



WHY SEO MATTERS

A GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE
ORGANIZATIONS

 **COFFEY**
COMMUNICATIONS



An effective and engaging website is a vital part of your healthcare marketing efforts. Your website serves as your organization’s digital front door. It’s the place where people can learn about your organization and engage with you in all aspects of their care journey.

The value you get from your organization’s digital investment depends, in large part, on getting people to find and use your website. To stand out among the sea of healthcare providers online, you need a strategic digital marketing approach that guides patients seamlessly to your virtual doorstep when they’re in need of the services and care you provide.

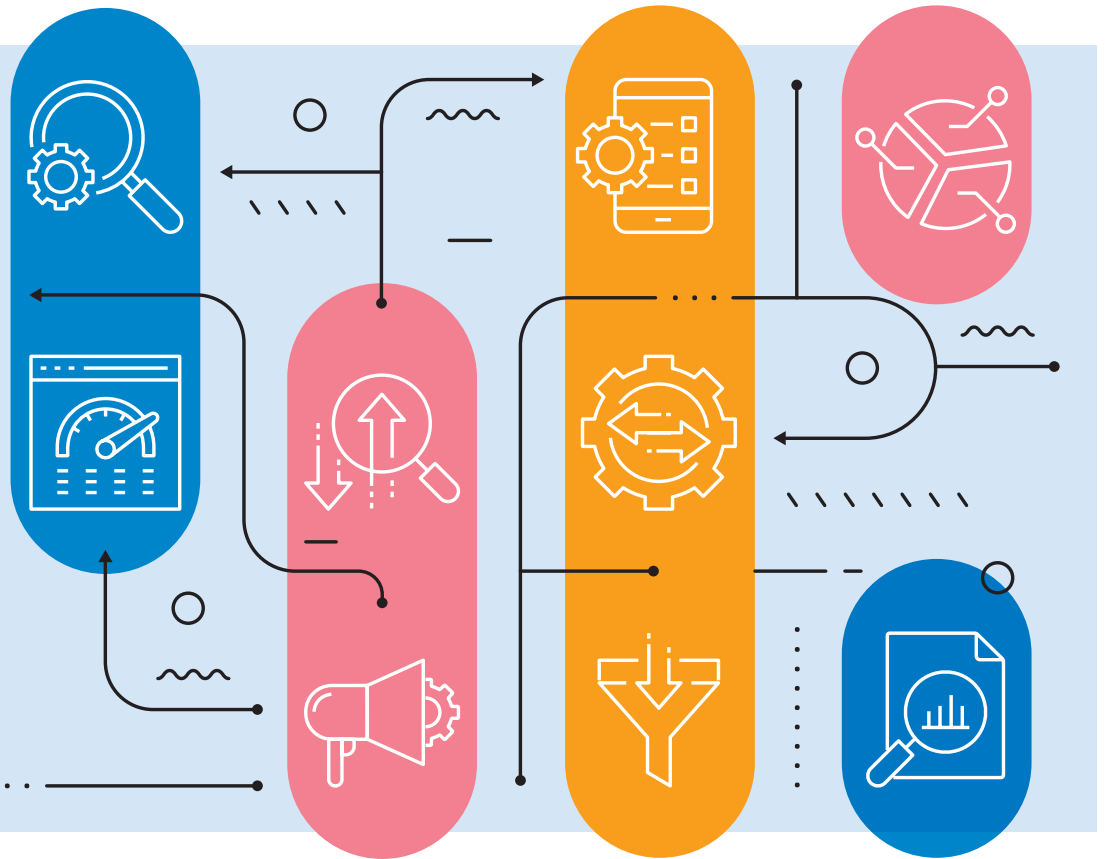
While there’s no single digital marketing strategy that is right for every organization, there is one tactic that most hospitals, health systems and health plans will find valuable—search engine optimization (SEO).

In this ebook, we’ll explore what SEO is, how it can help your healthcare organization and what you risk if you don’t invest in this digital marketing tactic.

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SEO BASICS



SEO is a set of practices intended to improve the visibility of a website in search engines like Google. SEO typically involves some or all of the following:

- **Keyword research** to identify how people search for a topic.
- **Content creation** and optimization to align with keyword research.
- **Technical optimization** to ensure the site functions well and can be understood by search engines.
- **Link building.** Though links have declined in value as a search ranking factor, the number and quality of links to your content from other sites still make a difference in where you rank.
- **Ongoing monitoring** to assess performance.

SEO vocabulary

On-page SEO: Anything done with the content on the page itself—using keywords in the copy, for example.

Off-page SEO: Strategies that take place outside your website—such as link building or review management.

Technical SEO: Tactics implemented in the code of the site—such as Schema markup.

Core update: A change in Google’s search algorithm that affects how websites are evaluated and displayed. There are typically a number of core updates released every year.

