



Searching for Success: A Pharma Marketer's Guide to Search Engines

To help marketers gain a better understanding of the role of search in the media plan, the author answers a series of questions that are frequently raised by brand teams. The responses provide a roadmap for healthcare marketers who want to avoid the obstacles and ensure success in the search marketplace.

By Joshua Palau

A recent Pew Internet study showed that a staggering 58 percent of Americans search the Internet for answers to their toughest questions, instead of going to their friends or family. While this is great for consumers, it makes marketing a product more difficult. With search, consumers can select the words they associate with a product to find specific products. It also creates a further challenge to marketing's reliance on offline media by pushing search into the conversation.

In 2007, search took a bigger step both for marketers and consumers. Spending on search rose 31 percent in 2007, while consumer's usage also increased to the tune of about 9 billion searches per month. All of the engines introduced enhancements, including such features as video, image and news integration, as well as refinement tools to make finding an answer even easier.

For those still unsure as to why search has taken off, the answer is pretty simple. Search provides the answer to a question...without the marketing clutter. Whenever I explain search, I use a personal example because I think we're all too busy thinking like marketers and not like consumers.

I'm a type 1 diabetic who checks my sugars about seven to 10 times per day. When I researched insulin pumps, there were several brochures that highlighted product features. The people in the brochure looked happy while canoeing, playing volleyball or rock climbing. However, I don't do any of those things – so while the imagery was nice, those companies spent a lot of money on a message that said nothing to me.

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I started doing searches that were specific to me, such as ease of use, cost of supplies and how concealed is the pump. With each search, I found information that answered my specific question. Search allowed me to ignore whatever the pump companies wanted to highlight and let me find the answers to my specific need. Think of search as a brochure or commercial that is customized to a specific individual or segment.

I have spent the better part of the last three years talking with healthcare executives about the ways to start doing search, how to avoid the obstacles and ensure success. With that as the backdrop, I've written this piece as a question-and-answer style summary of the important issues I've encountered.

Q *Why should I be doing search?*

It is 2008 and I still know marketers who have not embraced search or funded it properly. I don't want to dedicate this article to statistics, but they are staggering in terms of audience usage. When researching highly personal conditions, search is trusted. Unlike the millions of marketing dollars spent on offline, search is extremely quantifiable. On a daily basis, you can see the words people search for, what they click on, and how they interact with your site. This is, of course, provided you have your site analytics in place.

Q *What's all this talk about analytics?*

In order to have a successful search plan, it is important to have your analytics configured properly. I recently worked with a client who was spending the majority of the budget on several broad terms. While these words drove a significant amount of traffic, one of the client goals was voucher downloads. With analytics in place, we were able to determine that the words that drove the most conversions were more inexpensive, smaller volume words. While management loved having a No. 1 listing, it did not make sense for the campaign goals.

The reason analytics get hung up is that it is usually an enterprise level configuration with little technical support. Don't let this stop you. There are plenty of analytics packages that you can install in addition to what you have. You can then easily configure this to grab the top level data points and goals.

Q *Why do we need goals?*

Don't get stuck because you want to measure only to a sale and you can't. Marketers spend much more offline

and on conferences that have no ROI models. Some offline success is measured by brand interaction. Site visitors driven by search, cost per brand interaction and visits to specific pages (voucher download, physician locator and, among others, videos) are all important brand interactions to track.

Q *How do I choose keywords?*

One needs to think like a consumer and about the personal search experience. Think about what the user's intent is and how you can meet that expectation. If you search for "migraines," you likely are looking for broad information about migraines. If your product only treats ocular migraines, you may still want to show up for "migraines," but you need to understand that it likely will not be a successful word because of user intent.

You also can't dictate what users search for, but you can look at forecasting tools to determine what words to target. Did you know that more people search for the word "influenza" than "flu?" Don't avoid words that are not in your offline collateral.

In short, be realistic about what you should rank for and be mindful of user intent.

Q *How do I ensure my site is optimized?*

This is an article unto itself. Simply put, there are many technical factors as well as on page content factors that play into your search engine ranking. The biggest challenge for marketers is implementing their search engine optimization (SEO) recommendations. More than 60 percent of clients cite that implementation challenges are the reason they have not completed SEO. More than 70 percent of users click on the organic results, so they should not be ignored.

Q *Why doesn't my site rank for certain terms?*

For search engine spiders, content is very important when ranking a Web site. When marketers looks at a brand's Web site, they have to assess if their site is delivering on user intent. Just because you have a product that treats asthma, it does not mean that your site is considered a subject matter expert for asthma. Much of your organic search success will come from lower-volume tail terms, as well as brand terms. Many sites rank #1 for their brand name, but once

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you change the query to brand + side effects or prescription information, these sites do not rank.

Wikipedia and WebMD tend to rank because they have very relevant content on diseases, as well as clear navigation and link popularity.

Q What is link popularity?

Another factor that search engine spiders take into account when ranking a site has to do with the quality and quantity of links from other sites. These links can come from other sites, directories and, among other sources, blogs, and they are likely happening without your knowledge anyway. Link popularity is very much at the center of how Google ranks pages and finds grounding in the educational principle of authoritative references.

For healthcare sites, you want to have links from credible associations as well as Internet directories and other high-ranking sites. Do not discount the power of a “mom blog” that links to your site. This scares many healthcare companies because of how little control the brand has over the link. However, companies need to embrace social media and find a way to manage it because it is the way the world is going. In the world you live in now, your consumers tend to trust a highly ranked diabetes blog more than they do your site. Therefore, any lining affiliation you can come up with will give you credibility with both users and search engine spiders.

Q How do I budget for search?

This is another area in which you need to look at how big your category is and your campaign goals. Once you find out how big your category is and develop your goals, you can then decide how high of a share of voice makes sense. The beauty of search is that unlike offline where you have to secure the inventory well in advance, search is scalable. You can start with a really high share of voice and then adjust based on performance.

Q How should I respond to the competition?

Several marketers have asked me about what their competition is doing as a way to determine and set the budget. I believe this is extremely short-sighted. What you need to look at is how big your category is. If there are 3 million searches a month for the disease your product treats, don't you want to reach them regardless of what your competition is doing? Some companies have been slower to adopt search, so beat your competition to the punch.

Q What is blended or universal search?

All of the engines launched enhancements that integrated video, images and news results into their main

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results page. If you perform a search for “iPhone,” you will see a great example of what Google is doing. The takeaway for healthcare marketers is to make sure that you have all of your assets optimized, including product pictures, TV ads, press releases and any other assets that can help your product show up when someone searches.

Q What does the future hold?

As long as you have a product that people have questions about, search should forever be in your marketing mix. Marketers who are behind will fall further back over time. I had a client who I believed needed to optimize the brand's video library. The pushback was that it would be too time consuming and since videos did not appear on Google's main page, the client did not want to optimize them. However, in the middle of last year, Google, Yahoo! and MSN all began blending videos onto the homepage. Now this client is scrambling to play catch up.

Vertical and personalized search also are making gains. The engines have all made strides toward delivering a more personalized experience. If a consumer tends to visit brand sites, the engines will likely change their results to provide more brand site listings. Again, if a marketer is not actively managing search, they will miss out on this opportunity.

There are few industries that are regulated as much as healthcare. Unfortunately, this means that certain aspects of search cannot fully be leveraged, including social media. However, you can't let this stop you from embracing search. If you pay attention to the obstacles that I laid out and continue to push through them, you will find an ROI goldmine. ■

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