

## Internet Marketing for Dental Practices

If you've ever wondered about making Internet marketing an important part of your practice development strategy, consider this: Americans search the Internet over 10 billion times each month (that's billion with a "b"). One national study found that over 100 million Americans search the Internet for health related information, and that 70% said the information they found online influenced their treatment decisions. This represents a huge opportunity for doctors who capitalize on search engine marketing.

So, how can you capture a share of all those prospective patients conducting searches in your local area? The answer is search engine marketing. Search engine marketing (SEM) is a form of Internet marketing that seeks to promote websites by increasing their visibility and ranking within the search engine results pages. This is typically done using search engine optimization (SEO) techniques, pay per click (PPC) campaigns, and other methods.

In this article I'll focus on pay per click (PPC), since it's a quick and easy way to target prospective patients at the precise moment they are searching for the services you provide. Unlike search engine optimization (SEO) which can take months of hard work without any guarantee of success, PPC is immediately effective in driving targeted visitors to your website, typically within a matter of just minutes. All of the top search engines have PPC programs available. Google AdWords, Yahoo Search Marketing, and MSN AdCenter are the majors.

With PPC, you are essentially bidding an amount you are willing to pay for each visitor who clicks your "sponsored link". Bids can be as low as one cent (.01) per click. Your sponsored link only appears when a prospect does a search using your chosen keywords, so you have the advantage of targeting prospective patients who are seeking out high value services like cosmetic dentistry, dental implants, or any other services you wish to focus on.

You'll need to have a good website before you start a PPC campaign. Your website is where the prospects will end up when they click your sponsored link. You'll want to have a website that not only looks great, but also has good content related to what the prospects are searching for. I'll assume you already have a great website. If not, be sure to visit [www.prosites.com/tda](http://www.prosites.com/tda) (OK, that's my shameless plug for this article). ;-)

**Getting started.** I recommend starting with Google AdWords, since Google has the lion's share of all Internet searches. You can setup your Google AdWords account on your own for just \$5, or you can hire a professional to do everything for you. For those who are computer savvy, Google's help screens should provide enough information to help you get setup properly.

**Choose your keywords.** You want to narrow your focus to specific services and choose a bunch of keywords that relate to those services. Be certain to break out each service into its own group. For example, don't lump keywords for "teeth whitening" with keywords for "dentures". Prospects that search for one type of service will be focused on that service and not necessarily on any other service. Google AdWords allows you to segment your keywords into multiple AdGroups. This is important because you'll also be creating short ad text that will be shown with your sponsored link. If your ad text matches the keywords that triggered your sponsored link, you'll get a higher number of visitors (and avoid wasting your money on bad clicks). In most cases, a handful of well-targeted keywords will deliver the majority of your relevant clicks, so there's no reason to come up with hundreds or thousands of keywords.

**Create your ad text.** When a person does a search using one of your keywords, your ad text (with a link to your website) may appear on the top or right-hand side of the search engine results page. Ideally, you want to create ad text that is related to the keywords that triggered your ads. For example, create ad text

like “Brighten your smile today!” for your keywords related to “teeth whitening”. For “denture” related keywords your ad text might say something like “Get stable, secure and natural looking dentures”. When you segment your ad text and keywords into focused AdGroups, you’ll increase the number of clicks you get and convert more prospects into new patients.

**Set your budget.** Your monthly budget will limit the amount of clicks you get each month and the amount you’ll spend on traffic to your website. Pay per click means just that (you pay a fee for each click). You bid on each keyword, and that determines the order in which your ad appears. The higher your bid, the greater likelihood your ad appears at the top of the search results. You’re essentially bidding against other dentists for the same keywords. Google charges a click fee *up to your maximum bid*. For example, if you bid \$1 for the keyword phrase “teeth whitening” and the only other bidder was willing to pay just .25 cents, then Google would charge you .26 cents a click and place your ad above the other dentist. If the other dentist bids more than you, say \$1.10, your ad would appear below the other dentist’s ad and cost you up to your \$1 maximum bid. Remember though, you only pay when someone clicks on your ad and visits your website (it doesn’t cost you anything to have your ad appear hundreds or thousands of times). Google will only run your ads until you’ve received enough clicks to use up your budgeted amount for the month, then your ads stop running (until the start of the next month).

**Use Geo targeting.** Google AdWords allows you to target your ads so they only appear to users located in your local area. Without getting too technical, it does this by identifying the IP address of the person doing the search. It’s critical that you use Geo targeting in order to prevent your ads from appearing to users who are outside your local area; otherwise you could end up paying for clicks from visitors located far away or in other states.

**Use landing pages.** So, you’ve carefully chosen your keywords and have written some pretty compelling ad text. Your ads are being seen by hundreds of prospective patients and being clicked numerous times each day. Great! But where do they land on your website when they click your sponsored link? If you’re smart, you won’t just drop them off on your home page. Instead, you’ll want to send them to the specific page on your website that relates to what they were searching for. If they are searching for “teeth whitening” you’ll want them to land on the “Teeth Whitening” page of your website. If your sponsored link sends them to your home page, the visitor will have to navigate through your website to find what they were looking for. More often than not, they simply hit the “back button” and leave your website. On the Internet, people have the attention span of a fly. For this reason, you want to take them to the information they were looking for. This is also one of the greatest benefits of PPC; you direct what page they land on and get to spoon feed them the exact info they were searching for. Proper use of landing pages will dramatically increase your number of “conversions” (that is, the number of prospects who contact you to schedule an appointment).

**Track your results.** Google AdWords keeps a record of all of your account activity. You can view reports showing the number of times your ad was seen (impressions), the number of clicks you’ve received, the percentage of times your ads were clicked compared to the number of impressions (click through rate), your average cost per click (CPC), conversions and more. You can setup reports that are automatically generated and emailed to you each month. If you have a Google Analytics account (a free service) you can automatically integrate your AdWords activity in your site statistics from Google Analytics. The main thing is you want to track your performance and determine your return on investment (ROI) so you know your precious marketing dollars are being well spent.

**Start today!** Each day we hear more news about the economy slowing down and that we’re approaching (or already in) a recession. As times get tight you might be tempted to cut your marketing budget. Don’t do it! It has been well documented that increasing advertising during a recession, when competitors are

cutting back, is a great way to grow your business and get a better return on your investment than during good economic times. It's time to be astute about where you focus your marketing dollars and view them as an investment, not an expense. A pay per click (PPC) campaign can be an effective way to target high value patients seeking your most profitable services.

Pay per click (PPC) is just one form of search engine marketing (SEM). Other forms of SEM include search engine optimization (SEO) which utilizes techniques to increase your website's visibility within the natural or "organic" listings (i.e., the free listings). Ideally, you'll want to implement both strategies to attract new patients and target high value services that will keep your practice thriving, in any economy.

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