-click Marketing (PPC)

To find out more, speak to a Sweet Spot Marketing representative today by calling our toll-free number (800) 701-3480 or visit www.SweetSpotMDAudiology.com

[Citations]

Advertising Age: <http://adage.com/article/media/google-s-schmidt-internet-cesspool-brands/131569/>

Google vs. Phone Books: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kernlewis/2011/03/28/should-small-businesses-still-book-yellow-page-ads/>

comScore: <http://searchengineland.com/search-social-media-increases-ctr-by-94-percent-report-66231>

Forrester's :<http://www.seomoz.org/beginners-guide-to-seo/how-people-interact-with-search-engines>

Internet in 60 seconds: <http://www.crowdsience.com/2011/08/the-internet-in-60-seconds-694445-google-searches-per-minute/>

Pew Research Center: <http://searchengineland.com/77-percent-of-online-health-seekers-start-at-search-engines-pew-study-145105>

Search engine market share: http://www.statowl.com/search_engine_market_share.php

[Research links]

<http://searchengineland.com/study-78-percent-local-mobile-searches-result-offline-purchases-188660>

<http://marketingland.com/pew-61-percent-in-us-now-have-smartphones-46966>

<http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/mobile/cell-phone-and-smartphone-ownership-demographics/>

<http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2276184/No.-1-Position-in-Google-Gets-33-of-Search-Traffic-Study>

<http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/am/us.htm>

<http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=31588>

<http://techcrunch.com/2014/04/07/internet-ad-spend-to-reach-121b-in-2014-23-of-537b-total-ad-spend-ad-tech-gives-display-a-boost-over-search/>

<https://econsultancy.com/blog/7447-sempo-study-us-search-spending-nears-20-billion#i.520klc2grelnra>