

How to reduce the complexity

of patient acquisition



WebMD Ignite™

Introduction

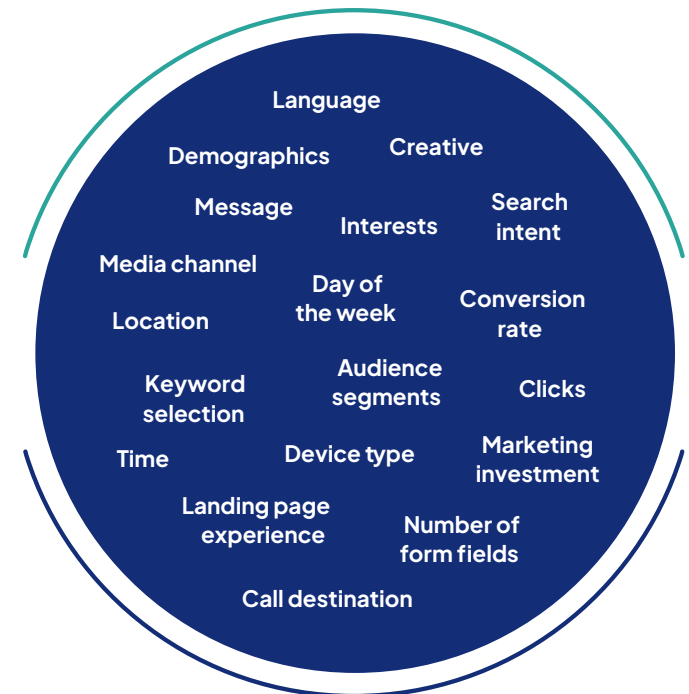
With the proliferation of digital channels and healthcare professionals, consumers are shifting how they make healthcare decisions. As opposed to visiting the websites of hospitals and healthcare providers, roughly 77% of consumers are searching a variety of digital channels as they embark on the “new-normal” patient journey.¹ This shift accounts for an estimated 350,000+ decisions that need to be made when creating a digital strategy that ensures you are front and center wherever your audience is.

The good news is that the complexity of patient acquisition can be reduced. In this dynamic — but opportunistic — digital marketing landscape, you have an array of opportunities to engage consumers at every stage in their healthcare journey. It starts by gaining insights into your market, understanding the behaviors of target consumers, and using a variety of engagement methods to continually attract high-value patients. All of which must be accomplished in a budget-friendly fashion, of course.



350,000+

Decisions need
to be made



ONE

New patient
converted

Incorporate these 5 fundamental priorities into your strategy

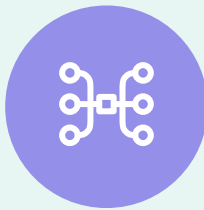
To build confidence in your ability to acquire patients and achieve your growth goals, it's imperative to:



Develop a clear picture
of consumer demand in
your market



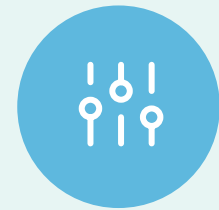
Understand how
consumers search



Create a balanced
approach of channels
and tactics



Speak their language



Track your new patient
key performance
indicators (KPIs)



①

Develop a clear picture of consumer demand in your market

The top goal for any healthcare marketer is, “How do we find the right potential customers to engage?”

Crafting an effective digital advertising plan that casts a wide net and maximizes every dollar is a critical part of the answer. Many marketers want a formula to determine the optimal digital advertising mix, but the answer differs based on your goals and market size.

For example, if your goal is to grow orthopedics, at a minimum you would want to assess how many people in your market searched for orthopedic services or providers. Alternately, suppose you are launching a new service line and want to give it maximum exposure to quickly grow market share. Demand may look small, but you won’t know its potential value without exploring adjacent markets or consumers’ appetite to travel distances for better quality care.



