An analysis of 65 medical society websites and a proven treatment plan to increase traffic.
There’s an **EPIDEMIC** of Weak Website Performance.

Clinicians and the professional societies that represent them are among the most trusted sources of medical information. Yet nearly all of these societies are failing to fully reach consumers online with critical health care information — and missing an opportunity to drive patient referrals to their members for timely diagnosis and treatment.

That’s the conclusion of Reingold’s analysis of 65 patient education websites created by societies representing physicians and other clinicians. Our review uncovered these key findings:

- Only **seven** of the websites are the **No. 1** online destination for information about the medical conditions in the society’s specialty area.
- About **60%** of the websites receive less than half the monthly search-driven traffic of their top online competitors.
- While the websites we examined collectively generate **28 million** monthly visits, their top online competitors generate more than three times that traffic volume — almost **100 million** visits per month.
As a result, instead of relying on the expertise of trusted medical societies, patients may be receiving critical health care information from potentially unreliable sources — including media companies, for-profit websites, and other less-reputable groups in the health care sector.

Our analysis also revealed that leading medical societies are not fully using their websites to refer patients to their member clinicians for the highest-quality care.

- 11 of the medical societies have no “doctor locator” tool on their website to help patients find a nearby clinician.
- Only two of the sites we examined adhere to all of the best practices we have identified for designing a website’s locator tool.
- Among the medical societies that do provide a locator tool, 40% do not promote it in the website navigation bar, greatly reducing its use by potential patients.

The **COST** of Deficiency.

**Why your website matters to patients**

Every day, millions of Americans search online for information on critical health issues, from asthma to the Zika virus. Because of their specialized knowledge and high levels of credibility, clinicians and their professional societies have a responsibility to provide accurate, easily accessible information.

In addition to providing education, they have the opportunity to expedite timely diagnosis and treatment. Too often this critical next step breaks down because the consumer does not know how or where to access appropriate care.

A “find a member” or “doctor locator” tool is one of most effective ways to expedite diagnosis and treatment. In addition to providing a necessary health care service, these tools deliver tangible value to a medical society’s members. For many health care specialties, the value of these referrals and new patients can be substantial.
The Value of Investment

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology estimated the lifetime value of a new patient at nearly $3,000. In 2016, the College generated almost 8.5 million unique website visits and over 180,000 “Find an Allergist” searches. Even if just 2% of those searches result in a new patient, the locator tool would generate an estimated $10.8 million in value every year.

A PROVEN Treatment Plan.

How the leading societies are increasing traffic

Search engine optimization

How do the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and other top medical societies succeed? First, they use search engine optimization (SEO) to generate significant organic (nonpaid) traffic to their patient education websites. Second, they drive member referrals with a user-friendly doctor locator tool and feature it prominently throughout their patient-facing sites.

“SEO is almost always the most effective way for medical societies to boost consumer traffic to their websites. A robust SEO strategy generates ongoing traffic to your site from search engines without the use of costly paid advertising.”

— Brooks Lape, Reingold Director of Digital Strategy

An effective SEO strategy begins by aligning website content with the topics consumers and patients seek. For example, if users are searching for information about a “nose job,” a section of your website dedicated to “rhinoplasty” will not receive a lot of visitors.
Using Google Analytics tools, web developers can quickly and easily identify:

- The key search terms that are most closely related to the medical specialty.
- The monthly search volume for each of those terms.
- The volume of website traffic that a site is currently receiving from those search terms.

They can also estimate how much of that monthly search volume an organization can draw to its site. Successful medical societies then build into their websites content on these key topics that is easy for search engines — and users — to find.

This approach can lead to significant increases in traffic. In 2014, the American Society of Anesthesiologists enhanced its patient-focused website, “When Seconds Count,” by including highly trafficked terms related to surgery. As a result, the site’s search-driven traffic increased by 261% year over year.

Credibility is also critical to SEO success. When returning search results, Google factors in domain authority — the trustworthiness of the website that’s providing the information. Fortunately, Google considers most medical societies to be highly trusted. But there are ways to raise a site’s domain authority even higher and generate even more search-driven traffic.

Table 1 shows how high-quality content tailored to patient needs and interests, along with high website domain authority, can significantly affect website traffic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Search Visits/Month</th>
<th>Domain Authority (0 to 100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical Society (.org)</td>
<td>173,000</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitor 1 (.com)</td>
<td>674,000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitor 2 (.com)</td>
<td>28,200,000</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitor 3 (.com)</td>
<td>23,000,000</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, the medical society has not developed the right content or increased its domain authority. Website competitor 1 also has low domain authority, but thanks to strong content, it generates three times the traffic.

Website competitors 2 and 3 have hit the sweet spot: strong content and high domain authority. As a result, they dominate the web on topics within the medical society’s area of expertise.
The easiest way to boost domain authority is by increasing the number of other websites that link to the site. That’s because when another website links to a site, Google views the linked-to site as an authoritative source of content. This is especially true if the link is from a very credible source, such as a government agency (.gov) or an educational institution (.edu).

