

Local Search Marketing for Dental Practices.

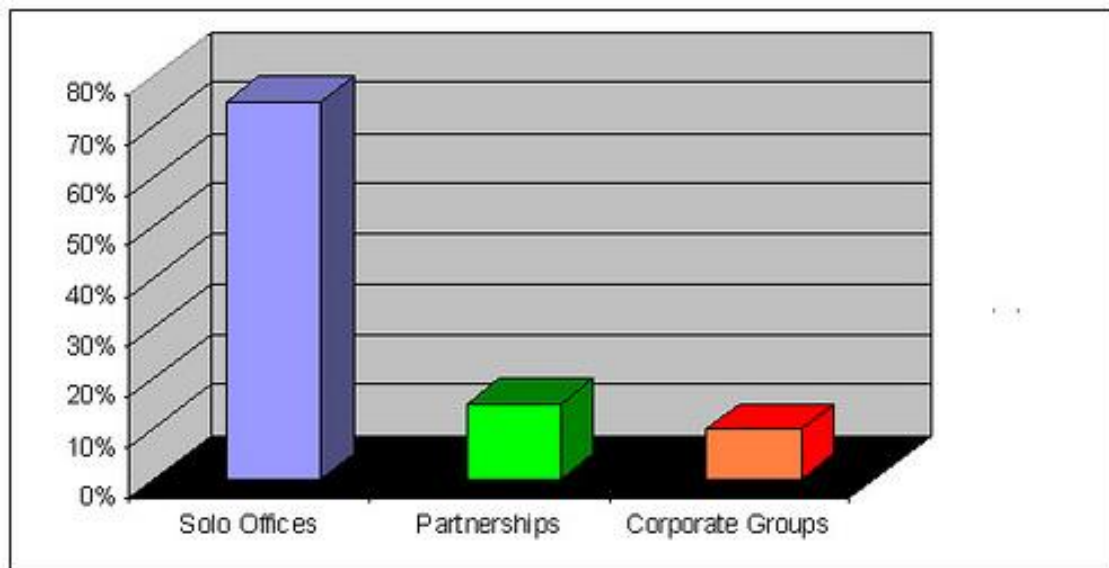
Don't let the market pass you by.

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Website Design and Internet Marketing



Local Search Marketing for Dental Practices

According to the latest figures available at the [US Department of Labor](#), 141,900 dentists were practicing in this country as of 2008. About 75% operate out of their own office, 15% are in a partnership, and the rest are part of corporate dental offices or clinics. Once the numbers are analyzed, this averages to about 120,000 dental practices in total, or roughly 2,400 per state. Each year, graduating dental students increase these numbers.



Practising Dentist Employment Distribution

If you're the only dentist in town, these numbers don't mean much. However, if you're trying to build a practice in an area with a dental office on practically every corner, the figures should give you plenty to think about. In today's market, you must give prospective patients a good reason to walk through your doors. In short, differentiate your dental office and make it stand out from the rest.

The Dental Profession and the Internet

As a group, dental professionals are somewhat behind the curve when it comes to Internet marketing (though they are catching up). There's a good reason for this. Most students don't enroll in dental school because they dream of running a business; instead, they're fascinated with the science of dentistry and want to help their patients resolve dental problems and achieve optimal oral health. Although many experts are proposing that dental schools should add a business component to the curriculum, few



schools offer this option. In truth, marketing isn't the priority (and that's a good thing); no one should face a dental drill held by someone who knows more about marketing than dentistry.

Most dentists tend to think of themselves as medical professionals first and business professionals second. In the past, it was enough to excel at your craft, hang your shingle, and let word of mouth do the rest. Now that thousands of dentists are operating under a generic "Dental Office" sign, no one can rely on this outdated practice. In fact, the most successful dentists aren't necessarily the most skilled. Instead, business-savvy professionals who know how to reach the patient and give the *impression* of excellence thrive in the competitive dental market. That's not to say that a successful dentist neglects his or her responsibility to the patient – just that today's dentist, like all small business owners, must wear many hats.

