



Social signals and SEO: Is there a connection?

THE PRINCIPLES OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION, or SEO, are ever changing. It's getting harder and harder to "game the system," thanks to search engines such as Google gaining the capability to harness artificial intelligence to help them continually refine their algorithms. As soon as someone figures out how to beat Google's algorithm, a new version appears to close the loophole.

Trying to "do SEO" yourself is trying to outsmart AI at Google. Even if it could be accomplished, your success would only last a short while before the algorithm caught up again. Trying "black-hat" SEO techniques can be tempting, but doing so carries the risk of being booted from search results once and for all.

Most dental practices outsource their actual SEO, but there's another facet of optimization that you can leverage to help enhance your SEO team's efforts. Social media optimization, or SMO, seems to be able to boost SEO effectively, thanks to Google factoring in social signals (although Google plays it close to the vest with details).

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO MY PRACTICE'S SEO?

The direct benefits that social signals can deliver when it comes to boosting your practice's SEO are hard to pin down. In a 2010 video, Google's Matt Cutts said that social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were being utilized as ranking signals.¹ By 2014, Google reversed course, saying they were no longer using social media as a ranking factor, but some SEO experts are now saying social is back as a way to increase website rankings. Moz contributor Jayson DeMers says the most direct impact of social signals on SEO is likely to come from numerous people on social platforms sharing links to your website and liking or following your practice's social media account.² An article by Awario on Search Engine Land agreed but added that even just a mention on social media can possibly provide a boost, so getting your practice name into conversation could positively impact your website rankings.³

One older study showed a clear correlation between getting a lot of traffic to websites from social and higher website rankings in search, but causation wasn't proven.⁴ A newer study showed an even stronger correlation, indicating that producing high-value clickable and shareable content for your practice's social pages could be a significant asset for online visibility.⁵

Levi Flint, a junior SEO analyst for Leverage Marketing, says social media can help signal boost a website in two ways: by providing engagement with content and by providing the opportunity for link-building.⁶

You may be wondering, "What's the benefit of social media activity outside of my existing patients staying connected to the practice?" Besides the positive effects your practice's social media activity can have on your practice's website rankings, social media is also highly valuable as a way to build strong rapport with patients, patients' friends and family, and potential patients living in your practice's immediate geographic area.

Facebook has significantly improved the way online reviews on the platform can be managed, while targeted, paid ads can significantly boost your practice's online footprint and help you attract new patients.⁷ Hashtagged keywords, such as #PortlandDentist or #Invisalign, can provide extra visibility, as many mobile users now utilize their social media apps as small search engines and seek input from friends online.

Overall, your social media channels are fairly likely to provide a positive impact on your practice's website rankings in search. It's even more likely that you can build a strong community around the nucleus of

your existing patient base. Your practice can benefit from social signals in either case, as more visibility can deliver strong potential patients who are primed to join your practice family. **DE**

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