One mistake that medical societies often make is creating vanity domains — brand-new addresses — for patient education sites. For nearly 40% of the patient education sites we analyzed, medical societies used a new URL instead of building on the society’s more authoritative address. With no history or in-bound links, these vanity addresses often have lower domain authority than the primary site has earned and draw lower traffic volume as a result.

A better approach is usually to have all web properties sit under the society’s primary domain. In 2014, the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology redesigned its patient education site, eliminating its vanity URL (allergyandasthmarelief.org) and folding patient content into its primary domain (acaai.org). The resulting increase in domain authority helped boost traffic to the site. The volume of monthly search-driven traffic increased by 139% over the same period in the previous year, while uses of the Find an Allergist doctor locator tool climbed 262%.

Reingold recently examined the website of a major nonprofit that was receiving 16,410 monthly visits in six of its areas of expertise (Table 2). That traffic volume represented just 0.3% of the search volume on those topics. By building robust website content and boosting the website’s authority, we estimate that annual search-driven traffic could grow to 500,000 visits within one year and 3.75 million within three years — 20 times the current volume.

### Monthly Search Volume for Relevant Keywords

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Keyword</th>
<th>Current Searches/Month</th>
<th>Current Capture/Month (% of search volume)</th>
<th>3-Year Target Capture/Month (% of search volume)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Keyword 1</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>9,526 (1.2%)</td>
<td>72,000 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Keyword 2</td>
<td>729,660</td>
<td>3,610 (0.5%)</td>
<td>65,669 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Keyword 3</td>
<td>437,130</td>
<td>975 (0.2%)</td>
<td>39,342 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Keyword 4</td>
<td>560,140</td>
<td>875 (0.2%)</td>
<td>50,413 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Keyword 5</td>
<td>72,000</td>
<td>1 (&gt;0.1%)</td>
<td>6,480 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Keyword 6</td>
<td>2,700,000</td>
<td>1,423 (&gt;0.1%)</td>
<td>81,000 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,298,930</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,410 (0.3%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>314,904 (5.9%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Doctor locator tools

Education is just one component of a successful patient engagement initiative. It’s just as important to persuade a consumer to seek timely diagnosis and treatment for a potential condition from an expert in the field. The best way to accomplish this is through a user-friendly doctor locator tool that is promoted across the patient website.

This process begins with an effective, well-developed tool that’s easy for visitors to use. Unlike the highly quantifiable results of SEO, the assessment of effective website design is highly subjective. However, there are a few proven best practices for website design to follow when creating a locator tool:

• **Make the tool intuitive** to use, requiring no instructions.
• **Minimize the number of inputs** required to use the tool.
• **Return results that are meaningful and relevant** to the user.
• **Make the tool easily “findable”** on the site and promote it across all sections with patient-focused content.

Conclusion

Medical societies play a critical role in our nation’s health care system and are uniquely positioned to not only educate patients on critical health issues, but also help ensure that they receive timely diagnosis and treatment. These societies have an opportunity to better serve the public as well as their members by enhancing their patient education websites and providing tools to help patients find local experts. It’s time for medical societies to increase access to the highest-quality information online and connect potential patients with their greatest asset: their members.
APPENDIX A: Our Study Methodology

To gauge the effectiveness of medical societies’ patient education websites, we evaluated each of 65 websites across 15 unique dimensions. We then analyzed these findings to produce our conclusions and recommendations.

First, we determined whether each of the 65 medical societies had a patient website or patient educational content on its website. We also examined whether the society provided a “doctor locator” tool for patients to find local experts for timely diagnosis and treatment.

Our evaluation criteria

When examining the traffic to each site, we analyzed the following:

- Is the patient website a subdomain of the society's main website?
- What is the domain authority of the patient website?
- What is the domain authority of the patient website’s top competitor?
- How much search-driven traffic does the patient website generate monthly?
- How much search-driven traffic does the patient website’s top competitor generate monthly?

For the purposes of this study, the top competitor is defined as the website with the most monthly traffic that has at least 10% of its keywords in common with the medical society’s patient website. Using this data, we were able to compare the traffic of the society’s website with the traffic of its leading online competitor.

To evaluate the doctor locator tools, we examined both the design of the tool (how easy it is to use and the relevance of the results) and its prominence on the website. Among the 43% of websites that have a locator tool, we determined the percentages of those sites that adhered to the following best practices:

- 31.5% – Search results are shown on a scalable Google map.
- 32.5% – The locator tool is well-designed and easy to use.
• 38.9% – An individual member profile is shown on a scalable Google map.
• 50.0% – Members are able to customize their profiles.
• 57.4% – The locator tool is linked in the website domain navigation.
• 61.1% – The locator tool is visible without scrolling on the primary patient page.
• 74.1% – The locator tool is easy to find.
• 81.5% – Visitors can search and receive results by entering a ZIP code.
Let’s find your treatment plan.

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