Traditional Marketing Tactics Are No Longer Enough

Traditional marketing strategies, like print and radio ads, are no longer enough in today's competitive world. In fact, many consumers don't read the newspaper, listen to broadcast radio, or even watch regular TV. Even a prominent listing in the local phone book, once recognized as the best way to reach a local audience, is no longer an effective tool to reach new customers. Instead of reaching for a phone book, your potential patients are now surfing the Internet.

Today's patients want detailed information about what they can expect when they walk through your doors, as well as testimonials that indicate whether other people have been satisfied with your services. If patients are looking for cosmetic procedures that won't be covered by insurance, or they have any type of phobia surrounding dental treatment, they will want even more information before making direct contact with your office. In short, to establish yourself or your practice as an industry leader, an effective, engaging website that provides a wealth of valuable information to the local community is a critical first step.

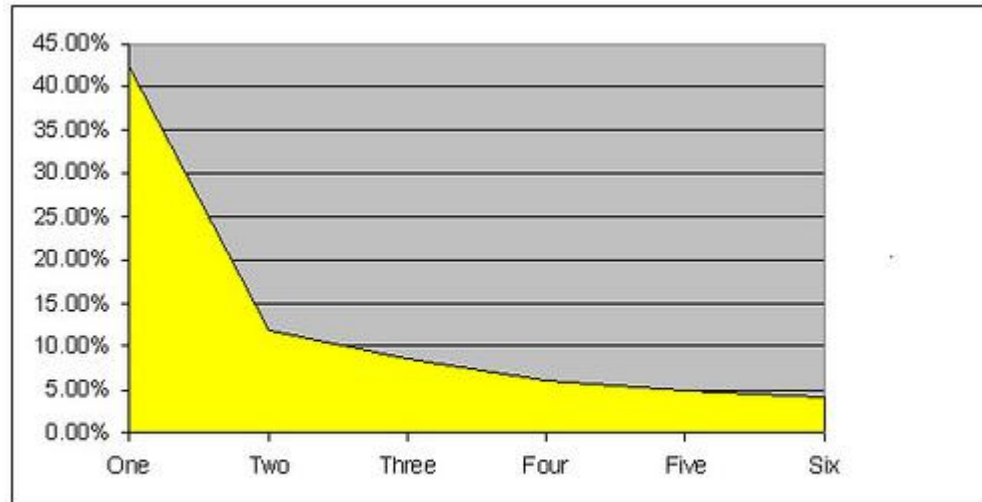
Creating a Localized Marketing Strategy

Assuming you already have an effective website for your practice, the next step is to ensure that your target market (i.e., local residents who will actually walk through your doors), can find your website and your online local business listings (e.g., Google Places, Yahoo Local, Citysearch, etc.). The more visibility your practice has, the better your chances of online success.

Traditional SEO vs. Local SEO

[Studies](#) show that websites displayed after page three on a Search Engine Result Page (SERP) don't stand a chance. However, they don't perform much better once they drop below the first

few organic (non-purchased) positions either. On average, the first result gets a 42.13% click rate. From there, the percentage drops to 11.9%, 8.5%, 6.06%, 4.92%, 4.05%, and so on. Only about 10% of web users bother to go to the second page before entering new search criteria and trying again.