Keywords: The terms people use in their searches.

SEO Q&A

Q: How long does it take for content to rank?

A: A variety of factors can affect how long it will take for your website to see results once you start implementing SEO. Brand-new content can take six months or more to reach peak

performance. Small changes to existing pages may produce more immediate results.

COFFEY’S RECOMMENDATION:

Think of SEO as a long-term investment rather than a one-off tactic.

HOW SEO CAN ALIGN WITH YOUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Here are a few of the ways investing in SEO can provide real value to your bottom line.

SEO helps you understand consumer needs.

Google remains the No. 1 search engine in large part because it does the best job at providing searchers with valuable information. To perform well in Google search results today, you need to follow an SEO process that is consumer-focused. Steps in this process include:

- Keyword research, which provides insights into what types of healthcare services your community is looking for and helps you monitor trends in interest over time.
- Content creation, which uses the insights you get from keyword research to answer questions and provide helpful information that builds your credibility and encourages people to take action.

- Ongoing measurement and optimization, which allows you to stay in touch with consumer needs and adjust your content as needed to stay aligned with them.

Investing in SEO makes your website a more valuable resource for everyone who visits it—regardless of how they find you.

SEO helps you differentiate your brand.

Your brand's unique value proposition is an essential part of SEO success. Helping healthcare consumers understand why and how to choose you goes hand in hand with other SEO tactics.

Doing SEO also requires that you take a close look at your competition's approach to marketing so that you can

present your organization as a better answer—both for Google and for healthcare consumers.

A strong SEO strategy also builds brand authority and organizational credibility by putting you in front of consumers as the implicit best choice to fill the need that inspired their search.

SEO helps you grow service lines.

Optimizing your service line content helps ensure that healthcare consumers can quickly find your organization in their time of need, even if they're not looking for you by name.

Often, people searching for healthcare services intend to take action right away. If they find a competitor who offers a compelling message, they may stop searching before they even get the chance to consider your organization.



SEO helps you fill provider schedules.

As with service-line searches, when people turn to Google for help finding a provider, they are typically ready to take the next step. Often, people searching for providers want to see someone who is in their community. Some of the most common healthcare searches reflect this urgency.

Search terms	Average monthly searches (United States)
OB-GYN near me	396,000
Gynecologist near me	315,000
Pediatrician near me	266,000
Doctors near me	183,000
Cardiologist near me	133,000
Primary care physician near me	99,000
Family doctor near me	60,900
Orthopedic doctor near me	51,800
Oncologist near me	19,600

SEO helps you recruit providers.

Hiring providers is an ongoing process for many healthcare organizations. SEO can help by:

- Improving the visibility of job postings and recruitment efforts.
- Giving your organization credibility and visibility that position you in a favorable light when providers research you.

SEO helps you control costs over time.

A well-conceived and implemented SEO strategy can produce a steady stream of organic traffic and conversions for years—with far less ongoing investment than paying for clicks or impressions in paid campaigns.

The long-term benefits of SEO far outweigh the initial investment.

SEO Q&A

Q: When should I pay for search placement?

A: Paid search can be a useful short-term strategy when you’re looking for quick results for a topic where you don’t have an organic presence. For example, if you acquire a new line of business in a competitive vertical, it might make sense to pay for visibility in search results while you build content that can rank organically.

COFFEY’S RECOMMENDATION:

Carefully monitor the data for any paid search campaign to make sure that the keywords you’re paying for are bringing relevant traffic to the site and that your landing page content aligns with the ad copy.

HOW YOU'LL MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF SEO



One of the great things about SEO is the many ways you can objectively measure your return on investment. Here are just a few of the metrics your team will be able to use:

- **Rankings.** One of the first measures of SEO success is an increase in both the number of relevant terms that you rank for and how high you rank for those terms.
- **Traffic to optimized content.** Improved rankings for high-value terms should lead more visitors to your site.
- **Conversions.** If your SEO efforts have succeeded in bringing the right people to your website, you should see an increase in meaningful actions, such as appointment requests, event registrations or email sign-ups.

A measurement bonus: Keyword data can also help you understand how your brand is viewed in general and give you insights into how aware consumers are of your services and locations. You could use this data to help gauge the effectiveness of other marketing efforts, such as direct mail pieces or offline brand campaigns like billboards.

SEO measurement and HIPAA

Measuring what people do on your website requires careful consideration of HIPAA. Fortunately, there are a number of ways to measure the value of SEO without putting people's privacy at risk. In fact, in a time where having Google Analytics on your site may not be an option, SEO data could be some of the only information you have to let you know how well your website is performing.

