



84% of healthcare shoppers use the Internet prior to choosing a physician.

Today's healthcare shopper has more choices and more resources than ever before, thanks to the Internet. Yahoo! conducted a study to gain further insight into the patterns of a specific type of patient: one seeking a physician for an elective medical procedure.

Yahoo! Study details

- 500 participants
- Sought the help of a physician within the past 6 months
- Interviews occurred between April - May 2008
- Key findings are highlighted in this report

A full 84% of the participants used the Internet prior to making their physician selection, positioning it as a dealmaker—or dealbreaker—in the physician research and selection process. The most sought-after physicians were chiropractors, dermatologists and plastic surgeons.

The provider selection cycle

Recommendations by friends and family tend to drive awareness of local physicians, and online resources—such as search engines—are used by healthcare shoppers to find the right physician. They use search engines to explore their options, searching according to the treatment they need rather than by the name of a physician, and seeking out online reviews of local physicians.

How consumers start online research for physicians in a search engine	
Keywords used	%
Type of treatment	68%
City and zip code	54%
Reviews of physicians	46%
Specific business name	34%

The type of treatment is most often the starting point when searching for a physician.

The depth of detail, speed and the relevancy of information search engines offer invites deeper investigation. And healthcare shoppers do just that, often educating themselves on the basics of the procedure they're considering. When it finally comes time to select a physician, online research focuses on even more specifics, including:

- Certification or credentials
- Strength of referrals
- Eligible insurance plans
- Breadth and years of experience
- Customer or user reviews/feedback
- Description of procedure/FAQs
- List of treatments offered

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In all, healthcare shoppers seeking an elective procedure take a measured approach to the decision-making process. A high level of engagement during the research phase often helps them discover new physicians in their required specialization.

Average time spent online: 7 hours
Learned about a new physician: 61%
Number of physicians considered: 2

A website can make a powerful first impression on a potential patient.

Healthcare shoppers who researched physicians online and ended up not choosing their services cited lack of online information as a main reason. So physicians should view an online presence, specifically a business website, as an opportunity to engage a potential patient and create a positive perception—before a face-to-face meeting even takes place.

- 71% of patients who visited a physician with a personal website ended up choosing a physician that had a site.
- 50% of patients used a search engine to reach a physician’s website.

Having the right kind of content on a website is key—specifically content that creates a perception of openness and honesty, such as reviews, testimonials and examples of past work. Additionally, promoting that website in areas where consumers are conducting their research, such as search engines, will help to drive new business.

Why patients visit a physician’s website

To learn more about their practices/services	83%
To find their contact information	80%
To look at photos or visuals	66%
To read reviews or view testimonials	51%
To get approximate costs	41%
To look for special deals or promotions	32%
To schedule an appointment or consultation	20%

A professional-looking website with content that addresses common questions and concerns is a physician’s best opportunity to create positive perceptions.

Online-savvy patients create good buzz.

Today’s medical patients are savvy, and rely on online resources. They’re also likely to return to online sources to record a positive experience in a user feedback setting. For physicians, that’s just one more motivation to make online marketing and an online presence an essential part of any strategy to reach new patients.

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