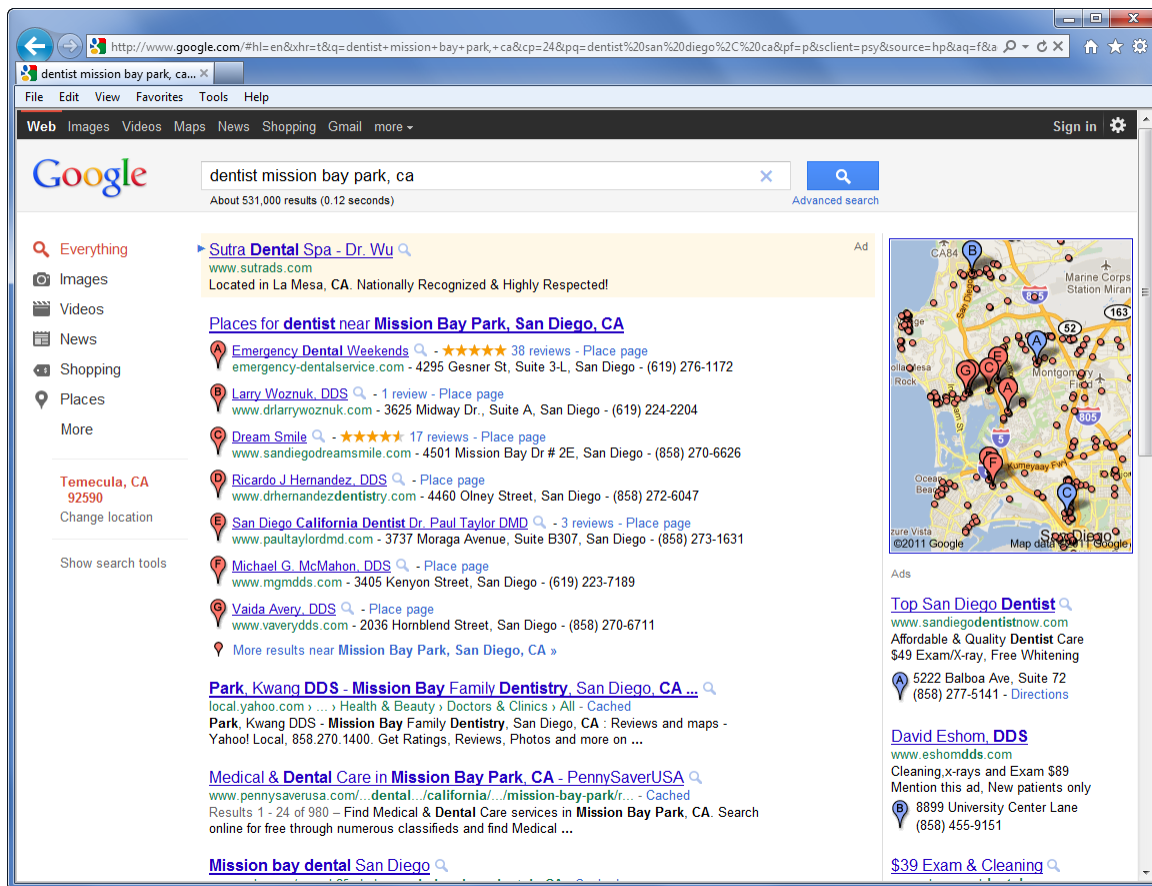
SERP Click Rate Based on Page Position

The masterminds behind Google have developed complicated algorithms to give each website a page ranking based on a variety of criteria, including keywords. Traditional SEO focuses primarily on keywords, content, and other on-page factors in an attempt to reach the top spot on Google or other search engines. In the past, the overall focus has been to take online marketers global to reach new markets.

However, reaching a global audience doesn't do much to help bring new patients through the door of a local dental office. What good does it do if 100 people in Sri Lanka see your website? Chances are, they won't jump on a plane the next time they need your services. Instead, local SEO focuses on reaching a targeted, local audience that is interested in your specific services. In essence, local SEO reaches customers who are ready to use your services and entices them to walk through your doors.

Localized Keyword Strategies

Keywords can be used to create a local SEO strategy in much the same way that traditional SEO takes a business to a global level. However, in this case, the keywords should include city and state names or even names of local neighborhoods or regional nicknames. For example, your website might appear at the top of the SERP if you use "dentist Mission Bay Park CA" as a local keyword, and this term is entered on the Google search page. Because Google usually knows where the searcher is located based on user profiles or auto-detection protocols, a prospective patient may not even have to enter "Mission Bay Park CA" to see a link to your page.