- **Google Search Console.** This free tool gives you data about how often Google shows your site for various search terms and how often people click through to you. It also helps you understand your website's technical performance. The data here is collected by Google, not by you. And it doesn't include personally identifiable information like IP addresses.
- **Third-party SEO tools.** These tools typically estimate website traffic and performance using click-stream data—anonymized information about the internet journeys of millions of people who have agreed to share their data.

Third-party tools can also provide rank tracking and help you understand how your site performs for various search terms.

THE RISKS OF NOT INVESTING IN SEO



Look at your healthcare organization's website analytics and it's likely that you'll see organic search as one of your top sources of traffic. This is likely the case even if you've never done any work to optimize your content. If you're seeing data like this, you are right to wonder why you need to invest in SEO.

Here's a look at a few of the risks you'll face if you don't make this investment:

Lost patient volume to competitors.

If you haven't done SEO, it's likely that a significant portion of your organic traffic comes from people who are using your brand name in searches and looking specifically for you. In most cases, you don't need to do SEO to perform well for these types of searches.

What SEO can do is connect you with people who are searching for a service you provide but not looking for you by name. If your competitors have done SEO and you haven't, it's likely that they'll be positioned to receive this type of traffic.

Lack of visibility into consumer needs and preferences.

Doing SEO right requires you to really understand your audience and the types of problems they're trying to solve. For example, the keyword research you do will help you know what kinds of words people in your community use when looking for healthcare services, as well as the types of questions they're asking.

You can use this information to create great website content. But you can also use it to inform your other marketing efforts. For example, if you know that people in your community overwhelmingly search for "heart doctor" instead of "cardiologist," you can use this terminology in offline marketing materials like brochures to help better connect with people by using their own language.

SEO can also help you stay on top of trends in your community and help you determine what investments to make in services, provider specialties and locations.

Lost revenue for elective procedures.

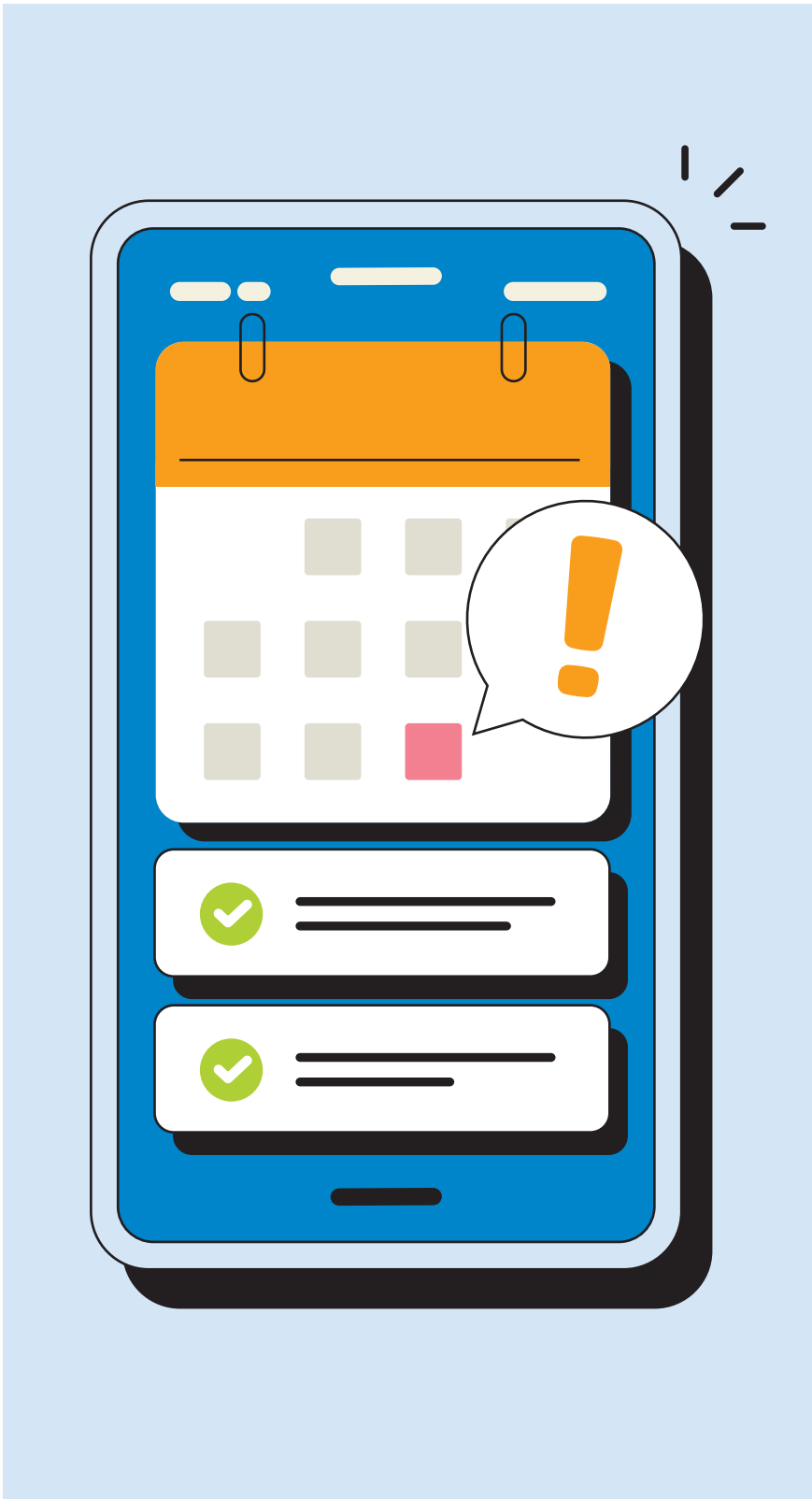
All revenue is important, but it's not all created equal. Increasing the volume of elective procedures can shift your payor mix by bringing in more revenue from private pay, which is typically much more profitable than revenue from other payor categories.

