

Episode #6: Online Ads For Medical Practices with Ashley

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Michael: Welcome to the Health Connective Show. I'm your host, Michael Roberts, and we have P3 marketing manager Ashley Hohensee joining us again today. Welcome back Ashley. Today we're going to be talking about online ads and how they are affecting medical practices. And really all of health care ads are almost on the verge of becoming a must have for online marketing. Depending on the practice and the amount of competition that they have. On the P3 side of things, we're seeing more and more practices coming to us for online ads than we were even just a few years ago. So we'll talk with Ashley after a quick break.

So Justin, we recently had a win worth celebrating, and I wanted to drag you on here to kind of talk about it quickly. So I heard you talk about the fact that our work with a client passed a security audit with flying colors. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

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Justin: A lot of times, security teams have a very fraught relationship with developers, because the security team feels like the developers are just constantly trying to get away with something or exasperated by them or not getting it. And then the security team needs to go in and spend time explaining and justifying and maybe educating. So in this most recent one, it was a annual scan. It was a very thorough penetration test.

There was a lot of setup that went into it. It wasn't cheap. And the audit from this third party, someone completely separate from us and who we work for, provided this feedback that it had a very strong security posture. There were no clear issues. That's very, very uncommon. It was just something we were all very happy to see. It was a huge pat on the back to everybody, not just us, but I was very proud of the role that we played in that and do feel that what we do makes that simple as part of the process.

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Michael: Let's dive in. Ashley, can you speak to some of the conversations you and Scott are having with clients about online ads?

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Ashley: Sure. So interestingly enough, the conversation often doesn't start with the client coming to us or asking for ads. A lot of times it's, you know, we'll get a call or an email from somebody saying like, oh, why is this practice outranking me for whatever search it might be? You know, they're like, I've got the website, I've got the content, I've done all of these things in the marketing space. Like, why are these people outranking me? I don't understand it.

And so a lot of times we'll go like, okay, well, look, let's take a look. Let's see what's happening. Like tell me what you're searching for, all of that. And then when we dig in, we see that it's not actually someone

who's organically outranking them. It's an ad. So then we have to go back and have a conversation, you know, about, you know, it's a competitor. Yes. Who's running an ad. So yeah, it looks like you're doing great from an organic perspective. But these people are placing an ad on these keywords too. There's really nothing we can do to prevent them from doing that. And then at that point, if you want to combat that, the only thing that you really can do is run an opposing ad.

So that's sort of how the conversation starts a lot of the time. And then so we have that discussion of whether that makes sense for them from a budgetary perspective, like how important is this to you, you know, in terms of what the search is and all that kind of stuff? A smaller subset do realize that it is ads and will come to us asking for that specifically. But, you know, more or less it's we're not even realizing that people are running ads and that that's the thing that they can do.

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Michael: Yeah. You are the one that works on the ad campaign. You're the one that sets them up. You're the one that maintains them all the time. What kinds of shifts are you seeing now through several years that you've been working in this space? Like what kinds of shifts are you seeing?

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Ashley: Sure. I mean, so of course we're seeing more people wanting ads just because ads are becoming more prevalent. I mean, it's hard to go anywhere online without seeing an ad, whether you know it or not. There's ads everywhere. There's ads on Google, there's ads on social media, there's ads. You're reading an article online. They're everywhere.

So with paid search ads, we're often seeing, you know, even if you're number one organically, that's not getting you the visibility that it used to. So a stat that I've come across recently, that word stream publish said organic results only account for 14.3% of the above the fold pixels. And what we're talking about when we say above the fold, there is what you see when you put in that search term. And the first thing that comes up on that screen before you scroll down like what you would see. So 14.3%, you know, the very, very bottom of the page.

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Michael: Yeah. Let's stop there for just a second. So like it's not like necessarily Google is just running ads on that entire amount of real estate. Right. So like when we say 14% organic, which is probably like one result. Yeah.

