

# ASC FOCUS

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## Put Digital Marketing to Work for Your ASC

Content, SEO and careful monitoring are key

BY NADER ASHWAY



If you are considering a marketing program for your ASC, the amount of detail involved could easily become overwhelming. Especially when it comes to digital marketing, the technical jargon that you hear from consultants and agencies could be confusing. Keeping a few basic concepts in mind, you can develop a successful program that will help you reach an ever-expanding audience with good news about your ASC.

### Understanding Healthcare Consumers

The first and most important principle of ASC marketing: We must understand patients and how they “shop.”

Numerous studies have shown that most patients turn to the internet first before ever picking up a phone or making a random visit to an ASC. Their online search is typically split into two parts.

First, they seek general information about their disease state, and/or about procedures they are considering. Since ASCs are performing surgical procedures, it is likely that these consumers are seeking as much information as possible on what a “typical” surgery looks like.

The second part is most often centered on selecting a specific doctor or facility, and your ASC can have an important influence in this process.

According to a large-scale survey of US healthcare consumers published by Deloitte in 2018, 50 percent of all healthcare consumers’ first concern is finding out whether or not a facility or a particular physician is in network for their health insurance.

Other elements that surveyed consumers considered most important:



- 46 percent—Is the facility conveniently located?
- 39 percent—What is the reputation of the facility and/or its physicians?
- 32 percent—Are there convenient hours?
- 31 percent—What will I have to pay?

These are all informational elements that you can help healthcare consumers find easily on your website.

### Build a Strong Website

The first and most important element of any digital marketing program will be the quality and usability of your ASC’s website. It is your first and best opportunity to make your first and best impression on potential surgical patients in your area, and also your best chance to tackle the really important aspect of marketing: showing how you are different from any other facility.

A quick checklist for your ASC website should include easy-to-find answers on almost every aspect of your facility and certain technical details:

For the consumer:

1. location(s), hours, contact information;
2. the types of procedures your ASC performs;
3. the staff, including bios of each physician;
4. insurance and payment information;
5. “self-serve” options, such as booking consultations online or chatting with a practice administrator; and
6. lots of marketing material on the procedures and medical conditions you address, such as brochures, charts, images, infographics and videos.

For online efficiency the site:

1. should be optimized for all devices: mobile phones, tablets and laptop and desktop computers;
2. should have a strong search engine optimization (SEO) strategy (more on that later); and
3. should have Google Analytics attached so you or an agency partner can measure campaign effectiveness and referral sources.

The advice and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not represent official Ambulatory Surgery Center Association policy or opinion.

### Create Valuable Content

Your website is basically a repository of content, so your first task should be to develop user-friendly content. Content provides multiple benefits for your ASC, including the opportunity to help prospective patients get educated and the opportunity to pitch your point of view. The biggest advantage of content is in the SEO value it provides.

Content can take many forms and the best websites will have some combination of these valuable content elements:

- videos;
- patient testimonials;
- procedural descriptions (preop, peri-operative information, postop, etc.);
- virtual tour(s) of your facility;
- surveys and/or polls;
- blogs;
- glossaries;
- images/infographics; and
- brochures—either one general brochure about the ASC or various brochures about each practice area.

With good content on your website, you also create opportunities to drive patient inquiries right to your ASC. Include a data capture form to contact patients directly or to track who downloaded a brochure. Then you have the opportunity to email these new contacts with new information as it becomes available. Your website is a great conversation-starting tool.

### Search Marketing

As mentioned earlier, most healthcare patients begin their online journey at a search engine like Google. They type in either the disease name or the symptoms they might be experiencing, or if they are in the later stages of investigation, what a specific surgery entails.

Given that so many patient journeys begin with the search engine, ASCs should leverage search—both paid and organic—as much and as often as possible. Let's look at the two primary forms of searching.

### SEO (Organic)

Search engine optimization or SEO relates to a technical undertaking of optimizing your website content around specific keywords related to your facility or your primary care area, such as “lumbar spine surgery” or “gall bladder removal.” SEO is typically done by a website developer or an SEO expert who has access to the content on your website. Important factors impacting SEO:

Keywords in:

- content—blogs, articles, web pages, etc.;
- header tags (H1, H2, H3, etc.); and
- alt tags (image descriptions).