SEO can help by positioning your organization in front of people throughout their decision process with content that answers their questions and establishes your expertise.

If you haven't done SEO, you may not rank at all in these searches. Or you may have less compelling content than your competition. Either way, you risk losing these healthcare consumers to another organization.

Inefficient and costly marketing strategies.

If you aren't investing in SEO, you may need to rely on paid advertising to attract patients. This approach may be great for short-term visibility, but Coffey's analysis of healthcare website data consistently shows that visitors from paid campaigns have lower engagement rates than those who enter the site organically. In addition, while your SEO investment can continue to pay dividends after your initial investment, paid campaigns require constant funding to deliver traffic.



WHEN SHOULD YOU START SEO?

There isn't a wrong time to begin working on SEO. But there are times when it can be particularly useful to begin this work. Here are some examples:

- **Before a website redesign.** SEO can inform choices about content structure and substance and ensure that you don't lose existing search equity when the new site launches.
- **Ahead of a campaign.** Before you start a paid campaign, evaluate your existing assets and how they are performing organically. These insights can help you understand where to spend your advertising budget.
- **When rolling out new service lines.** SEO can take time to pay dividends, but developing a strategy early on can help ensure that you get results as quickly as possible. Think about SEO before you issue the first press release announcing the coming service—not once the service has launched.

SEO Q&A

Q: How will AI affect how people search?

A: This is a rapidly evolving area. However, it seems likely that advancements in AI and features like Google's Search Generative Experience will fundamentally change the way we use search engines and receive information from them.

COFFEY'S RECOMMENDATION:

Don't put off making an SEO investment until the AI question is settled. Search is always changing, but the fundamental goal of making sure your content is valuable and aligned with consumer needs has held steady over time. Waiting for the new normal before you invest in your site will likely only mean that you fall farther behind your competition.

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN AN SEO VENDOR?

First of all, hiring a vendor to do SEO for your organization is not a must. Some organizations are able to successfully keep this work in-house. An in-house approach might be right for you if:

- Your staff members have expertise in SEO tactics, such as keyword research, content optimization, link building and technical optimization.
- Your staff members have time in their day-to-day schedules to monitor your search performance and make updates.
- Your staff members have time to stay current on Google's frequent algorithm updates and the latest trends in SEO best practices.

If the above items aren't true for your organization, you may want to consider either fully outsourcing your SEO efforts or engaging an agency to consult with in specific areas.

If you decide to look for an agency, you'll have many options—from local firms to national organizations.

Coffey recommends looking for the following characteristics in an SEO partner:

- **Experience working with healthcare organizations.** The SEO needs of a hospital, health system or health plan are not the same as those of an ecommerce website. It's important that your SEO partner has an understanding of things like HIPAA and website security so that their efforts don't put your organization at risk.
- **Proven results.** Any agency you're considering should be able to give you specific examples of how they've helped other organizations like yours.
- **Experience with local SEO.** Unless your organization is trying to reach the entire country, your SEO efforts need to be targeted to the community you serve. It's important to choose an SEO partner who understands this.
- **The ability to create content.** Not every SEO agency can also partner with you on content. Make sure to ask about this so that you understand what your role will be in implementing any suggestions they make.
- **Realistic goals and promises.** Be wary of agencies that over-promise. SEO is a long-term investment. If an agency's promises seem too good to be true, they likely are.
- **A clear pricing structure and deliverables.** Many agencies require a retainer. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Just be sure you understand what you're getting for your investment.



GETTING STARTED WITH SEO

Ready to bring people to your digital front door—right when you're just what they're looking for? Coffey's team can help by providing a variety of services, including:

- Audits and analysis.
- Local keyword research.
- Content creation and optimization.
- Tracking and reporting.



To connect with a member of our team, scan the QR code or email marketing@coffeycomm.com.

