

# Searching for Answers

Find out how your target audiences search the Web.

**T**HE MOST IMPORTANT WEB page to communicate with doctors and patients may not be one that you can control directly. Instead, it's the page of results that your potential customers see when they use search engines, such as Google, Yahoo!, or MSN. The importance of the search engine has been well documented:

A 2004 study by the Center for the Digital Future (a project by the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communication) found that search engines are the number-one resource for those seeking health information—used by 86 percent of those with health queries. Almost two-thirds of people seeking health information online use a search engine rather than directly inputting a URL, according to a 2002 survey conducted by the Boston Consulting Group.

Because a search engine plays a huge role in directing customers to sites, marketers are paying increased attention to how information-seekers carry out searches, and to how search engines process queries and rank results. The techniques they have developed, known as search marketing, are becoming increasingly important for both marketers and patients.

## Basic Strategies: A Primer

There are two parts to Internet search marketing. The first—search engine optimization (SEO)—looks at ways to raise a particular page's ranking on the search



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engine, with the hope of getting a site onto the all-important first page of results. The other—search engine marketing (SEM)—takes advantage of opportunities for paid placement of ads or links on search engines.

**SEO** A typical search on Google or Yahoo! may return thousands or tens of

**SEM**, also known as pay-per-click, refers to text ads, or sponsored links that appear at the top or side of the search results. Marketers can buy certain keywords or search terms that they think searchers will use. When users enter those terms in the search box, the text ads appear on the search results

The screenshot shows a Google search for "macular degeneration". The search bar at the top contains the text "macular degeneration" and a search button. Below the search bar, the results are displayed. The first result is "Macular Degeneration Help" from www.zeavision.com, with a snippet: "Promote Healthy Eyes with ZeaVision Supplements. Get the details Now." The second result is "Macular Degeneration aids" from www.optelec.com, with a snippet: "Magnification aides to help those with Macular Degeneration see again". The third result is "Macular Degeneration Foundation, Inc. - Eyesight Vision Disease ..." from www.eyesight.org, with a snippet: "Macular Degeneration Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the interests of those affected by macular degeneration and related low ...". To the right of the search results, there are two columns of "Sponsored Links". The first sponsored link is "Macular Degeneration? Low Vision? We can help. Read and write again. Free info www.enhancedvision.com". The second sponsored link is "CCTV Video magnification Discover VideoEye magnification for low vision. Live more independently www.videeeye.com". A third sponsored link is "Macula Vision Improvement Potent Full Spectrum Nutraceutical From The Company Eye Doctors Trust www.biosyntx.com". A green circular callout with the text "SEO" is overlaid on the search results.

With SEO, you can raise your Web site's ranking on various search engines, like Google, Yahoo!, or MSN. This will enable users to see your link at the top of their search-results page, thereby increasing the likelihood that they'll click on your site first. The caveat: It can take three-to-six months to improve a site's ranking. With SEM, you can buy sponsored links that appear at the top or the side of the search-results page. This way, you can link users immediately to your Web site. The caveat: Not all users will click on the ads.

thousands of results. To make the information more useful to searchers, the engines use computer algorithms to rank the relevance of pages, with the most relevant appearing first in the result list. Each engine uses its own techniques, but most of them rely on factors like frequency of key words, placement of key words on the page, the number and quality of sites linking to the page, and so forth. SEO uses design, coding, editing and creation of content, and other methods to improve the performance of a site.

page, linking users to a customized landing page on the marketer's Web site. Ideally, when searchers reach the landing page, they should see content that's relevant to the search term they used. A search engine's ordering of text ads is based on how much each advertiser has agreed to pay for a search term and, in some cases, how often people actually click on the ads.

Pharma marketing managers will find value in both marketing techniques. While SEO places a site higher



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brands or brands with new indications, the Internet is the first place physicians go for the most recent information.

### Case Studies

**SEO** A brand manager for a complex therapy for enlarged prostate wanted to improve search rankings and Web traffic on the product's site—both were falling below expectations of senior management. After assessing the site, the company found that the content was not consistent with search terms relevant to the brand or the condition it addressed. Rather, the site's content was focused on treatment issues. But when investigating a health condition, people typically search by symptoms.

To address the problem, the brand team included more references to symptoms, added links to other relevant sites, and arranged for other sites to link back to the company's site. Within one month, site visits increased 100 fold (by just over 1,100 percent) and page views increased by 340 percent.

**SEM** The same company also developed a SEM program. First, it purchased the specific symptom terms related to its brand that people were using in search engines. Second, text ads were created, and landing pages were developed to align with the information being sought by existing and potential users.

This resulted in a click-through rate of 10 to 15 percent of site visitors.

SEM can also help counter negative impressions of a brand. One brand, for example, had received so much nega-

minimizing the impact of legal and competitive advertising—the company made select keyword purchases. This helped ensure that the company's text ads appeared at or near the top of

**When investigating a health condition, most consumers search for information by inputting their symptoms. Offering symptoms-related information on your site could help improve its ranking.**

#### [SEARCH ENGINE STATS]

Almost two-thirds of online health-information seekers **start the search process**

using a search engine rather than directly inputting a Web site address, according to a 2002 survey conducted by The Boston Consulting Group.

tive coverage in the press that a search on the product yielded text ads mostly from lawyers seeking class action participants. To drive traffic quickly to the brand's online properties—thereby

search pages, reducing the prominence of the legal advertising. Over a three-month period, the program attracted more than 14,000 searchers to the brand's Web site. The rate of those who visited the page and actually clicked on the ad was more than three percent, resulting in 420 potential new patients.

Internet search marketing can be a valuable asset to a brand's overall marketing plan. It can help support existing patients, complete the acquisition of new patients, and meet the information needs of health professionals. SEO and SEM enable pharma marketers to appeal to a target audience that is seeking guidance. If your marketing team doesn't help them, someone else's will. ●

**Launches** Newly launched **Pharmaceutical Institute** will provide a wide array of industry-related information through a single online portal. Research and education materials are also available in the company's Raleigh, NC-based facility. » **American Healthways** and **Healthwise** are teaming up to market a virtual health coach. » **Connetics**, a company specialized in dermatology products, launched [AcneMedicine.com](http://AcneMedicine.com) to dispell myths and increase awareness of treatment options. » **Blue Diesel** designed a Web site for Millennium Biotechnologies, [Resurgex.com](http://Resurgex.com). » **Clinical Care Options** will partner with the **American Academy of HIV Medicine** to create online, interactive, and multimedia products to help physicians care for HIV-positive patients.

» A partnership between **HealthTalk** and the **Sisters Network** will bring the latter organization's breast cancer fighting campaign,



[getbcfacts.com](http://getbcfacts.com)

"Stop the Silence," online. The Web component will include patient and expert interviews, question-and-answer columns, and radio reports about breast cancer. » **Universata** launched two online products. The first was designed to speed the release of patient information. The second allows the exchange of electronic medical records. » Informed Medical Communications launched **MRxHealth**,

which will focus on alternative, non-traditional marketing, including the online medium. » **MBC** launched [getbcfacts.com](http://getbcfacts.com), a breast cancer awareness site, for AstraZeneca.

**Awards** Health and Human Services awarded contracts totaling of \$17.5 million to three organizations as part of its effort to improve health information technology: the **American National Standards Institute**, the **Certification Commission for Health Information Technology**, and the **Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration**.

**People** **Ken Freirich** joined Health monitor Network as senior vice president.

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