

Whitepaper

# SEO DECODED

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A DENTAL PRACTICE'S GUIDE TO  
SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

# SEO DECODED FOR DENTISTS

SEO (i.e. Search Engine Optimization) is a term that gets thrown around a lot – usually without much explanation of what it is or how it works. Add to that the fact that the online world is changing daily – search engines like **Google, Bing and Yahoo are constantly updating their standards for what makes a website relevant for online searches** – and a complicated process becomes even more complex. To help demystify SEO, this whitepaper explores the basic principles and most constant rules of search engine optimization, including:

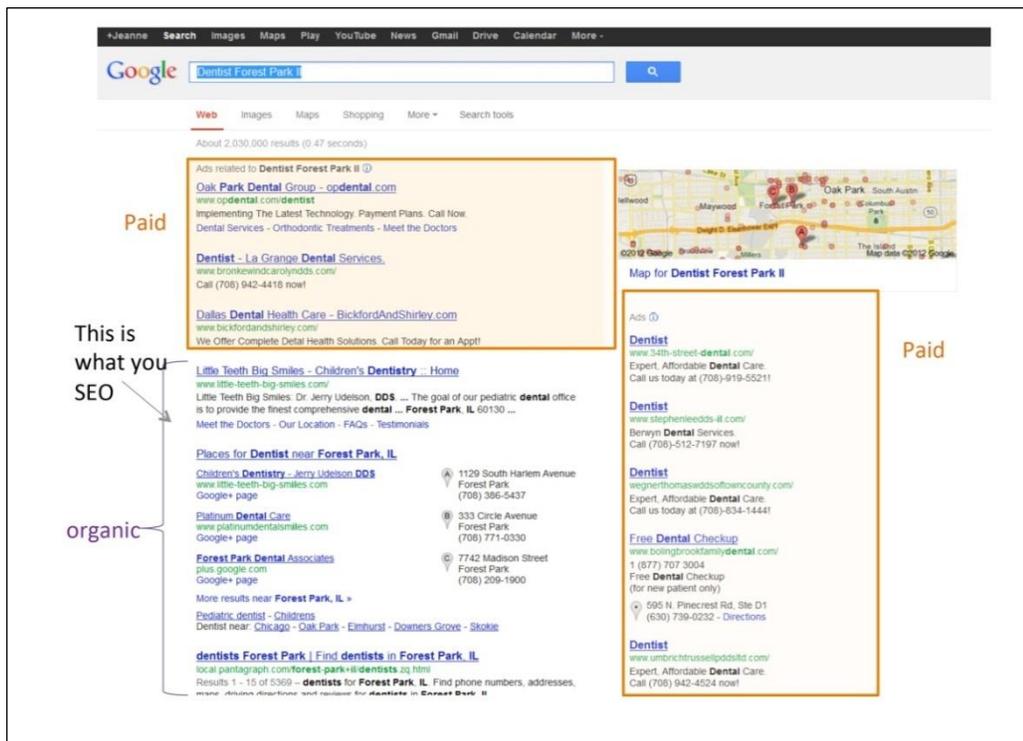
- Why SEO Is Important
- A Brief History of SEO
- Critical Factors in SEO Today
- Getting Your SEO Game On
- 10 Common SEO Mistakes
- Selecting SEO Vendors
- Measuring SEO Success

**An important note:** Because the world of SEO is ever-changing, the best long-term strategy is to work with an experienced webmaster that understands SEO and will update your site as the Web evolves.

## WHY SEO IS IMPORTANT

SEO is the process of optimizing (i.e. structuring) your website's design, content and links in order to gain greater visibility in the organic section of search engine results pages.

**TRANSLATION:** SEO determines where your website appears on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) when a patient in your area searches for a “dentist” on Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.



SEO is important because more and more patients are searching for dentists online. **A survey by the BIA/Kelsey group found that 97% of the consumers in the U.S. now use the Internet to research services or products within their local area.**<sup>1</sup>

In order to get patients' attention (and their business), your practice needs to be highly visible during Web searches. A first-page SERP ranking is "the Holy Grail" of SEO. The higher your website appears in the organic search section of the SERP the better. A number-one-ranked site can get more than 30% more clicks than a site ranked tenth on a page.<sup>2</sup>

*A first-page ranking is considered "the Holy Grail" of SEO.*

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEO

When search marketers first appeared on the scene in the mid-1990s, the SEO world was a simple one. Basically **all it took to increase your search rankings was to post new content on your website** and then wait for search engine "spiders" from Google, Yahoo, etc. to "crawl" your page and index the content. Rankings were derived from keywords, page titles and links within your website.

