

Mentor Solutions is dedicated to delivering strategies and practice management tools our clients can put into action to enhance their bottom line in any economy—especially this one. As part of this ongoing commitment, we are pleased to bring you the July edition of Mentor Solutions Insight.

This edition of *Mentor Solutions Insight* features a follow up to last month’s article about how to start and manage an online paid search campaign. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a vital component of an online marketing campaign, and this month you will receive an excellent primer on how to implement and get the most from your SEO campaign.

We are also continuing our new section titled, **Mentornomics**. This month you’ll get an economic update and learn why now more than ever it’s imperative that you be able to craft and share your value story with potential patients during consultations.

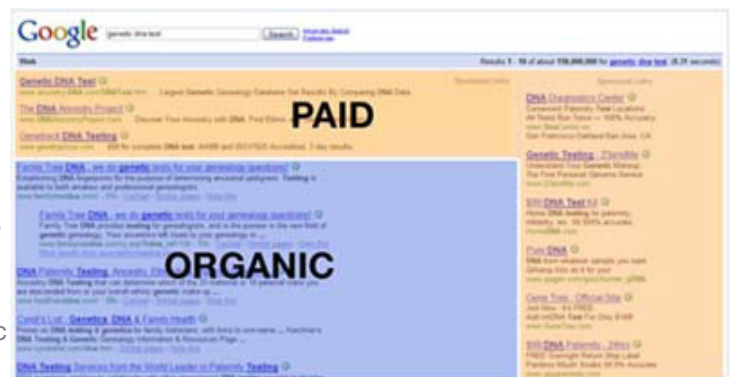
We are always interested in your feedback, so we hope you will take time to share with us your thoughts and opinions about this edition of *Mentor Solutions Insight*. As you read through it, we hope you’ll recognize our commitment to giving you information that you can learn today, so tomorrow you can take steps that will help you make your practice one that stands above the rest in your market.

Regards,  
Layli Sobhani  
Director, Marketing for Mentor Solutions

## The Effectiveness of Organic Search

Last month, we took an in-depth look at paid search, or pay-per-click (PPC), online advertising models where advertisers bid to have their ads placed on the results pages of search engines like Google and Yahoo. In this edition of Mentor Solutions Insight, we’re going to examine search engine optimization (SEO), which is another important search engine marketing tool and a drastic shift from the paid search model.

Let’s start by defining what SEO is NOT. SEO is not an advertising model. There is no money exchanged for the rankings you receive on search engine result pages (SERPs) and you pay nothing per click on your listing. SEO is best defined as an ongoing process of improving your site and earning links from other relevant sites on the web. The goal of SEO is to get your site ranked in the top positions of organic search results for the keywords relevant to your product or service. And just so we’re clear, here is a snapshot of a SERP with paid and organic results highlighted:



Like paid search, SEO can be an incredibly effective tool for driving qualified surgical leads through your website. In this article, we’re going to dive into the benefits of SEO before covering its key components, some best practices and then some tools you can use today. Then we’ll close with a reality check about search engine marketing and the basic understanding you’ll have by the end of this article of its two major components—PPC and SEO.

### The Benefits of SEO

The benefits of SEO are in contrast to those of paid search. If you keep the simple thought in mind that paid search results are bought and organic search results are earned, the differences in the benefits between PPC and SEO make a lot more sense.

- **Unbiased Endorsement** – organic search listings are considered to be unbiased endorsements of the ranked sites. People in general have an inherent distrust in “being marketed to,” which is how most searchers perceive PPC listings. Searchers view organic search results as the best option according to the all-knowing search engines. This engenders trust for your product, service, and brand that can go a long way towards winning customers.
- **“Free” Traffic** – I always have problems touting this benefit, but it is one of the most common that you hear about SEO. The traffic you get from organic search results is “free” in the sense that you do not pay for each click on your listing like you do with PPC. However, it is important to understand that a lot of time, effort and expertise goes into ranking well in organic search, and that equates to an investment in SEO.
- **High-Volume Traffic** – Here’s a statistic that speaks for itself when it comes to the biggest benefit of SEO: For every one click on a paid search listing, there are 8.5 clicks on organic listings. In my opinion, this statistic is a direct effect of the first benefit listed above. Simply put, organic search can account for a substantial amount of traffic over that of paid search.

