

CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED WITH INTERNET MARKETING

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Before we begin discussing the best ways to market your practice online, it might be helpful to take a brief moment to explain exactly what internet marketing is.

Internet marketing seeks to influence how consumers discover, research, evaluate, and eventually decide upon a provider from which to purchase goods and services via the internet. It's similar to the general field of marketing in scope, with the exception that internet marketing is based on pull rather than push methodologies; while traditional marketing involves pushing out your message, online marketing requires you to reach customers (in your case, patients) by pulling them in to your website or office via a number of inbound channels.

Some of these major internet marketing channels include:

- Search engines, such as Google and Bing
- Doctor review websites, among them Healthgrades and Vitals
- Blogs, especially those written by local individuals
- Social networks, including Facebook and Instagram

Since there are so many different channels available for marketing your health care practice, there are also a number of different ways to take advantage of them. The most popular strategies and tactics include search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing (blogging), reputation management, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and social media marketing.

Each of these internet marketing strategies plays a role in the patient journey – from initially finding a health care provider, to evaluating the provider against other similar providers, and finally to how the patient ultimately decides upon which provider to go to for care.

Don't worry if this all seems like too much – each strategy is explained in further detail in later chapters. For now, rather than delving deeply into the ins and outs of internet marketing, let's instead take a look at the advantages that come with it.

ADVANTAGES OF INTERNET MARKETING FOR HEALTH CARE PRACTICES

There are numerous advantages for health care practices when it comes to internet marketing, especially when compared to their traditional marketing counterparts.

These advantages include:

- **Cost**–Unlike traditional marketing channels, internet marketing is relatively inexpensive. Since the cost of delivering content online (text, video, etc.) is less than in the physical, offline world, health care providers can effectively grow awareness for their practice with even modest budgets.
- **Engagement**– The internet allows patients to interact directly with providers through content, blogs, videos, and social networks. Even the ads themselves can be interactive–patients love polls, surveys, and multiple choice questions.
Remember: the best marketing doesn't look like marketing at all.
- **Targeting**–The internet allows you to get very specific with your marketing, targeting specific patients you want to reach with advanced activity, demographic, and life-event settings. These targeting features allow many health care practices to reach groups of patients they could have never effectively reached before.
- **Measurement**–Virtually everything on the internet is trackable. Yes, this can occasionally be taken too far and border on creepy, but for a health care practice it means that marketing campaigns can be operated and measured based on established metrics of success. This gives you the data that will ensure that you stay within your target cost per new patient acquired.
- **Time**–Since there are so few barriers to entry on the internet, creating and launching an online marketing campaign is less time and resource-intensive than doing so through traditional channels.

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In addition to these benefits of online marketing, it's also important to realize that internet marketing represents a bit of a paradigm shift as it relates to marketing in general. To expand on that point further, let's examine the advantages of internet marketing another way - exploring the differences between push and pull marketing.

PUSH MARKETING

For decades, brands created something (a good or service) and then spent an enormous amount of time and money pushing this product through advertising channels on to the end consumer. This "push" is defined through a message (ad) directed at a consumer.

Since traditional communication channels were A) limited (TV, print, radio) and B) controlled (your cable provider dictates programming, for example), the messages delivered allowed for no interaction between brand and consumer. This created an environment in which the brand could control what consumers saw, heard, and thought about a particular product or service, but also one in which only the largest and most well-funded of brands could effectively reach enough of the population (the mass market) to sustain operations.

This meant that there was a limited amount of brands and products for consumers to choose from. It also made it hard for many health care providers to successfully market their practice, as the cost of advertising through newspapers, radio, and TV prohibited all but the largest practices from doing so.



PULL MARKETING

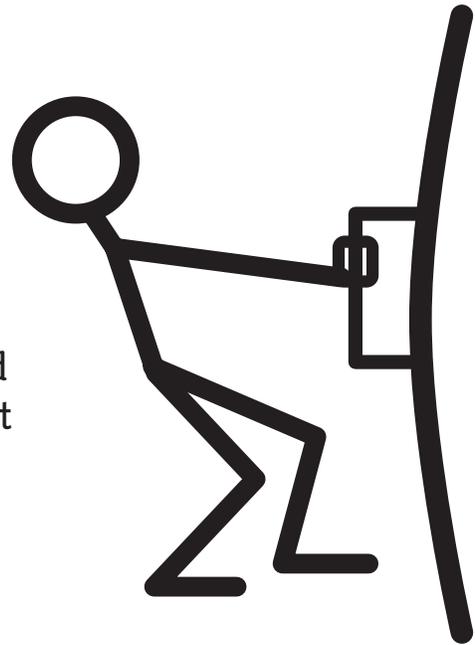
With the advent of the internet, a new medium was created that allowed consumers to find, evaluate, and decide which products to purchase in a manner not previously available. This meant that consumers –your patients– could dictate how and when they were exposed to different products and services. The internet also allowed for interaction to take place between brands and the end consumer.

As a result, *consumers have taken to the internet in droves as they've gained the ability to control–or at least take part in–the messaging that they're being shown.* This has given patients ever-increasing say in how they are being marketed to and has resulted in smart health care practices being present where their patients are online, creating messages that pull patients in.

A clear example of pull marketing for a health care practice is the creation of a well-optimized health care website, especially one that ranks highly on Google for its related search terms. In this example, if a patient decided to go to Google to search for information about an issue he or she may be having, he or she would click on one of the listings displayed in the search results. By doing so, he or she would be “pulled” to that particular web page.

Today, most internet marketing tactics and strategies are based on pulling a consumer/patient from a channel they use to find, evaluate, review, and/or compare information about a product or service back to one's offering. This is often referred to as inbound marketing.

