



Adapting Urgent Care Marketing Strategies to Include Mobile and Voice Technologies

Urgent message: As consumers become more dependent on their internet-connected smartphones for health information, urgent care centers must adapt their marketing content to mobile devices and include greater use of voice-enabled search and GPS-enabled marketing tactics.

ALAN A. AYERS, MBA, MAcc

When personalized technology started to become widespread in the late 90s and early 2000s, it changed the way companies did business. They were forced to adapt to new marketing tactics and develop creative ways to fend off competitors. Customers found that they had more choices thanks to the internet and were no longer afraid to explore their options.

Today, the majority of marketing is done digitally. Websites are more valuable than mailers, and a Facebook ad can bring in more customers than a billboard.

However, things are still changing. Smartphones are an indispensable part of daily life for almost all Americans. That means that the mobile arena is quickly becoming the go-to space for digital marketing.

To take things further, artificial intelligence (AI) and digital helpers like Alexa, Siri, and Google Assistant are making voice-search technologies mainstream. Smartphones even make it possible for companies to target their marketing based on geographical location.

So, what does this mean for urgent care businesses? It's a signal that our customers are changing and that it is once again time to change with them. Urgent care owners need to consider the impact of mobile technologies when crafting their marketing strategies.

This will be a key area for any urgent care business that wants to thrive in the 2020s and beyond.

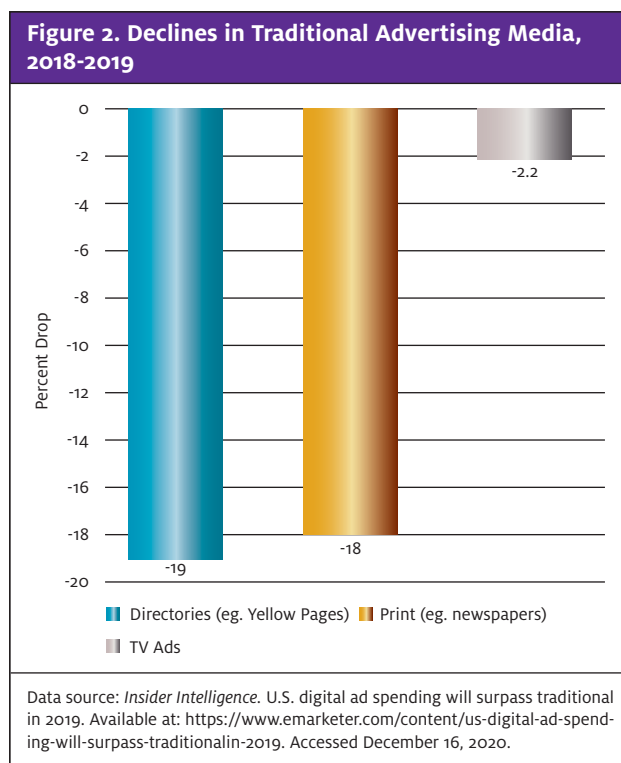
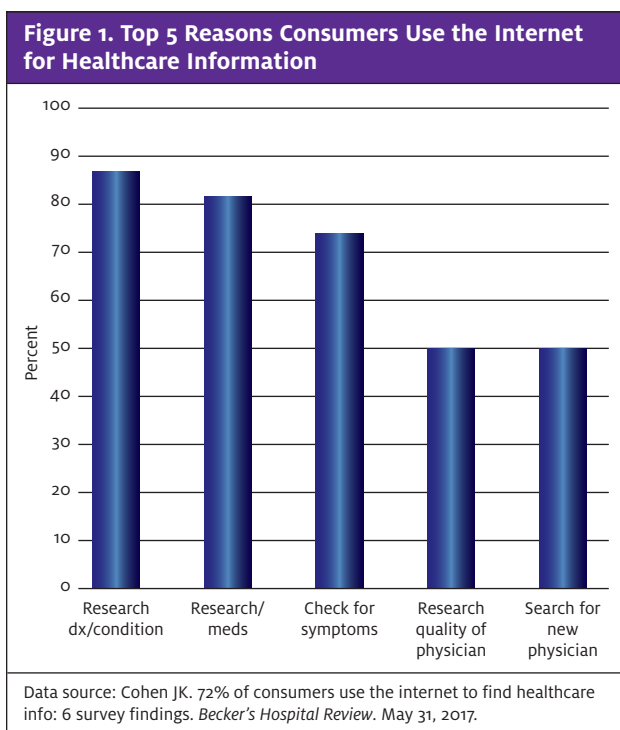


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Starting Point: Widescale Adoption of Mobile Technology

It only takes one look around to see that smartphones are everywhere. Data from Pew Research found that 81% of U.S. adults owned a smartphone in 2019.¹ That number has been climbing for years and continues to do so. With the market nearly saturated, smartphones

Alan A. Ayers, MBA, MAcc is Chief Executive Officer of Velocity Urgent Care and is Practice Management Editor of *The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine*. The author has no relevant financial relationships with any commercial interests.



can't be ignored when it comes to digital marketing.

