



## The New Patient Journey

Here's how today's patients find your podiatry practice.

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Ten years is a relatively short time frame, but many things have changed significantly in the past decade. Today, we're more connected than ever through our phones, email, and social media. If you asked your patients 10 years ago how they found your podiatry practice, they may have answered from a friend or physician referral. We're willing to bet that those answers are different today, ranging from "on Google" to a popular online review website.

While the journey your patients take to reach your practice is not always a straight line, it often begins with a Google search. Google processes 3.5 billion searches every day, making search engine optimization (SEO) a major factor in how patients find your practice. From SEO to website design, online marketing strategies have a significant impact on today's patient journey.

### Where Patients Search Online

The power of the Internet lies in the vast amount of knowledge available with a single mouse click. In an instant, potential patients can pull up a list of podiatrists, filtered by distance, office hours, or ratings. When executed correctly, SEO puts your practice in front of those patients, showing up in the top search results based on their search query. Good

SEO helps your practice's website rank for relevant search queries and keywords.

When your website features keywords such as "Chicago podiatrist" and "heel pain", search engines will show your website in the user's search engine results. Without SEO, your website may not appear in top results. Most users don't click

tween a potential patient choosing your practice or your competition.

A HubSpot survey showed that customers expect brands to be active on social media, with 95% of millennials specifically expecting brands to be on Facebook. People use social media to get a feel for a company's culture and to observe how they interact with customers. When

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past the first page of results, making SEO essential to getting your practice found online. A potential patient's journey to your podiatry practice will be very short if they can't find your practice in the first place.

### The Social Proof Effect

Without ever stepping foot through your practice's doors, potential patients have already formed an opinion about your practice. A quick Google Search of your practice can reveal a lot of information such as your online reviews and your social media presence. This is the kind of social proof, or social influence, that users pay attention to. Your social media presence can make the difference be-

your social media presence reflects the friendly and responsive nature of your practice, this builds trust in potential patients and makes them more likely to continue their journey to your podiatry practice.

### The Importance of Reputation Management

Online reviews can build trust and lend authority to your practice. An unbiased review or testimonial can heavily influence a patient's opinion of your practice. Whether the review is positive or negative, 86% of patients will trust a stranger's online review of your practice as much as they would trust a personal recommendation. A

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bad review could stop a potential patient's journey to your practice if left unmonitored. Reputation management is an online marketing strategy that is useful in monitoring what patients are saying about your practice on popular review sites like Yelp and Healthgrades.

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Potential patients look to reviews to confirm their decision to visit your practice. If they can't find any reviews, they'll likely choose another podiatrist who does have reviews. Another component of reputation management is the ability to ensure all of your listings are up-to-date on review sites to encourage patients to share their review. The only thing worse than a bad online review is not having any reviews at all. By monitoring your practice's online reputation, you have the opportunity to respond to both positive and negative reviews signaling

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that your practice cares about patient concerns. This can guide a potential patient closer to your practice.

### **Mobile-Responsive Websites**

Ten years ago, your patients were tied down to a desktop computer. Now they're constantly on the move, preferring a search method that reflects their busy schedules: mobile. More Google searches take place on mobile devices than computers. When a potential patient views your podiatry practice's website, they expect it to function seamlessly on their smartphone or tablet. A responsive website adjusts automatically to work perfectly on every device. If your practice's website isn't mobile-responsive, it could cost you a new patient.

Of course, your patients aren't alone in their preference for mobile. Google ranks responsive websites higher in search engine results largely for the better overall user experience they provide. Additionally, a responsive website is easier for mobile users to navigate than a mobile desktop version of your website. This helps to decrease bounce rates and increases the chances of a patient completing their journey to your practice by scheduling an appointment.

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If there's one thing your podiatry practice depends on, it's your patients. The journey a patient takes to your practice has evolved a lot over the years. In order to continue attracting a steady flow of patients to your practice, it's important to evolve as well. Embracing SEO, social media, mobile-responsive websites and other key strategies is essential to the success and growth of your practice. A strong online marketing strategy can benefit your practice at every step of the patient journey, whether you're a well-established practice or just starting out on your own journey. **PM**

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