Other SEO elements:

- site traffic;
- internal linking;
- inbound/outbound linking;
- mobile responsiveness; and
- technical SEO (site speed, structured data, security).

Although you will pay for someone to “optimize” your website for you, SEO is technically free. It creates long-term value for your site for anyone searching any of your relevant keywords. SEO is set up once and should be optimized periodically—the content on your website should change/update at least once per month—but essentially lasts forever and yields more benefits and greater return on investment (ROI) the longer it exists.

### SEM (Paid)

SEM stands for search engine marketing and is primarily a form of paid advertising. In this powerful form of marketing, your ads can show at the top of search engine results pages (SERP) when people conduct searches that are related to your ASC or primary practice area. The amount you pay will depend on a number of factors, includ-



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ing how long the ads run, the level of competition for the keywords you want to be associated with, and the geographic area you want to cover. It can be expensive but also lucrative in terms of generating clicks to your website or other content.

This matchup of immediate consumer intent and perfectly timed ad placement is what makes SEM so valuable for ASC marketing. Outside of a strong website, ASCs can make great strides in reaching potential patients by leveraging both paid and organic search.

### Social Media

Many marketing agencies are hawking the value of having a strong social presence. While this is true for certain companies, it gets a little more complicated for ASCs. In general, it is difficult to communicate any valuable information on Facebook, for instance, without first navigating a minefield of compliance issues, especially the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)* Title II privacy regulations.

If you can navigate those issues, however, social media could provide another opportunity for your ASC to be more visible to your immediate community, engage with potential patients and brag about your successes. It also is possible that some of your physicians might already have active social profiles, and you will want to be sure that they are integrated into the profile of your ASC.

Remember too that once your ASC is on social media, you do not necessarily control the conversation; you can only participate and steer. If you are thinking about using social media, consider working with a partner that can help you generate content on an ongoing basis and keep a fresh perspective on how your ASC is different or special in some way, all the while being careful and compliant.



### Display Advertising

Display ads, also called banner ads or interstitials, are an excellent way to ensure that a large number of people see your message. Like many other forms of advertising, the interaction time is short and, therefore, you must crystallize your most important message into the fewest words possible, usually by relating some core benefit to the potential patient.

Display advertising is a paid marketing channel, so you must choose carefully where you advertise. For ASCs, there are limited places to advertise but since you can target by ZIP code, almost anywhere that your audience might be is likely to be a good match. Your ASC can advertise on other medical websites or on general health and wellness sites and, depending on your specific area of treatment, there might be certain contextualized places to advertise. For instance, if your ASC provides pediatric ear, nose and throat surgeries, you might want to place ads where parents are looking up various information for their children, like education sites and vacation sites. Remember that ads on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, also are display advertising opportunities.

### Email

Once you have a patient inquiry, you should work to garner an email address so you can stay in contact. You can keep both patients and patient prospects up-to-date about developments at your facility, such as new physicians joining the practice, new services offered and new equipment. Email is an excellent add-on to any of your digital marketing activities because it is relatively inexpensive and easy to scale and measure.

### Mobile

Similar to email, you can keep patients and anyone else who offers their mobile number up-to-date on your ASC through periodic text messaging. You might even consider developing an app that allows patients to stay informed with calendar updates, reminders for follow-up visits and even individualized content, like videos, rehab plans and therapy options.

### Summary

All ASCs should employ some combination of digital marketing activities if they want to capitalize on prospective patients. While it might seem a little difficult to manage, digital marketing is highly measurable, and you can see—often in real time—exactly how your marketing activity is performing.

Start with a good hard look at your website, then carefully integrate at least two other channels to provide a framework for potential patients to become more educated on your ASC's services and specialties. To be as effective as possible, consider engaging with a partner—like a marketing/advertising or digital services agency—that understands these channels and can handle the detail and labor associated with building this kind of marketing system. «

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