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Ashley: So you'll see. Yeah. You'll see usually what you'll see at the top is like usually maybe up to like three ads. And those look just like the organic result for the most part. Right. You might see some map listings. Some of those are also ads.

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Michael: And that didn't used to be the case. Right. Like that's a fairly recent development.

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Ashley: Yeah. That's a new Earth. I mean it's been a few years since they've been implementing it. It's definitely being used a lot more often. But I mean, technically some of those are organic results. But if you're wanting, you know, again, some of those can be ads. And then you get into like what you would consider that like top ten result of organic the non-paid results usually. And then you could also depending on the search term, you could be seeing like some of those featured answer boxes, all of that. Some of those things are can be ads as well.

So there's a few things like that you can add to your ads now. So like that you could get you could work towards getting an organic result that you can also now just add in your ads, like you can add images to your ads. Now you can add those site links under your main link. If you want to call it that. You can add things, you can add different little callouts. You can add things. You can add a phone call link. You can add even not in health care, but in other industries. You can add lead forms, contact forms directly onto the ad. Um, there's so many things that you can add on now to make it closer to like what you would get with like a featured result organically.

But you all you really have to do is pay for it. So that's part of it. And again, like they look so much like paid search ads. So that same word stream article was saying that 45% of people couldn't identify paid ads and search results. So sometimes we'll have clients say like, okay, well, we have the top organic result. Patients are going to know what's an ad and what's not. Well, according to this, I mean, still half people could, you know, identify, but that's a good chunk of people who can't.

Then you have to start looking at your audience to, you know, your patients, who's savvy about ads and who's not are your older patients who aren't as used to like, you know, growing up in this era of technology or are they going to be able to identify it if you're, say, a joint replacement practice or something like that? So, you know, even the practices aren't realizing that some of these search results are ads. So that's where the biggest shift is coming in, is just I think you're probably seeing a lot to the same thing in the kind of medical device and pharma where you're having as you have sort of similar products your customers are going to, your competitors are going to be running ads for against you.

Everybody is very savvy on the competition there, and you'll see that a lot with the larger health groups as well. Everyone knows who their competition is and what the big searches are to capture. So we're seeing more of those organizations running ads than we used to.

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Michael: Yeah, we definitely see like a and this is more, you know, the stuff that you and Scott are working on more today than, than me. But you definitely get a wide range in terms of like, how sophisticated a marketing team may be for practice. So, you know, some like they're on top of this, they

know all about it. Some like you mentioned, they don't understand why they're being, why they're further down the page than their competitors, like that sort of stuff. What's interesting about that? There's this really fine line.

There's been a lot of complaints about Google search results in the past. I'll say like a couple of years specifically. Like there's definitely been a lot of a lot of people talking about, like, Google's not as good as it used to be, right? And part of that is like, well, maybe our expectations have grown a lot on like, what we expect these kinds of things to do.

But yeah, there is a definitely a feeling in the air right now, I think, where people are starting to question like how useful search is in the way that we used to rely on it. But all of that to say, like, what interests me about that is like Google's main job. Their main source of income by far is the advertising. And if people can't even tell the difference between the ads and the organic, like the organic stuff, all the stuff that they're saying, these are the best results. Like that's what gives them a credibility to serve the ads. But the ads are like potentially like showing, I don't know, like it's just like a tension there that I think that Google has to figure out. But that's not our problem. Yeah, yeah.

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Ashley: And we have a lot of we end up having a lot of those sentiments from customers to like, you know, it's kind of it's not fair that my competitor can bid on my practice name. Ehm. And, you know, certainly that's a whole other conversation, you know, whether it's fair or not or, you know, whether that's a good result, it's kind of more just like conversation. I'm sorry that it is this way, but unfortunately it is. And we've got to figure out how to tackle it now. And unfortunately it's probably going to cost some money to you know. Yeah.

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Michael: So I don't control Google.

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Ashley: Yeah. You know I would agree that it's kind of sucky that your competitor can just outrank you by bidding on your name. But that said, you know, if you we and we'll talk about this in a little bit, but like, you know, you're going to rank better for your than your competitor for your own key. Or if you bid if you bid on your name too, there's some ways that'll help. But yeah, it's I want.