Think three to 12 months ahead

Using monthly search volume estimates available in your Google Ads account or similar search engine marketing (SEM) services can provide a good indication of what's relevant to consumers in your market. Take it one step further by [using propensity models to predict demand](#) based on your patient and consumer data. With access to data science and statistical models, you can accurately target consumers most likely to need services in the next three, six, and 12 months.

Between Google Trends, digital advertising services, and predictive intelligence, you will have a powerful picture of where your demand lies and how to direct marketing spend to maximize return. Without these refined targeting methods, you'll waste scarce marketing budget by reaching a lot of people who don't need your services (and miss many who do).



2

Understand how consumers search

Searches start with a question

Today, the journey that consumers take toward making decisions about their health looks like a standard consumer purchasing funnel: They start with a question. Actually, almost 80% of patients start their healthcare journey search by asking questions — and the older they are, the more they search.¹ Perhaps even more staggering, 70,000 health-related searches take place on Google every minute, or roughly one billion searches every day.² With numbers like these, you clearly need to have a strategy in place to dominate the landscape.

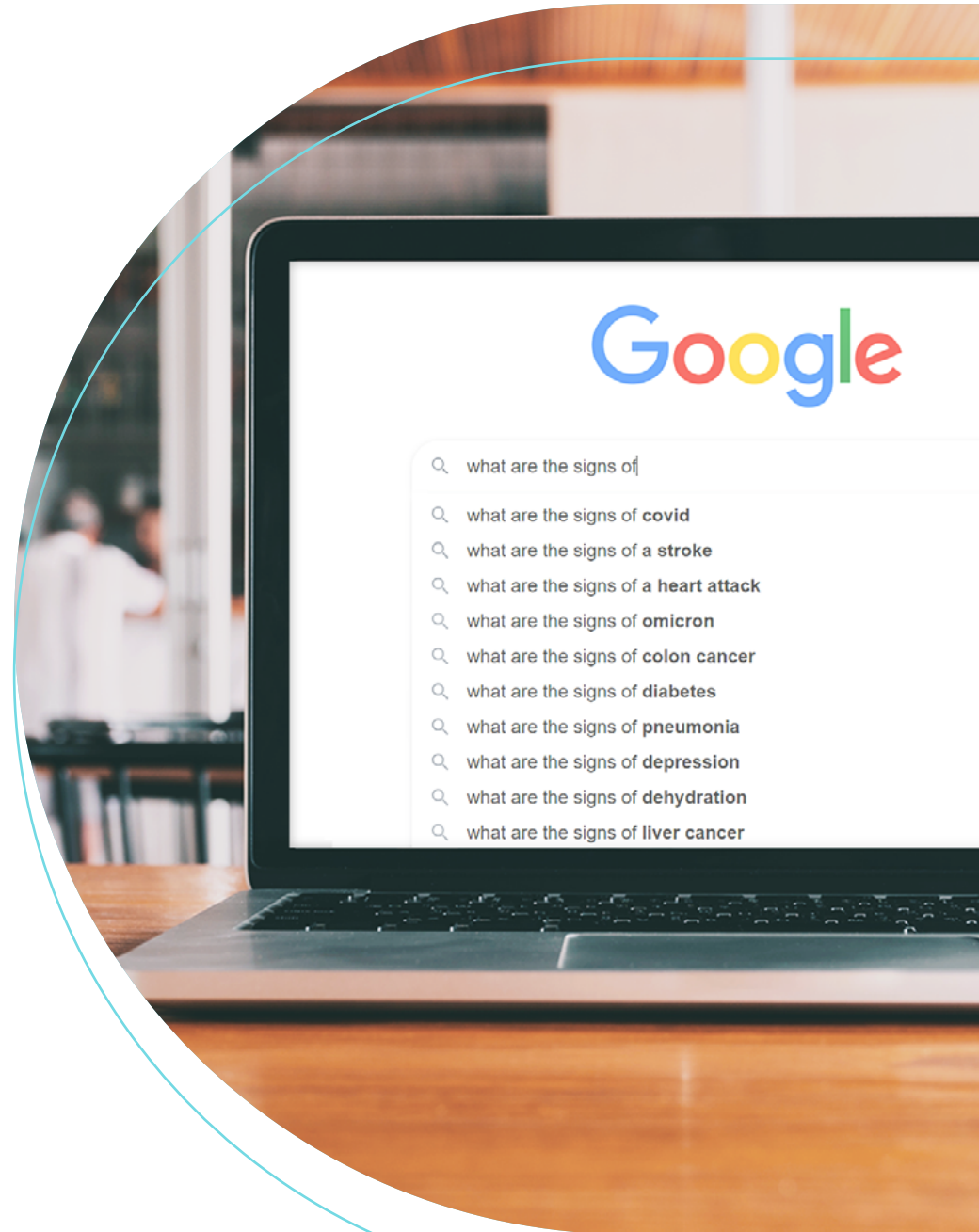
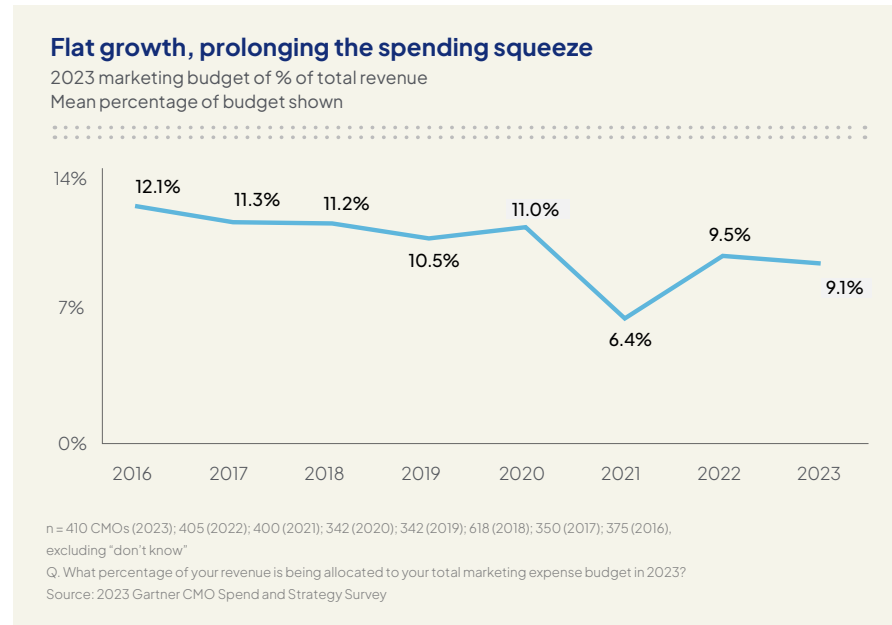
Think of online real estate just like physical real estate — location, location, location. In the digital world, the priciest (and most valuable) real estate is “above the fold,” or on page one of the search results. Just as traditional newspaper readers only read the headlines, consumers searching online only scroll about halfway down the first search engine results page (SERP). The top five sites result in over 60% of clicks, whereas results six thru ten receive less than 4%.³

Your performance on the results page is how you win business. If you don’t rank high in search results — and don’t point searchers to relevant content they can interact with — you will lose those hand-raisers to a competitor. Devise a strategy for owning as high a percentage as possible on varying SERPs for the keywords you want to rank for.



Pausing vs. always on

We know that marketers are (still) being asked to do more with less. Although budgets began trending upward from pandemic lows in 2021, marketers continue to face budget constraints while organizations continue to respond to revenue losses and inflationary pressures. However, going dark means consumers won't find your offerings—only your competitors. The best strategy is to maintain a steady market presence. By keeping your campaigns running, you remain front and center for consumers who are actively searching in your market.