Of course, your results will vary depending on how many competing dentists are utilizing the same keyword phrase in their local SEO strategy.

The Value of Third Party Directories

Third party directories are another great way to bring local attention to your dental office. This can include business listings, professional organizations, referral agencies, or any other service that your target market might use to find a licensed dentist in the area. Include both contact information and a link to your site in any directory listing. If possible, use directories that don't charge for this service. Even if the fee is nominal, the public is skeptical of any paid listings.

Search Engine Tools

The most popular search engines, especially Google, offer a vast selection of tools to help web designers and SEO professionals boost their page rankings. Utilizing these tools to provide the best results is part art and part science, but they can add a tremendous amount of value to an online marketing



strategy when used effectively. Because interest in local SEO is growing at a fast pace, the search engines have created a variety of new products that will display your business listing in localized searches, along with a map, contact information, and patient testimonials.

Social Network Marketing and Coupon Services



Social network sites like Facebook and Twitter can also bring local attention to your dental practice. Anyone who has the time to dedicate to this technique could soon see an influx of new patients. While the typical dentist wouldn't have hours each day to focus on this type of activity, a token presence on Facebook and Twitter, along with the relevant widget on your main website, could attract some new business. Don't forget to update your page at least once a week and provide special offers.



New localized coupon services like Groupon and Living Social can also reach a very wide audience in your local area. If you decide to give this strategy a try, plan on giving a very deep discount to garner the initial appointment. It will be up to you to earn repeat business once the new patient is in your chair.



65% off
teeth whitening

\$75

buy now

65%
savings

1,247
sold

10 hours
remaining

Lil Wayne called -- he wants his grill back. And we're not talking about the Weber in your backyard. If it's a sparkling smile you're after, brush up on today's deal for Icing, an at-home teeth-whitening system from Bling Dental. Including shipping and handling, it's only \$68 (regularly \$199). Developed by Dr. Joe Crowne, these trays are an excellent alternative to in-office whitening

Example of a dental advertisement on LivingSocial

Brand Integration: Online and Offline

Many businesses, not just dentists, forget to integrate their online and offline brand. This means more than making sure your business card colors and logo match what is displayed on your website. Educate your staff on the services, features, and special offers that an online user will see. One of the easiest ways to lose that prospective patient is to have uninformed employees fielding telephone calls. Your goal should be to make your new patients feel just as good about your practice when they have real-world contact as they do when viewing your website.

Google Places: A Top Choice for Local Marketing

Google estimates that 97% of the population searches online when looking for a local service provider. One of Google's most recent developments, Google Places, is intended to provide this massive user base with the most valuable local search results. To help achieve this goal, businesses can create listings within Google Places with contact information, photos, and other information. In return, users are provided with a SERP that includes the following items:

- A consolidated map with lettered icons for each local search result on the upper-right portion of the page
- To the left, local search results are identified with the matching lettered icon to make it easy to match the business listing with the map
- A list of clickable hyperlinks that take the user to the companies' websites
- The address and phone number from the Google Places listing along with the number of independent reviews and the option to go directly to the Google Places listing
- A clickable listing of other referral sites like Citysearch.com or Yahoo.com that contain additional information about the business

Although this provides a wealth of information to Google users, Google Places offers an unbeatable value to the local business: the fastest route to the top of page one on a Google SERP. Currently, Google gives priority to relevant Google Places listings and displays these links at the top of the page. This could be the best way to reach the number one spot that receives the 42.13% click rate as mentioned above.

Of course, you want Google users to do more than just click on your website or business listing; you want them to take the next step and make an appointment. If you've created an effective Google Places listing, prospects will have enough information to be fairly sure your dental office is convenient for them before clicking a link. In fact, some new patients may place a call with the phone number listed directly on the SERP and never click a thing.