In fact, some argue that the mobile space should be the center of all digital marketing—not just a component of it.

Of course, smartphones aren't the only devices that consumers use the internet on. Pew Research found that 92% of adults report being online daily and that 28% report being online "almost constantly."²

Those figures are less shocking than they probably should be. Almost everyone finds themselves in the 92% category while those who always have their smartphone on hand are likely part of the 28% statistic.

Thanks to the rise of smartphones, the internet, and affordable computers, consumers have access to unlimited information at their fingertips. That is especially true for those seeking healthcare services and information about their medical conditions. *Becker's Hospital Review* found that 72% of healthcare consumers use the internet to learn about their medical concerns.³ (See **Figure 1**.)

With that in mind, it's easy to see how digital advertising needs to be a key component of every urgent care company's marketing strategy.

It goes even further, though. The prevalence of mobile technology opens the door for micro-moments. In the marketing world, this refers to an instance where consumers are seeking out information and intend to use it

to make a decision. With a smartphone, people can search for something, get instant results, and make their choice in a matter of seconds.

Micro-moments are extremely valuable for urgent care clinics due the fact that they are fast and offer convenient services. We'll discuss this more later.

For now, it is important to remember that a mobile-friendly website is a must in today's world. In 2018, Google started using the mobile version of websites for indexing—where sites rank in the search engine. This means that sites optimized for smartphones and tablets are more likely to rank higher in organic search, ultimately leading to more customer views.⁴

Mobile Is the Foundation of All Digital Advertising

While optimizing your website for mobile is important, companies are also paying for smartphone traffic. Digital advertising is increasingly skewed toward mobile devices with more and more businesses throwing their dollars at smartphone users.

Data from eMarketer suggest that 70% of digital ad spending in the U.S. is dedicated to mobile devices. Smartphones account for 34% of all ad spending in the country.⁵ **Figure 2** suggests which media are declining in ad spending as a result.

Micro-moments are at the core of this mobile-first ad approach. Urgent care businesses must be prepared to capitalize on the moments where smartphone users turn to their devices to make a healthcare decision. A well-placed mobile ad can be the turning point that ultimately brings them through the door as a paying customer.

However, mobile-first marketing comes with many challenges of its own. It requires that websites be built with a mobile-first mindset. This means pages should be attractive on small phone screens and desktop displays alike. Moreover, sites should be optimized to load quickly, thus preventing users from navigating away to find a faster alternative.

The messaging associated with mobile-first marketing is also unique. It should focus on things that are most relevant to consumers who are looking for information while they are on the go.

Emphasizing the speed and convenience of urgent care is a great way to attract busy smartphone users. Promoting urgent care offerings like walk-in visits and text message updates assures customers that their time won't be wasted.

Content Messaging Must Be Specific and Meaningful to End Users

As mentioned, the internet has put vast amounts of information at our fingertips. While that's great for getting your message out to consumers, it also means that your competitors can do the same thing. A search for a common medical concern brings up a host of different options.

People see results from your business, competing urgent care centers, and even info from primary care offices, alternative medicine practices, and private blogs. This means that your content needs to stand out and be meaningful if you want to attract customers.

What does this look like in today's age?

Again, your digital marketing efforts should put your company's strengths front and center. How does your clinic stand out from other urgent care locations? Why is urgent care a more convenient option than a primary care visit? How can consumers access your services?

These are all questions that need to be answered. Fortunately, you can do so in a number of ways. Mobile-friendly content should be shared across all of your channels. In other words, you should have content on your website, Facebook page, online reviews, and blog. These are just a few examples. Remember, the more content you put into the world, the more likely it is that a consumer will find it.

Still, the content can't just be "fluff." Google's algorithms excel at sorting out content that has been posted to check a box. Urgent care companies need to ensure that their content is well-written and helpful to the reader. This makes it stand out from a search perspective. Ensure that your content is helpful by focusing on the needs of patients and answering the questions they are asking.