3

Create a balanced approach of channels and tactics

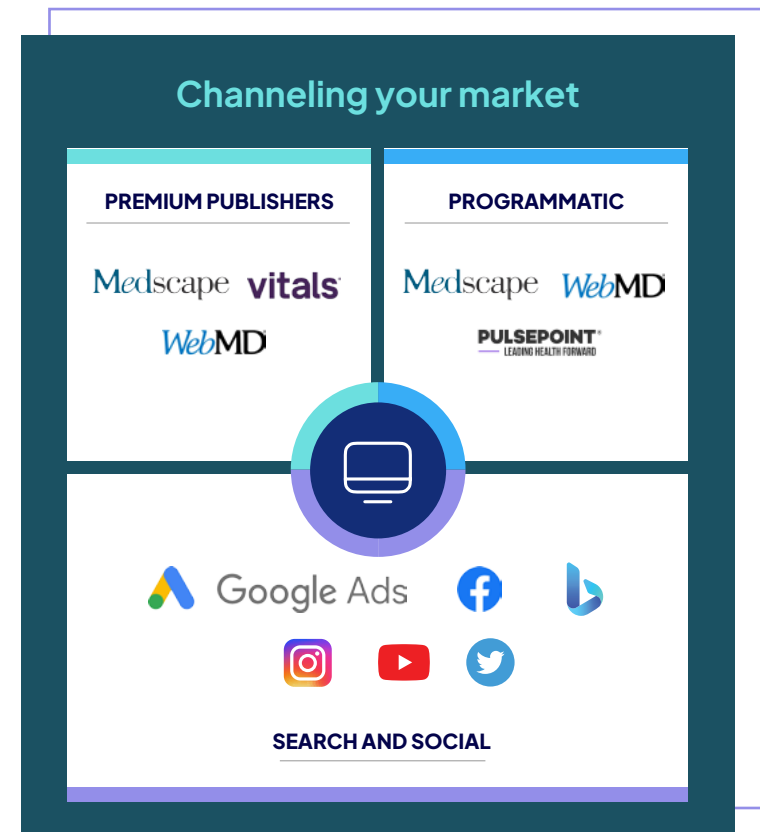
Find relevant, profitable audiences

Once you've devised a [targeting and search strategy](#), it's time to introduce premium publisher websites, programmatic ad buying, and an active social media presence. By establishing a blend of these channels, you can ensure high-value customers are aware of your organization before — and when — they're ready to convert.

Whether they feature sports, entertainment, or other popular content, premium publisher sites are considered trusted sources by their significant — and loyal — followers. Whereas non-premium publishers push content, premium sites pull their audiences in because of their quality content.

Programmatic buying is a process of purchasing and securing ad space automatically across a vast number of sites and devices. Consisting of a wide range of channels and formats, programmatic buying is a viable strategy to reach your targets wherever they are.

Almost 90% of users access popular social media sites to find and share health information.⁵ Advertising and building a strong social media presence may be one of the quickest ways to connect with your high-value target audience.



The bottom line: Scalability and hyper-targeting. With the amount of targeting criteria such as location, behavior, demographics, and interests offered for each, you can concentrate all your spend on a relevant — and profitable — audience, rather than having to sift through hundreds to find **the one**. An ad to the right persona using the wealth of targeting options available can even raise awareness among passive consumers who are less likely to actively seek out care.