Image courtesy of [Glenn Fleishman \(Flickr\)](#)



Crunching the Numbers

Here are a few more statistics compiled by [ComScore](#) and the Local Search Association to illustrate the importance of a top ranking in local search results:

- Local searches account for 13% of all queries on the five top portals, and this number is growing at a rate of 16% each year.
- In 2010, 25.1 billion local searches were initiated.

- 20% of Smartphone and tablet owners, or 77.1 million people, use mobile searches to find local business while they're outside the home at least once a day. 88% of these consumers use GPS-enabled phones that facilitate local searches. This is the highest growth area for the local search market, with a 34% increase from January 2010 to January 2011.
- 8% of mobile searches are accessing business directories, while 18% are accessing online maps – the two areas that have been combined so effectively by Google Places. The year-over-year increases for each category are 26% and 41% respectively.



Optimizing Your Google Places Listing to Become Part of the 7-Pack

Because Google gives priority to relevant business listings within the SERP, it can't display them all. To do so would push all other sites too far down in the listings. In an attempt to be fair, up to seven listings that Google deems to be most valuable to the query entered are shown (most commonly referred to as the 7-pack). To earn your spot on the 7-pack for your area, optimize your business listing in the following ways:



- Claim your listing if it exists or create a new one.
- Double check your information for accuracy and completeness. Part of the verification process uses the listed phone number, making a simple error a big problem. The need to be thorough in this effort can't be overstated.
- Google attempts to pull together information from the Internet for each business listing. Review all aggregate data for accuracy.
- To make your listing stand out, add rich details like photos, video, branding services, services, and hours of operation.
- Encourage your best patients to review your business on Google. At one time, Google pulled reviews from third-party sites, but has recently stopped this practice. Today, Google Places only displays reviews and statistics based on input from Google users. This recent change affects dentists in two ways. First, existing star ratings on Google Places changed as external reviews were removed from the calculations. Second, any

dentists using third-party services that fed reviews to these sites have lost a key tool. Note: Google Places still provides a link to third-party review sites around the Web (though those reviews are not factored into the Google Places ratings).

- Register your dental office on other business directories that Google interfaces with like Yahoo, Yelp, and Citysearch. Web citations like these (though not counted in the Google user reviews) may factor into Google's formula when evaluating candidates for the 7-pack for each localized search.
- Make sure your business listing and information is showing up under the correct category for your practice.
- Avoid mistakes that negatively impact your final results like listing a primary number with an 800 or non-local area code or creating multiple listings with the same title, phone number or address.

Improving Your Local Ranking

In addition to optimizing your Google Places listing, there are a number of ways to improve your local ranking across all major search engine portals. These methods have been proven to help local businesses, including dental offices, draw additional traffic to both their websites and their physical locations:

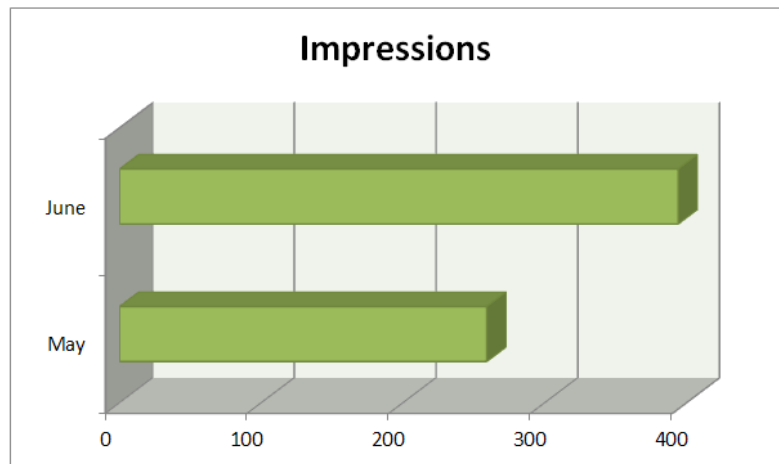
- Register your business with a variety of local search engine tools like the ones provided by Bing and Yahoo in addition to Google Places. Include any other local directories that are popular in your area. Many local newspapers offer this service on their websites.
- If your dental office is located within the US, purchase a domain name that ends with .com or .net.
- Optimize your keywords by adding your locality (city and state) or even a specific neighborhood you would like to target.
- Finally, Google and the other search engines regularly change the formulas used to determine rankings. To maintain a top position, it's critical to monitor your performance and make changes as needed.