Unfortunately, it didn't take long for unscrupulous webmasters to start manipulating the system with so-called "Black Hat" strategies that artificially improved their website's search results. These tactics – including excessive content development, misleading keywords and tag stuffing – forced the search engine companies to use other factors to determine whether a site should get to the top of search results.

That's when "off-page" factors entered the picture. With off-the-page factors, search engine algorithms could decipher which websites sites were more reliable than others based upon the number, quality and prominence of third party sites that link to a website. Black Hat practitioners quickly adapted to the new parameters turning to link farms and link buying in order to inflate their rankings. These practices quickly got out of control and Google had to evolve its algorithm once again to reduce the noise of those factors.

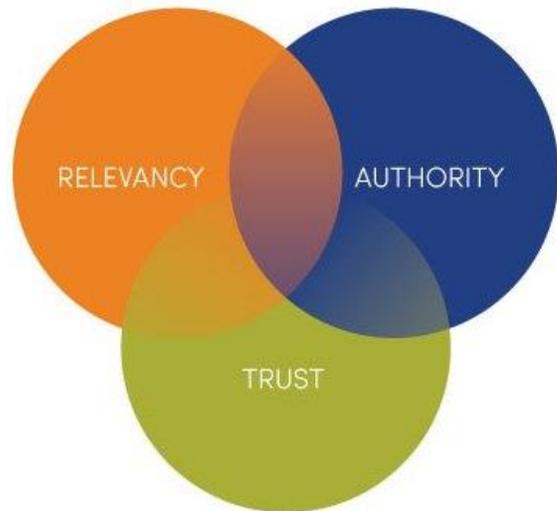
**By 2007, Google was using more than 200 different factors to ranks sites.**<sup>3</sup> Starting in 2008, Google and other search engines began looking at postings on social media sites like Google+, Facebook and Twitter as way to understand what sites can be trusted to provide quality content. Since then, the number of factors search engines use to determine if a site is worthy of a #1 SERP ranking has grown exponentially.

**Search engines now take into consideration a host of on-the-page and off-the-page factors, including content, site architecture and HTML, links, trust, social, and personal (e.g. country, locality, history, and social).**<sup>4</sup> While the future of search engine optimization is unclear, one thing is certain: SEO will continue to evolve at a frantic pace. Fortunately, there are several factors your dental practice can work on to improve its website's ranking.

## CRITICAL FACTORS IN SEO TODAY

At the highest level, the factors that drive where your site ranks in a search engine are its **Relevancy, Authority and Trust**. The elements are determined by SEO's three key concepts:

- **Code:** Making sure your site can be crawled well.
- **Content:** Making sure your pages are optimized with the right keywords and content – that way you create relevancy.
- **Connection:** Links help search engines determine importance and authority.



**No single factor can guarantee you'll rank #1.**

Google and other search engines view some as being more important than others.

The following chart of SEO success factors is ordered from highest to lowest based upon their impact on your site's SERP rankings. Doing well in each area will increase your chances of a high ranking website.

On Page Work		Off Page Work	
<b>1. CODE</b>	<b>2. CONTENT</b>	<b>3. CONNECTION</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code is clean and easy to crawl</li> <li>• Tight short URLs with relevant keywords</li> <li>• Well thought meta tags (no stuffing!)</li> <li>• Good H2 tags (Subheadlines)</li> <li>• Good H1 tags (Headlines)</li> <li>• Site Speed</li> <li>• Mobile accessibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of your content</li> <li>• No duplicate content</li> <li>• Keywords in Body Copy</li> <li>• Word Count</li> <li>• Length of time users are engaged in content</li> <li>• Freshness of Content</li> <li>• Content is rich and has relevant images.</li> <li>• Doesn't feature too many ads</li> </ul>	<b>Backlinks to Your Site:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of links to your site</li> <li>• Text within links</li> <li>• Number of Backlinks</li> <li>• Links are not paid for</li> <li>• % Backlinks from your location</li> <li>• % Backlinks with your Keywords</li> </ul>	<b>Social Engagement with Site:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are local users sharing your site?</li> <li>• Are they Google+ Plus Ones?</li> <li>• Facebook users in your area link to your site.</li> <li>• Facebook Likes of your site.</li> <li>• Pinterest</li> <li>• Tweets and others</li> </ul>
<p>Both on-page and off-page work have to be done in order to be successful in SEO work.</p>			

## GETTING YOUR SEO GAME ON

A winning SEO strategy requires the right tools. For starters, **your practice needs a well-built, modern website that was constructed with modern search engine optimization in mind.**

Specifically, it should allow you to easily post new content, create custom page names and integrate with social sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. If your site requires a webmaster (or extra fee) to accomplish any of these tasks, it's time for an upgrade.