4

Speak their language

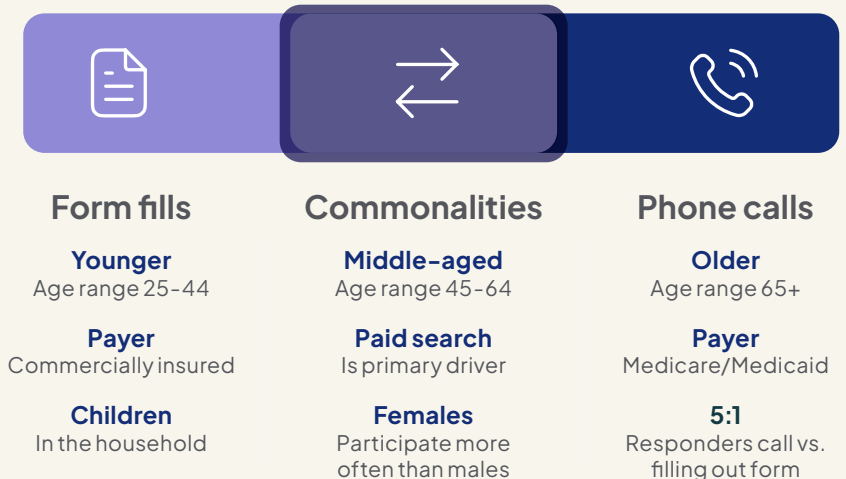
Nurture your audiences to help them take the next step

All of the work you've put in until this point—targeting the consumers needing your services and [reaching them when and where they consume media](#)—will be for naught if you don't engage them with additional tactics tailored to their needs, preferences, and motivations. Some people will be ready to act after filling out a [health risk assessment \(HRA\)](#) on a social networking site, but many more need to be nurtured. Even the most tailored mix of digital channels accomplishes nothing if it doesn't convince active searchers to take the next step.

78% of people are leaving their current healthcare providers because of the lack of digital engagement and ease of navigation, while 71% confirm access is a major influencer when selecting a new one.⁶ So be sure that your ad points to a relevant and [compelling landing page](#) with action-oriented creative and agreeable language that matches what your target audience is looking for. Use an easy-to-read and comfortable design that supports your brand and complements the previously seen content. Include strategic calls-to-action (CTAs) that really stand out. Make it easy to fill out a HRA, request an appointment, speak to a [helpful Contact Center agent](#) with no transfers or holds, or take other action that captures their contact information. You'll realize much higher conversion rates as consumers see you have what they're looking for without having to sift through your site.

Actionable insights you can use now

Digital consumers engage differently. Let's consider forms and phone calls. You will want to make a form your primary CTA for younger target audiences. Those that prefer forms tend to be young moms (age 25–44) that are commercially insured. You should use a unique phone number for older audiences. Consumers that prefer to pick up the phone also tend to skew female, but are a bit more mature (age 65+) and are a mix of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries. Consider offering both to capture outliers.



