

Content is the New Focal Point of Your SEO Strategy

The goal of your dermatology website is to disseminate original, relevant and useful information that addresses readers' queries in a most satisfying manner.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH WITH VIKAS VIJ

Search engine optimization (SEO) has traditionally been a technical strategy to help improve a website's search rankings for the largest number of targeted keywords. Many SEO experts that belong to the old school still continue to believe they can manage to 'game' the algorithms of Google and other search engines to achieve higher page rankings for their websites. However, the reality is that Google and other leading search engines have already woken up to the tactics employed by traditional SEO managers to outwit the search engine algorithms.

Major search engine updates from Google such as Panda and Penguin were designed precisely to counter the traditional SEO tactics, and allow for a more level playing field where the best website ultimately wins in the race of rankings. It is now more important than ever to remember that the goal of your dermatology website is to disseminate original, relevant and useful information that addresses the readers' queries in a most satisfying manner. Google wants you to be natural with your website content development and provide information for your readers, rather than for the search engines.

WHAT ABOUT LINK BUILDING?

While it is true that content is the new SEO strategy for your dermatology website, but it does not mean that link building as an SEO strategy is dead. The focus has now shifted to more natural and organic link building compared to the artificial link building strategies of yesteryears. Google and other search engines have been working overtime to refine their search algorithms to distinguish between good and

bad links. The problem is that now the search engines not only promote websites with a large number of reputable links, but they are also likely to pull down your website rankings if it has a large number of low quality links.

Back links to your dermatology website continue to be one of the most important algorithmic signals for search engines to rank your website in search results. The search engines essentially do not go through the actual content of your website to determine the quality of the website. They estimate the quality of your website from the way the readers and other websites on the Internet are responding to your website content. When your website gets linked with leading or reputed websites, it is a strong indication for the search engine about your website quality. Similarly, when online readers refer or link to your website over blogs, forums, websites and social media networks, the search engines pick up those signals to determine the true value of your website.

REDUNDANT LINK BUILDING STRATEGIES

The day of indiscriminate link building activity is now over. Google has come down heavily against websites that engaged in unnatural link building behavior with an aim to push up their rankings in search results. If the links are high quality, they are most likely to help improve your website rankings. Therefore, the key objective must be to create such high quality content that it earns good quality links in a natural and organic manner. Some of the unnatural link building strategies that are no longer effective from an SEO perspective are as follows:

Article Submission to Directories. Link building experts traditionally relied on large online directories to create back

links to their websites. These directories accept original articles from websites and provide them with links in return. While the practice of achieving links through online directory submission is not completely dead, it is no longer an effective SEO tactic.

The number and value of recognized online directories has gone down following the search engine algorithmic updates in recent times. Search engines such as Google do not attach much value to links that originate from online directories. If the directory has a negative reputation, it may even result in lower rankings for the website.

Artificial Participation on Online Forums. One of the popular tactics to create back links for a website has been active participation on various online forums and blogs. It has long been seen as an important component of the website's link building strategy. However, the search engine technology has improved in recent years to an extent where it is usually possible for the search engine to detect artificial commenting on blogs, forums and social networks with an aim to create a larger number of links.

Search engines no longer attach much weight to artificial commenting activity on blogs and forums. They instead try to identify authentic activity and responsiveness of genuine readers about your website on social media and blogs and forums.

Good content and a good website will naturally receive mentions and links from a large and diverse range of readers. That is the kind of signal that search engines are looking for. The more natural and positive social media noise that a website is able to generate, the better it may be from an SEO point of view over a period of time.

Links for Sale. Google and other search engines have consistently advised webmasters to refrain from indulging in unfair link building activities such as purchasing links in bulk. Search engines have worked hard on improving their search techniques to identify websites that may be buying links in bulk just to manipulate their search engine rankings.

Google has already penalized several leading websites over the last two years that indulged in paid link activity to boost their rankings. It is a highly risky and ill-conceived link building strategy now to go for paid links. Most of such paid links are of low quality, which would not be given any value by the search engines anyway. Therefore, such tactics can only do more harm than good in the current SEO environment.

Two-way Link Trading. Traditional link building experts sometimes relied upon the practice of generating two-way links with other websites. The tactic would involve a middle party that would arrange link exchange activity between various websites. However, now the search

engines are able to detect such two-way link exchange activity.

Google officially advises webmasters to refrain from link exchange practices because it could lead to a negative outcome for the website's rankings. Any link building activity that is deemed to be reciprocal is now viewed with suspicion by the search engines. If the website continues to indulge in rampant link exchange tactics, the search engines may pull down the website rankings.

CONTENT QUALITY OVER LINK BUILDING

Search engine optimization strategy for your dermatology website should center around content rather than link building. Link building should be a natural, incidental result of your content quality. Therefore, your SEO and Internet marketing team should invest maximum time and effort on building superlative content that generates maximum online exposure.

Great content will automatically lead to high quality back links, higher traffic of readers, greater responsiveness and stickiness of the readers to the website, and natural social media sharing of content. These are some of the key signals that Google and other search engines use to rank your website in their search results.

Great content also leads to stronger brand building, unlike link building, which is only concerned with improving search rankings. An effective content strategy can help improve the website's PR and media exposure, which can never be achieved merely by link building. With more than 80 percent of American adults using the Internet to access information, great content can go viral, resulting in extensive exposure for your dermatology practice. Links, on the other hand, have no way to go viral.

Smart SEO managers have already re-adapted their Internet marketing and search engine optimization strategies to make content the central focus of the website. Make sure that your dermatology website promotion strategy is in line with the new search engine guidelines and updates. Improved search algorithms are an opportunity, and not a threat, for real websites with real content to gain their rightful position at the top of search engine rankings. ■

Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete Internet marketing company which focuses on SEO, social media marketing and the online reputations of dermatologists in the US, Canada and the UK. Visit them online at www.ekwa.com/pd to receive special information just for Practical Dermatology readers!