**FIRST: Knowing which keywords you want to optimize your website for is critical.** For most dentists, the following is a good place to start:

- Dentist + city/cities you serve
- Your practice name
- Your practice name + city/cities you serve
- Your doctors name
- Your doctors name + city/cities you serve
- Your practice name + Your address
- Your practice name + reviews
- Your doctor name + reviews
- Area of specialization/service + city/cities you serve

**SECOND:** Good HTML and site architecture are essential. When designing your website, it's important to work with a professional webmaster in order to ensure that your site architecture is easily "crawlable" by search engines. If not, Google will skip it when it indexes websites. Also, your site needs to load quickly and work well with mobile devices (e.g. smartphones and tablets) in order to achieve a good SERP ranking.

**THIRD:** Start creating content that lines up with your keywords. Don't overdo it. Remember, **your success in SEO starts with quality content.** Your website must feature well-written, substantial information that includes popular keywords used by patients in your area. Target one keyword per page and mention it naturally in your writing. The same keyword should also appear in the webpage's metadata (e.g. meta title, meta tags and meta description). Don't "stuff" (i.e. overload) your pages or metadata with keywords ... Google will penalize your site if you do.

**LAST: Get links back to your site.** Search engines want to see quality external links from respected websites connecting to your site. These backlinks establish your website as a trusted authority. You can achieve this by making sure your website is properly listed on major online directories. Sites like Google Places, Yelp and Yahoo will provide valuable links back to you! A good place to start is by claiming your Google Places page and making sure your NAP (**N**ame, **A**ddress, **P**hone number) matches that listing.

**The easiest way to ensure your practice is properly listed and linked to by sites across the web is with ReputationMonitor®, now included with PatientActivator®.** Futuredontics' easy-to-use online reputation management tool helps improve your site's SEO by automatically identifying all the important directory sites where your practice website needs to appear. ReputationMonitor makes sure the information on the directories is correct and the links back to your site are functioning correctly.

*Websites need to load quickly and work well with mobile devices to achieve a good SERP ranking.*

## 10 COMMON SEO MISTAKES

There's no denying that search engine optimization is complicated – and getting more so on an almost daily basis. So, it's not uncommon to get off on the wrong foot and make a few missteps that actually hurt your site's search results. Following are ten of the most common mistakes we've seen dentists make when optimizing their sites:

1. Exclusively relying on on-page content, like keywords, while ignoring important off-page work, like link building.
2. Keyword stuffing
3. Poorly written content
4. "Borrowing" content from other sites
5. Focusing on link "quantity" instead of link "quality"
6. Using images instead of text for headings and menus
7. Not keeping your site up to date – both in content and design
8. Having Flash on your site – it's not "crawlable" by search engine bots
9. Not using a professional Web developer to create a clean site that welcomes search engine crawlers and loads fast
10. Ignoring SEO because you're retiring. Remember: a top spot in search results will increase the value of your practice in a sale.

Optimizing your practice's website for SEO can be challenging. The stakes are particularly high due to the fact that **search engines penalize websites if they're found to be violating SEO best practices** – whether intentionally or unintentionally. Dirty tricks and Black Hat SEO tactics can actually result in Google, Yahoo and Bing banning your website. How often does this happen? An online search for "banned website" reveals over 196 million results.<sup>5</sup> The potentially "fatal" risk of a banning is why some dentists bring in outside vendors to manage their site's SEO. Others rely on full-service dental website providers like Futuredontics to ensure their sites are always compliant with the latest industry-approved SEO best practices.

*Dirty tricks and Black Hat SEO tactics can result in Google banning your website.*

## SELECTING AN SEO VENDOR

Few dental professionals have the time or expertise to successfully manage a highly effective SEO program on their own. If you choose to bring in outside help to improve your site's SERP rankings, **it's critical that you can know the difference between Good SEO vendors and BAD SEO vendors.** Picking the wrong vendor not only wastes money, it can potentially get your site banned from search engine results. Following are a few guidelines to consider when interviewing vendors:

### Bad SEO Vendors:

- Guarantee you top placement. **No one can guarantee what Google will do.**
- Say they know a person at Google and will therefore get you special treatment. Google has 53,000 employees.<sup>6</sup> 52,999 of them can't guarantee you anything because they don't have that power. And Google CEO Larry Page probably isn't your vendor's friend.
- Don't optimize your site. Instead they optimize a micro-site or mini-site that THEY own.
- Offer to post content for you, but it is content they post for others too. (This puts you in a position to get penalized by search engines for duplicate content.)
- Use too many keywords – most local businesses don't need to target hundreds of keywords. If your SEO vendor pitches this (along with a high fee) it's a warning flag.
- Promise instant results. Their short-term tactics can have major negative long-term repercussions.