Although push marketing was and is more prevalent with traditional marketing, some internet marketing techniques are also “push” in nature. Email newsletters and Facebook allow for brands to push content out to consumers, though the consumers must be subscribed in order to receive the communications. Consumers can respond directly to this content, as well – an interaction that newspapers, radio, and TV don't allow.



THE 4 P'S OF INTERNET MARKETING

Internet marketing still encompasses the four P's of traditional marketing – product, price, place and promotion. Each of these four core aspects has evolved, however, based on the workings of the internet and the new marketing channels that have emerged.

- **Product (People)**–For decades, traditional marketing started with a product, which was created and pushed upon the consumer. Today, product has become people – in other words, people, not brands, now dictate what is needed and how it is acquired.
- **Price (Purpose)**–Price has traditionally set the value of an item. It still does to some extent, but more important than price in setting value is purpose. Today, most buyers judge the value of a product or service based on its purpose.
- **Place (Position)**–The place–how you got your product to buyers –was the third pillar of marketing. Today, getting products and services to consumers is still a function, but more important than place is the position (search rank) of what is being marketed. This means being “present” where buyers are going to discover, evaluate, review, and compare potential products or services.
- **Promotion (Passion)**–The old world relied on promotions (discounts, sales, etc.) in order to drive sales of new and/or underperforming products and services. Today, a company's passion for what it sells determines whether or not a buyer will take notice. Passion is one of the most powerful of all human emotions, and it can't be manufactured. Passion not only rounds out the new 4 P's, but completes the circle back to people. When people get passionate about your products, services, and company, they can help promote and build your brand faster and stronger than you could on your own.

THE FIFTH P OF INTERNET MARKETING

The internet has also brought forth a fifth (and perhaps more important) P – performance.

Thanks to the internet, almost all marketing tactics and advertising campaigns can be tracked, in order to give you insight into their performance and efficacy. Through website analytics, specific campaign tracking links, and other technology, you can view every piece of a patient's interaction with your clinic – from the first time he or she clicked on an ad to the rating that was left on your profile after his or her visit.

These insights allow for metric-based marketing and make understanding your return on investment (ROI) more transparent than ever before. This in turn makes investing time and money into marketing your practice a safer bet, as you'll be able to see data on the strength of a particular campaign in real time. At worst, you'll know what strategies are not working, allowing you to make swift adjustments and save both time and money.

THE FIRST STEPS

Okay, so you're convinced that you need to market your health care practice online. Where do you start? Well, before you run out and set up a website, start posting on Facebook, and ask patients to review you on Healthgrades, there a few things you want to do first.

- 1. Establish a point person**—Whether this is you or another member of your staff, someone needs to be in charge of coordinating your practice marketing efforts, to ensure that your marketing plan is implemented consistently across all platforms.
- 2. Define your target patients**—Internet marketing all starts with a clear understanding of who you are trying to attract. You can do this by creating Patient Personas, fictitious archetypes for the kind of patients you want—and don't want. We'll discuss this in

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more depth in the next chapter.

3. “Ghost” your competitors—Once you’ve defined which patients you want to visit your practice, you need to take a look at what others in your area are already doing. This way, you can understand what patients are experiencing with other practices—and what you can do better.

4. Define your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)—Now that you’re armed with an understanding of your local competitors, you can look inward and define the current Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of your practice. This will help you determine what makes you different from other practices, so that you can best position yourself with the patients in your market.

5. Determine your unique selling proposition (USP)—From your SWOT analysis you can determine your USP. Your USP is important to develop and articulate—it’s the reason a patient would choose you over other providers. Without a USP, it’s impossible to position your practice and build messaging for ad campaigns.

6. Document your brand voice—With your SWOT and USP determined, you can move on to documenting your brand voice, or how you want to describe your practice. This will determine the tone taken on your website and social media profiles, as well as the selection of topics on your blog.

7. Conduct keyword research—At this point, you have almost everything you need to get started. The final data point you’ll want before creating a plan and implementing your marketing platform software comes through conducting keyword research. Since search engines are the number one driver of new patient acquisition for most practices, having a clear understanding of what patients are looking for in and around your specialty will

help you focus your efforts properly. This topic will be explained further in Chapter 4.

8. Create a Plan—Of course, before you start marketing, you need a plan. The purpose of the first six steps along the way is to give you the knowledge and insights required to create a plan that can achieve your goals. This plan should also help keep you on track and ensure your continued progress.

9. Implement a practice marketing platform—Last, but certainly not least, you need to implement a marketing platform that will help you automate efforts, ensuring you are as efficient as possible. Your practice marketing platform will give you and your team the tools to execute on your efforts. It will also ensure your campaigns are being tracked, so you can easily make tweaks and determine ROI.

Internet marketing can be a powerful way to grow your practice, but proceed with caution. The internet changes daily – heck, Google had a half-dozen updates just last year. What works today may not work tomorrow, meaning there’s a lot to stay up-to-date on. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be using internet marketing to grow your practice; just know that you need experience, expertise, and time in order to be successful.

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GETTING STARTED WITH INTERNET MARKETING CHECKLIST:

- A point person has been established to lead practice marketing efforts.
- Current online marketing and presence performance benchmarks are established.
- Target patients have been defined and analyzed.
- Competitive practices in your market are known and have been analyzed for opportunity.
- You have determined your practice's USP, as well as analyzed all relevant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- A brand voice has been crafted, to shape how you will describe your practice in your online marketing efforts.
- Keyword research has been used to determine target keywords patients use in searches.
- Practice marketing goals are documented and understood by staff.
- A formal internet marketing plan is in place and being used to guide efforts.
- Practice marketing metrics have been established and are monitored consistently.
- Internal stakeholders and owners are meeting frequently to discuss marketing progress and to update the plan accordingly.