

Search engine marketing

Increase your website traffic organically using Search Engine Optimisation

By Kim McCotter



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After successfully attracting dozens of new patients last month using Google Adwords, you’ve tested, optimised and assessed and your appointment book is now full. You have become so successful, you decide to hire an hygienist and need more patients to keep your new recruit busy. So what is the next step? Yes, you can spend more on Google Adwords in the short term, but after a certain point your return on investment (ROI) will drop.

Assuming your website is in half decent shape, a medium to long term online strategy would be to invest in Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This article focuses on SEO, explaining what it is, the different types of SEO, the benefits and drawbacks of SEO and my top 10 DIY SEO tips.

Unpaid search

Unpaid search, also known as organic search, is the unpaid listings that appear in Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs). In Australia, Google controls 87.55% (Experian Hitwise Australia 2011) of the search market. Because of this dominance, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is synonymous with the process of achieving the top organic listing in Google’s SERPs.

Intuitively, dentists know that unpaid exposure of their website must be a good thing, but most don’t realise how important it is. They accept their position in Google’s SERPs and leave it at that.

Black versus white

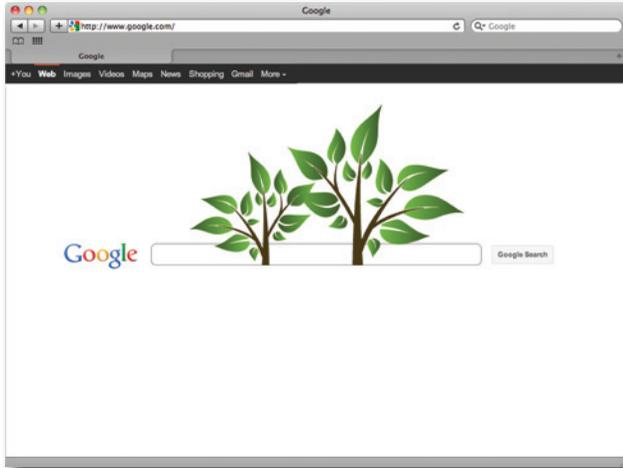
Broadly speaking, there are two different approaches to SEO - termed *black hat* and *white hat*.

Black Hat Search Engine Optimisation is about using techniques that search engines find unacceptable. At best these techniques are considered a temporary solution; at worst they are considered misleading and unethical.

Things like link farming, invisible text, keyword stuffing, meta tag stuffing and fake pages with redirects are commonly used practices. When Google finds a website that uses these tactics, they blacklist it and remove the website from their SERPs. This makes the website practically invisible online.

Stay away from these ‘quick fixes’ and you will be fine.

White Hat SEO uses techniques that are recommended by search engines. Good website design and compelling content that focuses on the patient experience should be the cornerstone of any long term search strategy.



There are heaps of technical details like site structure, site maps, links, meta tags, image names, alt tags and headings that need to be considered by web developers, but these are outside the consideration of most dentists.

A client's involvement is normally only limited to content development. If you require assistance creating content, a dental focused marketer will be able to help you.

What does an SEO Consultant do?

A White Hat SEO consultant will assess your website, suggest keywords/terms, modify content and gathering links. Look for a provider that offers all these services, avoid sub-specialists like link builders unless it is part of an overall marketing plan.

Over the last few years, Google has augmented their text based organic SERPS by including local results, video and image results and expanded sitelinks. This makes the job of maintaining a visible online presence harder then ever. The purpose of an SEO consultant is to deal with all the implementation details of improving your rankings.

Since the Google algorithm is constantly changing, each consultant will have their own method for achieving results. Normally there will be a setup period with a performance guarantee then a monthly maintenance fee. As White Hat SEO is a medium to long term strategy, it will take three to six months to see results and longer to reap the full benefits.

What are the benefits and drawbacks of SEO?

SEO works for the same reason as Google Adwords; eye tracking studies have shown that users scan SERPs using a pattern that resembles a large F. If you are not on the first page in the first three results, you are a lot less likely to be found. Optify (2011) has conducted research that found that these positions attracted 58.4% of all clicks. By the time you get to the second page, the click rate was around the 1-2% mark.

Since traffic is attracted over time and continues after an SEO campaign has ended, the ROI potential for SEO is higher than "Pay Per Click" advertising like Google Adwords.

A drawback of SEO is that it can be viewed as expensive. There are numerous low cost solo operators in Australia and abroad, but expect to pay \$1000+ a month for a reputable SEO consultancy firm. The quantity of and competition for keywords targeted influences how much you will pay.

Can I DIY SEO?

SEO is a specialty skill and isn't really a DIY sort of job. It is best handled by a web designer and SEO consultant. But if you can't justify the expense at the moment, the table lists my top 10 SEO tips you can implement yourself or in conjunction with a web designer.

TOP TEN DIY SEO tips

1. Write unique content and avoid templated material where possible;
2. Stick with one theme per page. You are better off splitting content into separate pages instead of subjecting your patients to endless scrolling;
3. Submit your website to relevant information aggregators like yellow pages, white pages, find-a-dentist, true local and hotfrog;
4. Register for Google Places and upload your business details;
5. Add videos, images, news feeds, articles, maps, blogs, social elements, etc;
6. Link your website to an active Facebook site for you practice;
7. Track your performance using Google Analytics;
8. Research keywords that matter to your patients - your Google Adwords Account should give you a few clues;
9. Include keywords throughout your website, just don't go overboard; and
10. Update your site frequently with new content.

By far the hardest part about setting up a website for dentists is they have to write about themselves and their practice. That is why the next article in this series will focus on gathering and writing content for websites.

References

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About the author

Mr Kim McCotter is Business Development & Marketing Manager at Levitch Design Associates. With a background and passion for business and marketing, Kim comes to LDA with experience in both service and product based industries. Having over five years of professional services experience and five years of marketing experience, he brings a fresh and professional approach to LDA. Kim holds a Bachelor of Business (UTS), Masters of Business in Marketing (UTS), and a Certificate in Digital Marketing (ADMA). He is continually investigating marketing and business techniques to find the next competitive edge. His methodical business development and marketing approach is outcome driven, his initiatives will be beneficial to the future success of our clients. He can be contacted on (02) 9880-9300.