### Good SEO Vendors:

- Are honest and tell you upfront that your **true SEO results won't appear for 6 – 12 months.**
- Optimize for local search.
- Provide case studies and references.
- Aren't afraid to provide detailed reporting.
- Develop quality, original content which organically integrates keywords. Ask to see samples.
- Have proven track records.

*Reliable SEO vendors provide quality, original content which organically integrates keywords.*

## MEASURING SEO SUCCESS

As with any dental marketing initiative, it's essential to track the results of your SEO efforts. Start by signing up for Google Analytics. It's a free online tool that you can sign up for on your own. **Google Analytics is important because it lets you see if the keywords you targeted are actually producing visitors** – and ultimately patients.

## SUMMARY

**Search engine optimization is an essential marketing tool for dentists.** A properly executed SEO program helps maximize your dental website's visibility during online searches by motivated patients seeking a local dentist. Though implementing an SEO strategy can initially appear daunting, the resulting new production makes it well-worth the effort.

## LEARN MORE

Since Google and the other search engines are continually refining their ranking algorithms, no single whitepaper can tell you everything you need to know about succeeding in SEO. We encourage you to learn more about search engine optimization by consulting the following resources:

- The Beginners Guide to SEO, [moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo](http://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo)
- A Brief History of SEO, [uk.copify.com/the-history-of-seo](http://uk.copify.com/the-history-of-seo)

- Top 5 SEO Myths – Ignore Them At Your Peril! [hallaminternet.com/2012/top-5-seo-myths-ignore-them-at-your-peril/#ixzz2aBRUD09I](http://hallaminternet.com/2012/top-5-seo-myths-ignore-them-at-your-peril/#ixzz2aBRUD09I)
- 12 Warning Signs of a Bad SEO Company, [womeninbusiness.about.com/od/internetmarketingandseo/a/12-bad-seo.htm](http://womeninbusiness.about.com/od/internetmarketingandseo/a/12-bad-seo.htm)
- Why Does it Take so Long to See SEO Results?, [brickmarketing.com/blog/see-seo-results.htm](http://brickmarketing.com/blog/see-seo-results.htm)
- Tips for Selecting the Right SEO Company, [nfib.com/business-resources/business-resources-item?cmsid=50297](http://nfib.com/business-resources/business-resources-item?cmsid=50297)
- SEO Explored - Common SEO Myths & Mistakes Explained, [honestwebsitemarketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/SEO\\_Myths\\_and\\_Mistakes.pdf](http://honestwebsitemarketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/SEO_Myths_and_Mistakes.pdf)

## ABOUT FUTURE DONTICS®

FutureDontics®, parent company of **1-800-DENTIST®** and **Patient Activator®**, is the nation's leading provider of dental marketing services. Since 1986, the Los Angeles-based company has dedicated itself to developing powerful products that help dental practices thrive.

Recognized as dentistry's premier new patient leads program, the company's flagship 1-800-DENTIST service has helped over 9 million dental patients nationwide connect with member dentists. Every day, thousands of patients get personally matched to dentists through their 24/7 call center or via [1800dentist.com](http://1800dentist.com).

PatientActivator — FutureDontics' communications, social and online reputation solution — increases production and boosts the practice's online presence with automated appointment confirmations and tools for marketing, social media, reviews and much more.

FutureDontics also offer an extensive library of dental marketing resources – including whitepapers, webinars and videos. With unlimited live customer support, dentistry's best marketing products and North America's largest dental referral website, FutureDontics is the proven way for dental practices to grow their patient base and increase production year after year.

For more information about our dental marketing services visit us at [www.futuredontics.com](http://www.futuredontics.com)

**To get a FREE copy of any our additional resources, including whitepapers, videos, webinars and more, visit [futuredontics.com/MoreResources](http://futuredontics.com/MoreResources).**

**For info about our suite of dental marketing products, call 1-855-230-1313.**

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> BIA/Kelsey, User View Wave VII, March 2010

<sup>2</sup> Optify, The Changing Face of SERPs: Organic Click Through Rate, 2012

<sup>3</sup> New York Times, "Google Keeps Tweaking Its Search Engine, June 2007

<sup>4</sup> SearchEngineLand.com, "The Periodic Table Of SEO Success Factors," 2013

<sup>5</sup> Excira Media, "You've Been Banned By Google. Now What?" May 13, 2013

<sup>6</sup> MacroAxis.com, "Google Number of Employees," March 18, 2013

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Disclaimer: This whitepaper provides general marketing advice. Please consult your legal professional to ensure compliance with applicable laws in your jurisdiction.