Getting to Know You: Is Content Marketing the New SEO?

By David Evans, PhD, MBA

Content marketing is the new name of the Internet marketing game.

Today's savvy and often somewhat jaded consumers want to be courted, educated, and inspired. They don't want to be pitched, patronized, or persuaded. The best way to do this is to woo them with your prose.

Strong content is the key to great marketing. Roper Public Affairs recently reported that 80% of business decision-makers prefer to get information about a company in a series of articles instead of an ad, and 70% say that content marketing creates more of a connection.

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

The first reported modern-day content marketing campaign was launched by the John Deere tractor company. Instead of focusing on product sales, the company introduced a magazine called The Furrow. The magazine focused on how farmers (Deere's customers) could turn bigger profits. Its articles discussed issues that affected individuals who used tractors, but not tractors per se, and it worked. The Furrow helped John Deere become an extremely profitable company and ensured its place in popular culture. (The Gap even sold retro John Deere T-shirts for tots.)

At its heart, content marketing is the creation and distribution of unique, valuable, and relevant content. The goal is to subtly entice your prospective patients to think or act differently, and this approach touches on all facets of an Internet marketing campaign. On Facebook, Pinterest, or Instagram, the goal is to gently encourage fans to read, like, comment on, and share your posts. From a search engine

optimization standpoint, Google, Yahoo!, and Bing like educational content more than blatant sales pitches. Content+ reports that blogs give websites 434% more indexed pages and 97% more indexed links. Press releases, too, are more likely to get picked up if the copy is informative and not overly self-congratulatory or a thinly veiled ad. Online patient reviews are perhaps the ultimate form of content marketing because consumers learn about you without being sold. Reviews should be genuine, not canned or gamed. Is it really possible for any surgeon to have 1,000 five-star reviews? Likely not. Everyone has a bad day or a really difficult patient. Keep it real.

No practice avoids bad reviews altogether. According to studies from Stanford Business School, "When consumers get mild doses of negative information about a product or service, news about the blemish may actually strengthen their positive impression."

This is valuable counsel. It applies to all forms of content marketing—not just to reviews. If something sounds too good to be true, your readers won't buy in.

CONTENT MARKETING FOR YOUR PRACTICE

To get started, think about your patients, and then try to think like your patients. What issues and topics appeal to your target demographic? What magazines do they read through (or even steal) from your waiting room? From here, select a

theme and develop articles around that theme. For example, skin care is likely something that matters to your patients and is probably a revenue source for your practice. So develop articles on skin health. Examples might include, "The All-Star Anti-Wrinkle Diet," "5 Reasons You Need More Sleep Now," or a roundup on celebs with the best or worst complexions.

Importantly, the articles don't sell anything to anyone. They just educate or entertain. The content connects the consumer to your practice, and in doing so it makes the next leap an easy one to take. He or she will likely consider you when it's time to schedule a skin care treatment. It's not a bait and switch—it's more of a courtship. It is also not a one-and-done endeavor. To be successful, a content marketing campaign involves a steady stream of well-written articles on various themes.

What are you waiting for? It's time to start that blog you always meant to...

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