Search Is Evolving to Be More Voice-Centric

The rise of mobile devices has also made another technology popular—voice search. It is an easy way for consumers to seek out information while they are on-the-go. Without even touching their device, people can find answers to almost any question.

Essentially, voice search can be broken down into two types. The first focuses solely on voice and takes screens out of the equation. For example, this occurs when a consumer asks Google Assistant a question while they are driving and it reads an answer out loud. The second area focuses on a voice-based search that leads a user to traditional content. This might happen if a user asks Google Assistant a question but then scrolls through the results on their smartphone.

Unsurprisingly, Google is leading the way for voice searching thanks to technologies like AI and natural language processing. The tech giant is responsible for 93% of all search engine traffic, according to StatCounter. As such, where Google goes, the world follows.⁶

Although some voice searches can occur in the consumer's home thanks to devices like Google Home and Amazon Echo, most take place when the consumer is on-the-go. This means that people almost always use voice search when they are looking for answers to a specific question.⁷

Urgent care companies should focus on answering those questions when writing content for voice search. To do this, it is a good idea to get inside the consumer's head. Think of how they would ask the question and then write content that is rich in natural language—the words and phrases that people use in everyday life.

This is different from focusing on keywords, which rank highly in search engines but might not be as helpful with voice searches. As a result of these trends, search engine marketing is evolving. By putting an emphasis on voice search, using natural language, and answering questions clearly, urgent care companies can get their brand in front of consumers in a very effective manner.

Geofencing and Location-Based Targeting

Much like voice searching, mobile devices have intro-

duced another technology into the world of marketing—geofencing. Since smartphones are equipped with location-tracking features, it's possible to know where a consumer is at any point in their day.

From a marketing standpoint, this allows companies to create targeted ads based not on a person's interests, but their current location. That is a key point for urgent care companies. Since it is pointless to reach users outside of your target market, geofencing and location-based targeting can be very helpful tools. They allow urgent care businesses to focus their marketing efforts on consumers who are within a certain radius of one of their clinics. For example, once the consumer drives into a predefined area, they will start to see ads for the urgent care center. When they leave, they'll no longer see the ads.

This strategy could be employed in the area directly around a clinic or around certain high-priority locations. Targeting ads that educate parents about urgent care services around a middle school could turn them into customers next time their child needs care. Using a busy grocery store as a reference point and serving ads to shoppers helps raise awareness for a nearby clinic.

Estimates from Single Grain suggest that marketers will spend \$2 billion on location-based advertising by 2023. This area presents a huge opportunity for urgent care businesses thanks to the relatively small size of their markets. Thankfully, smartphones make it easier than ever to use geofenced advertising to target ideal consumers.⁸

Google My Business—Your Digital Address

It wouldn't be right to discuss digital marketing strategies without mentioning one of the most valuable tools of all. Google My Business is a free resource that gives your company the ability to manage how it is presented to searchers.⁹ It consists of a single, streamlined dashboard and gives local businesses a huge boost in their target markets.

Of course, Google My Business needs to be set up properly before it can start delivering those benefits. Companies need to ensure that they upload the correct contact information, website address, and hours into the platform. Then when a user searches for something like "urgent care near me," the Google My Business profile is presented to them.

Google's algorithms prioritize local businesses based on factors like how close they are to the user and how relevant the services are. Companies with accurate, updated information stand a better chance of ranking highly in the local businesses category.¹⁰

When it comes to bringing in customers, that ranking

is extremely important. Forbes estimates that businesses listed in the top five positions of a search account for nearly two-thirds of all clicks. In other words, creating a shining Google My Business profile can drive more traffic to your site and more traffic through your doors.

Another noteworthy feature of this tool is the fact that customers can post reviews about your company. After visiting, consumers leave a star rating along with a comment about their experience.

This can be both good and bad. Positive reviews help rank your business higher in the search index. Reviews that discuss a positive experience also impact consumer decision-making and help draw people in.¹¹ On the flipside, a multitude of negative reviews can scare potential customers away before they even experience your services for themselves.

In Conclusion

Digital marketing has changed dramatically in recent years thanks to the record popularity of smartphones and a shift toward mobile-first searching. Urgent care owner/operators need to be prepared to meet these challenges and respond with appropriate marketing campaigns.

Doing so early can get your business ahead of the competition and bring new consumers through the doors. Failing to jump on trends like voice search, geofencing, and mobile-friendly content will leave your business struggling to catch up in the coming years. ■

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