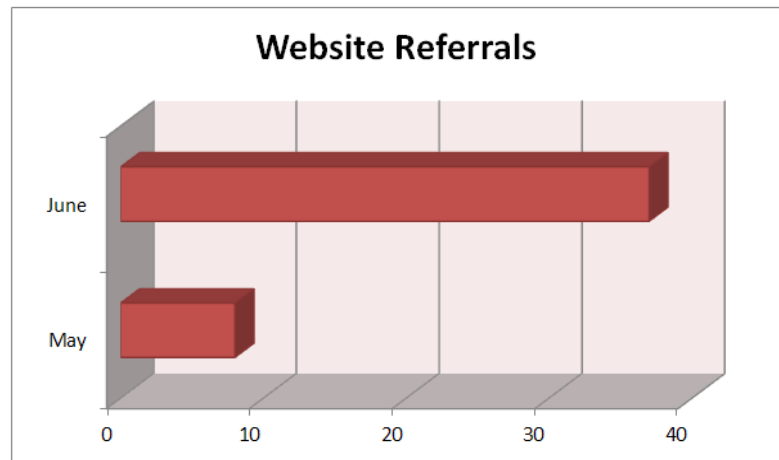
Local SEO and Google Place in Action – A Case Study

Recently, Sabine A. Purps, DDS of San Diego Fine Dentistry hired [ProSites](#), a leader in web solutions for medical and dental professionals, to optimize her Google Places profile. Within one month, the results were significant. Below are graphs showing the improvements in just one month:

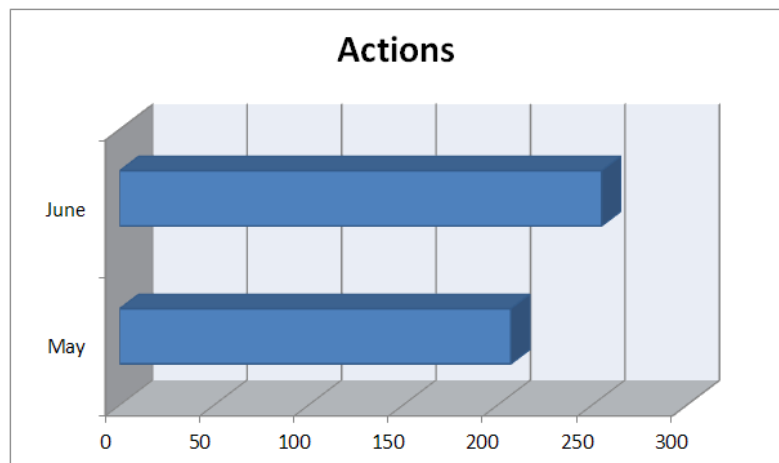
Google Places impressions increased 52.12% from 259 in May, to 394 in June.



Google Places website referrals (clicks) increased 362.5% from 8 clicks in May, to 37 in June.



Actions taken (i.e., both referrals and clicks for more information via Google Places) increased 23.19% from 207 actions in May, to 255 actions in June.



Local Search Optimization is a Must for Dental Practices

In the competitive world of dentistry, an effective marketing strategy tailored for the local community is a key factor to your success. Whether you choose to take advantage of Google Places or other local listings, don't let the opportunity to reach your target market pass you by.

If you would prefer to do what you do best – treat your patients – instead of taking on the additional role of local search optimization guru, ProSites is available to optimize both your website and your local listings (including Google Places).



For more information, contact ProSites at (888) 932-3644 or visit www.prosites.com.



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