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Michael: To get into like sort of like how people should tell the difference between ads and organic in just a second. But, you know, I think with all of these different services that are out there, there's an incentive on the behalf of the people that own these services. They've got to make money as a business, right? Like they've but there's some incentives that that feel kind of negatively aligned in some cases

where they kind of it's almost like a holding a hostage situation, like, here's your profile on Yelp or your, you know, whatever other service like, and you can use it, but you can't really get all these other great things until you start paying a, you know, significant monthly fees.

But again, we're not here to solve you today. We're not here. So Google like these aren't our challenges that we have to fix. But let's just start with the fact of start with the delineation between ads and just regular results. You know, like we talk about practices, practices, getting confused. These are very intelligent people. Right. Like these are physicians. These are people that work in very professional settings. There's such a lack of delineation today that people are getting confused. So tell us, kind of walk us through like what are the differences? How can people spot the there.

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Ashley: Aren't a lot. And that's where, uh, it kind of comes in. So like if you're we're talking about Google in particular, really the only thing that looks different is that it just says sponsored over the listing, over the whatever that little feature is. A lot of times it's going to look almost exactly like a search result, you know, in terms of here's our heading, here's our little description, here's the link.

You might have some site links underneath it, some other, you know, things in the map pack. It looks just like a map result. The only thing is that it'll just have a little sponsored. They're not trying to hide it like it's, you know, the words in bold. It's the same right now. At least it's the same size as the rest of the text. The rest of the text, like in the description, it's not quite the same size as the heading, but like, that's really the only thing you just kind of have to look right above that link and go like, see, is it sponsored? Does it say sponsored or not?

That's really it. Because you're even seeing like you'll see ads a lot at the top. But you know, you might see it as you're scrolling down at the bottom of the page at the in, sometimes in the middle, if it's like a longer one. I think the first one kind of goes like now down to almost like 20 results. The first page, sometimes depending on your device and all of that. So you might see some more mid way and then see some more at the bottom. So you kind of have, but otherwise it really just meshes in with what's there. So you kind of just have to, you know, be like look a little bit closer.

So that is hard especially, you know, we're in a world everything's really, you know, in a hurry. We're looking quickly. I mean, I even, I'll admit, you know, as a parent, you know, I'm trying to scroll my phone for, you know, maybe we need a new doctor. We need to find somewhere to order dinner, whatever it is like, I know what's an ad and what's not, but, like, I'll still click on an ad sometimes if it's the most relevant thing, because I don't necessarily have time. Like while my toddler's trying to grab my phone out of my hand and like, throw it that, uh, you know, okay, this is relevant. Let's just click on it. So that's one of the things you're combating there.

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Michael: There's a book written on this is a several years ago now, but it's kind of talking about like the, the being overwhelmed by too many choices. Right. And that's what search results can be. That's why people don't go to page two. It's, you know, all those kinds of things, like we're just looking for what is

good enough sometimes and sometimes frankly, like, I mean, we offer advertising as a service. Like we don't think it's evil. It's just that delineation between what is advertising and what isn't. That line used to be clear, you know, like you.

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Ashley: Still run along the side. That was more like ten years ago. Maybe along the side.

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Michael: Yeah. I'm in my 40s now. Like, you know, things blend together. I don't know, but yeah, like, there was kind of like, it was like a gray box or it was a different color box around what was an ad. So there was always like, this is the ad set, and then this is the organic set. And you can always kind of tell. But yeah, it's getting harder and harder today, especially like especially depending on the device. Right.

One thing that we've kind of talked about a little bit and I just want to level set for everybody that's listening. We're talking some about like bidding on branded terms. So branded terms being like the name of your company, the name of the product depending on what your industry is, maybe the name of a physician that is in your practice. So we talk about this concept of whether or not you should bid on your own branded terms. If you're just doing like a regular search result and you just ignore all of the ads, like you probably rank pretty well for your own branded terms.

