

Search Trends: What Do They Reveal about Dental Treatments?

By Robert Carrier

If you're a dentist, one of the simplest and most effective ways to gauge potential patients' wishes is through the analysis of search trends. Because users' search queries are unprompted - as opposed to results that you might get through a survey or questionnaire, for example - they reveal a great deal about what individuals are actually interested in. Rather than asking users what their preferences may be, search engines like Google, Yahoo! and Bing allow users to tell you what their preferences are.

Though effective to a degree, polls and questionnaires can illicit incorrect information; for example, when a list or range of "potential" answers are provided from which to choose, it may prompt an answer that an individual otherwise would not have chosen. Search engines eliminate this element and as a result provide more accurate results.

So how does search engine analysis benefit the dental practitioner? It's actually quite simple: a review of potential patients' search queries allows a dentist to shape his or her practice around the needs and wishes of the "customer base." Search engine queries can reveal seasonal changes in patient research (for example, do individuals look for information on [porcelain veneers](#) more during the summer or winter?) as well as the popularity, or at the very least awareness, of particular treatment options. If you do not offer [teeth whitening](#) at your practice but search data indicates it is being searched for at double the rate of [dental crowns](#) or veneers, it might be worthwhile to take a second look at that treatment to determine if it's a worthwhile procedure to offer. Rather than guessing at the popularity of treatment options, search engines can provide real data.

What Can You Do with This Information?

Search engine data can be taken advantage of in several ways:

1. As discussed, dentists can tailor the procedures and treatments that they offer so that they are more in line with the wishes of their patients. In cases of elective cosmetic dentistry procedures, this information can be of

- particular benefit as cosmetic dentists, perhaps more so than reconstructive dentists or oral surgeons, have some degree of freedom when it comes to offering some treatments and not offering others.
2. Seasonal trends can dictate the cost of a procedure or the investment in materials required for particular treatments. If data indicates that porcelain veneers are historically searched for most just before summer and least after Christmas, then a dentist may choose to utilize this information to modify the cost of porcelain veneers depending on the time of year; perhaps offering incentives during "dry" months, for example.
 3. Understanding search engine trends can allow a dentist to market effectively on the Internet. Search Engine Optimization is the practice of making a website relevant and topical through the use of copywriting and HTML coding so that it can be found "organically" on search engines such as Google and Yahoo! for applicable and appropriate search queries. By understanding exactly what is being searched for, individuals can tailor their websites around the needs of their potential patients.

Search Engine Trends - The Hard Data

So what does the data say and where can you look for additional information regarding search trends? There are several tools offered by Google that allow anyone to look into the popularity of a search query, both over time and regionally - locally or globally. Google Insights, Google Trends, and Google AdWords - all of which can be found through a simple Google search, of course - present data in an intuitive manner that allows for simple analysis. Though search engine queries do not necessarily represent patients seen or procedures performed, they do illustrate public awareness and popularity, both of which can be quite valuable for an entrepreneur, of which private dental practitioners are, looking to tailor a business plan.

We chose to look at three different treatment options to compare their popularity and analyze their search trends: veneers (alternatives being dental veneers and porcelain veneers), dental implants, and teeth whitening. A full analysis would best be performed by an actual dental practitioner or his or her head of marketing, should there be one. Nonetheless, the data we found is striking in that conclusions can quickly be reached through a simple overview of the data. In our exercise, we found that:

- Teeth whitening has double the volume of global monthly searches of both dental implants and veneers, with approximately 673,000 monthly queries. Veneers and dental implants on the other hand each receive roughly 301,000 searches per month.
- In the United States, the highest concentration of searches for these terms was in the states of Nevada, Florida, Mississippi, Kentucky and Georgia. The states that showed the least interest in these search terms included Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Mexico and Montana.

- Though teeth whitening receives more search queries than either dental implants or veneers, its trending is less consistent, with large upwards and downwards spikes in popularity, both over time and seasonally. Dental implants and veneers on the other hand show a relatively steady state of popularity over time.

Make Knowledge Work for You

The English philosopher Francis Bacon proclaimed "all knowledge as his province," a saying which came to be known popularly as knowledge is power. Knowledge of patients' wishes gives doctors and dentists the power to more effectively satisfy their patients' needs and desires. The question is, "How do I gain this knowledge of my patients' wants? How do I know for sure what they are seeking?" Though there are several tools one might choose to employ to gather information on his or her patients' preferences, including surveys, polls, questionnaires and one-on-one conversation, search engines provide perhaps the most intuitive and accurate look into the mind of a patient base. Dentists who take advantage of this information can reap its many benefits.

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