5

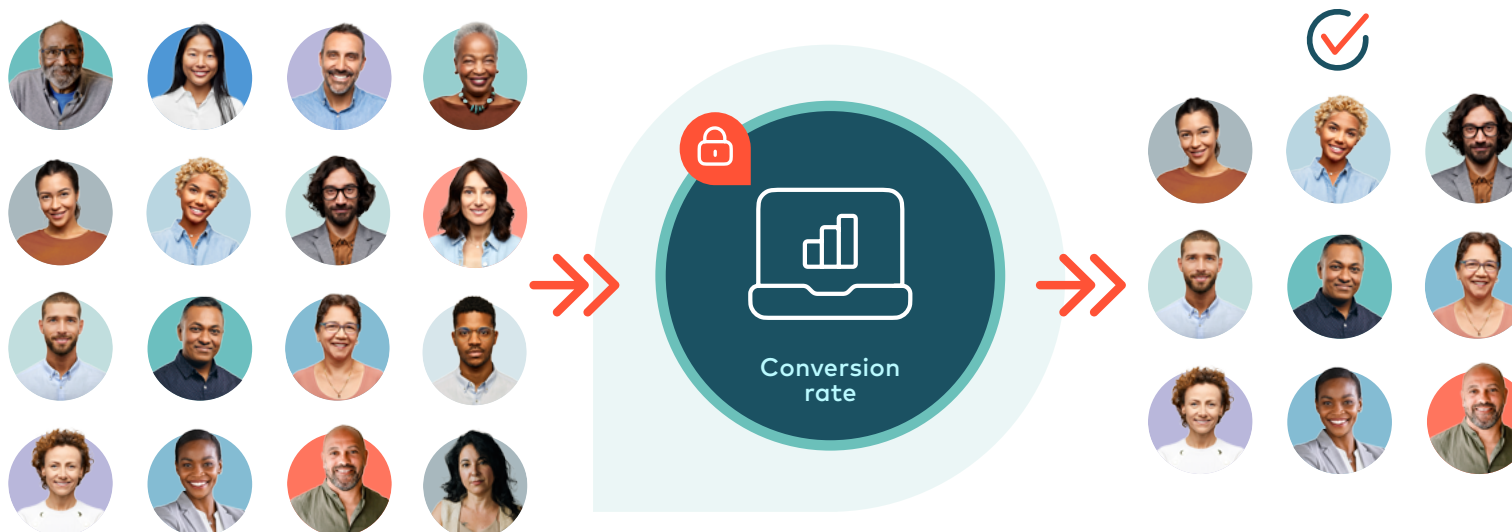
Track your new patient KPIs

Conversions equals success

Not too long ago, marketing success was measured in clicks and impressions, but that no longer suffices. The truest measure of success is conversions, when visitors become identified leads.

Readily available technology now tracks conversions in terms of referral requests, scheduled appointments, contact center inquiries, and other consumer actions, supporting the attribution of each activity by channel, vendor, and initiating source. Be sure

you have tracking methods pre-established and a cadence of measurement that aligns with your goals before your campaign is live. Tracking these conversions can provide valuable information about how your audience engages with your content, and it is the benchmark for determining the overall success of your digital campaign strategy, even while supporting evolving HIPAA Privacy rules and regulations.



VISITOR

Your website

GOAL

Conclusion

With pressures to fill the patient pipeline, drive measurable growth by building brand recognition, and grow market share, a healthcare marketer faces complex decisions. All while budgetary pressures continue and the need to demonstrate positive returns are at a record high.

So take pause and ask:

"Where can I have the biggest impact?"

Depending on your internal resources and expertise, you may need to enlist a strategic partner to help you create and execute a winning digital acquisition strategy. Consumer-centric companies everywhere

— not just in healthcare — are outsourcing similar programs so their marketing teams can stay focused on additional high-value engagement activities.

Consider working with an organization that has a pre-established set of media partners, workflow tools that support targeting and measurement, audience experts, and results-driven and performance optimization specialists who are committed to building connected experiences. You'll then have the time to focus on where to direct those captured leads based on how your organization can best nurture them through their journey, and retain them for a lifetime of care.

SOURCES

1. Becker's, Patient Acquisition in a Competitive Market: Patients are asking questions — are you providing the right answers? <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/patient-acquisition-in-a-competitive-market-patients-are-asking-questions-are-you-providing-the-right-answers.html>
2. Becker's, Google receives more than 1 billion health questions every day, <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/google-receives-more-than-1-billion-health-questions-every-day.html>
3. SMA Marketing, 80 SEO Statistics That Prove the Power of Search [2022 Update], <https://www.smarketing.net/blog/80-seo-statistics>
4. Gartner. The State of Marketing Budget and Strategy in 2023. <https://emtemp.gcom.cloud/ngw/globalassets/en/marketing/documents/state-of-marketing-budget-and-strategy-2023.pdf>
5. JMIR Publications, eHealth Literacy and Web 2.0 Health Information Seeking Behaviors Among Baby Boomers and Older Adults, <https://www.jmir.org/2015/3/e70/>
6. Accenture, Health experience: The difference between loyalty and leaving, <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insightsnew/health/difference-between-loyalty-leaving>



As the premier growth partner for healthcare organizations, WebMD Ignite empowers decision-making insights across the health journey. By integrating proprietary technology, unrivaled reach, strategic targeting, business intelligence, and educational resources, our solutions solve healthcare industry challenges to boost acquisition, build loyalty, and ignite action.

Learn more at webmdignite.com.