But again, you've already mentioned a few different times that like, hey, people could be bidding against you based on the terms that are yours as far as you can own a term or not. You know, people are running ads on these kinds of things. So how do you advise, you know, should practices and or companies be bidding on their own branded terms? Should they be bidding on other, you know, companies terms, like how do you approach that?

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Ashley: I really look at the individual situation. It's definitely becoming just as a whole, a lot more common to bid on your brand terms. And of course, the biggest reason for that would be a competitor bidding on it. So a lot of times we're looking at we'll look at, you know, how big is that competitor or like how big of a threat are they to you. You know, if you're the small practice and you've got a large hospital coming in and bidding on your practice name, and sometimes they're not even really bidding on your practice name, sometimes they're just bidding on a broader term like orthopedic surgeon or, you know, orthopedic surgeon in your city and say, like your practice name is like New Orleans orthopedics. And if they're bidding on a term that's like orthopedics in New Orleans, their ad would still run.

So sometimes it's not always, you know, as maybe nefarious as you might think. But we'll look at like, you know, how big of a threat is that competitor? How much, how many, how much business could they be taking away from you by doing that? You know, if they don't, if you're lucky enough that you don't have any competitor ads running, then maybe it probably doesn't make sense to go ahead and bid on your brand terms. But if you're looking at they are, and especially if it's multiples, then your organic result is

pushed down, like we said, down kind of below that fold or close to it. Then you might want to consider it. When we start getting into like specific maybe service areas. Is this a key business driver for you then? Yeah, you want to you want to think about budgeting for ads for that.

And then another thing, here's just another stat to think about from word stream again from that same article is they said if an advertiser buys keywords for something where they already rank well organically, 89% of the traffic generated by the search ads, it's completely new traffic that's outside of that organic reach. So even still, there's a lot to be gained potentially from running ads on your brand terms. Because also, if you think about it too, even if there's no ad results, sometimes, a lot of times you can get map results showing up.

So depending on what and not always necessarily for brand term, that should stay just to your practice. But if you start getting like a little bit outside of that, you know, you can you might have map listing show up before your organic listing and all of that. So there's definitely some benefits. Like if you're a small practice and a really small town, you may be one competitor if that. And they're also kind of small, maybe, you know, it might not be as urgent for you. But if you're in a competitive market, even if it's not happening now, I would start like maybe thinking about budgeting towards that or putting aside some budget for when it when it happens. Because it's when you're in a larger market, it's almost more a matter of, you know, when not if.

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Michael: There's a lot more to deal with. Yeah. So, you know, we're talking a lot about medical practices. And I just want to kind of like expand on the concept here, you know, in terms of other types of businesses that that may be, you know, listening in. So if you're a hospital, obviously this almost like directly 1 to 1 kind of applies like just substituting the word hospital. And you've pretty well got the solution here. You know, we do with the P3 service line that we have like we do really focus on practices.

And then with the Health Connective business, we really do kind of focus on larger med tech companies, that sort of thing. And for med tech companies, I don't think it's going to be so much that if you have the XYZ robot that goes into AWS and. You know, it's not like a lot of people are going to be searching on things as much there, right? Like it's a very different kind of interaction. But if you have any kind of like direct to customer kind of solution, you know, I'm thinking of like especially like hearing aid companies, those kinds of devices, like it's very now that that's opened up and that everybody can buy their own hearing aid without having to go through, without having to have like a prescription and everything.

That process is just completely direct consumer kind of experience. So there's a lot of stuff here that definitely relates. If you have a direct consumer product, you're not dealing with the map on that kind of regard. So there's a lot to I think unpack is sort of in how search is changing. We're not going to really dig into all of what's happening around I, because I feel like by the time that this episode is released, like seven more, you know, developments will have happened.

But I just want to kind of quickly mention just a few that I've just been kind of keeping an eye on. So there is the search generative experience, right? That's the kind of stuff that's like the things that they're starting to test in search results and they want to start including you want to talk about like having a harder time getting people to your organic listing. People like actually finding your search result and

clicking through like that's not going to make it easier, right? Like some of the tests that I've seen, like there's they're supposed to if Google's AI system answers the question, it's supposed to list off sources. And like some of the test results that I've seen, like at most have three sources when they're answering something. So again, like your chance for getting that click through is lower. Google will find a way to advertise around all that stuff to of course. So you want to talk about like yeah.

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Ashley: They're doing like auto generated. You can do ads where you just kind of give them like here's the landing page, you and then let Google come up with like what they're going to say in the ad. I don't we don't use it very often for medical practices just because I feel like in healthcare, you just have to be careful about what you're saying. And that just really I don't I don't trust Google enough to give them the control to do that right for our customers. But yeah, yeah, they're starting to get into that kind of auto generated stuff even with the ads you're placing.

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Michael: Yeah. So Google was really playing on that side as the advertiser and then really starting to introduce a lot of that stuff for the organic and for the, you know, the person that's doing the actual searching. So just all of this just to say, like, there's a lot that's changing in this space. Like we've always been of the opinion like you should set your advertising strategy as a, set it and forget it kind of approach. But the I mean, that was possible ten years ago. It's just completely impossible today. I mean, there's just too much that's changing and you just can't take your hand off the wheel.

I think as you're trying to look through that kind of stuff. Anything else that you would advise? I think to practices like physician groups, that sort of thing, in terms of thinking about advertising, in terms of thinking about kind of like how you're promoting your practice just within like search results right now, within Google itself.

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Ashley: So it's interesting, you know, we had, you know, maybe again, like five, ten years ago. And the focus was a lot more on specific procedures. And because obviously there's certain procedures that are bigger moneymakers for you. And in general these days that's not those ads aren't performing as well. And that's probably for a few different reasons. Sometimes it's just, you know, you're really seriously considering a major procedure.

You're doing your research, you're not necessarily going with the first thing you click on. You're probably going back and forth a lot. That gets harder to track back because we're talking probably multiple sessions and all of that. And, you know, with HIPAA and all of that, we have to be careful about how we're tracking people doing that. So that's one part of it. And it's also maybe just a shift in how people are searching, like not every practice and say in orthopedics, I'll just say that since we're we work with them a lot. You know, there's a lot of subspecialties within orthopedics. And so some of them only do hip

replacement. But the trend is going more towards like people are just searching for an orthopedic surgeon. So those ads that are targeting more broad keywords tend to or tending to have a better like a better return in terms of like people calling the practice booking.

You know, I think they don't maybe people don't always know what they need. So seeking out kind of maybe they're just looking for, okay, this I know I need something in this specialty, but I'm not sure. Like what's wrong with my hip? Do I need a replacement? Is it something else? So that could be just where they're starting off in it. So that's been kind of an interesting shift because I feel like five years ago we would say like, don't run a general like, you know, an ad on just a general like orthopedic surgeon thing because maybe you're not getting the right type of patient. But in some cases, it's like if your practice kind of does everything, that's a good way to go. Now it's like it's. Getting returns for people. That's been kind of one of the bigger shifts I've seen there.

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Michael: There's also a lot to be said right now in terms of you mentioned the HIPAA, like having multiple sessions and then like there's HIPAA, privacy and all of those kinds of things that we need to like be on the lookout for. But as an entire industry, like the whole advertising industry is really going through some major shifts right now in terms of what's possible from a tracking perspective, people are getting more and more savvy around, like maintaining their privacy online. So there's just a lot to lot to definitely keep up with here.

We've talked at length about the state of online ads today for medical practices, med tech companies, and sort of the industry as a whole, and really focusing in on the prevalence of ads and search results, being able to spot those paid search ads, what to do about competitor ads, and whether or not it makes sense for your business to bid on brand terms. So Ashley, thank you so much for joining today. Always a pleasure. Thank you to our listeners for joining for this episode. For more on the health connected Show, please visit HCA show for previous episodes and Health Connect as a company.