## Key Components

Gaining a truly useful understanding of SEO requires boiling it down to its most basic components. In the section that follows, I’ll describe the basis of all successful SEO.

- **Keywords** – Remember the goal of SEO I defined at the start of this article: *“to get your site ranked in the top positions of organic search results for the keywords relevant to your product or service.”* The most important part of this statement is *“keywords relevant to your product or service.”* Put yourself in the mind of your potential customers. What might they be searching for that should lead them to your site? Keyword selection is one part intuition and nine parts research. Unlike paid search where you can add thousands of keywords and let the marketplace reveal which ones drive the most customers to your site, SEO requires a great deal of effort to rank for each keyword you choose, so you must choose those keywords intelligently.
- **An accessible site** – Search engines use automated “spiders” (also called “bots”) to crawl and index the web. This is how search engines know that sites exist and what content they contain. They literally download the web into their databases. If your site is not setup properly to allow these spiders to crawl your site’s content, then it will never get found and never have a chance of being ranked. Technologies such as JavaScript and Flash can prevent the spiders from effectively crawling your site’s content.
- **Good, well-optimized content** – This component has a lot of weight to it, so I’ll break it down into its finer meaning.

*Good content* – Your content has to be quality, and by quality I mean people have to want to read it. The easiest way to write good quality content is to focus on your target audience and address all of the questions, concerns and needs they might have about your product or service. Provide your content in a visually pleasing manner, using pictures, graphs, headings and subheadings to make it easier to comprehend. This is important for keeping visitors once they arrive on your site, and it is important in helping you earn links, which I’ll touch on later.

Well-optimized content is where SEO best practices come in. First of all, you have to have enough content to target all of the keywords for which you’ve chosen to rank. You simply will not rank for a keyword if you don’t have a page that supports that keyword well. You can target multiple related keywords (up to five is a good rule) on the same page, but for the most part, you will need a page for each major keyword you want to target. Those pages must, at a minimum, meet certain best practices such as including the keyword in the title tag, once in a header tag and then two to three times in the page content. Typically, more than this must be done, but this is a good start.

- **Links (aka in-bound links, back links, or external links)** – This is the most important factor that influences a site’s rankings in today’s SEO world. I talked a little bit about search engine spiders and the nature of how they crawl the web. Well, those spiders will never even find your site if you don’t have links pointing to it. That’s the first reason having links point to your site is important.

The more important reason to have inbound links is because they help indicate to search engines how “popular” your site is. Consider each link a vote from an external party. The more “votes” your site has compared to your competition, the higher probability it has of ranking well.

Link building is by far the most difficult and time-consuming aspect of SEO. All links are not created equal, so our metaphor of links as votes starts to break down when you get into the trenches and actually start building links. Everything from the page and site from which you get your link, down to the text that is used in that link provides different levels of value to your site. So, it is not a simple numbers game when it comes to link competition because there is a huge component of quality built in. Typically, the higher quality links are the most difficult to obtain.

Now, back to the topic of quality content. The higher the quality of content you have, the easier your link building task will be. Other site owners are much more likely to provide a link to your site if it provides quality content in a well-formatted and well-designed manner.

Looking at these components makes SEO seem fairly easy, and from a high-level understanding of what SEO is all about, I would agree that it is at least straightforward. If you brainstorm and research keywords and back your choices with data about search volume related to those keywords, you should end up with a keyword portfolio that will drive traffic to your site as if it were ranked in the top three for all of your terms. If you make sure your site is “search engine friendly,” so that the spiders can crawl and index it, and you spend time planning and writing great content around the keywords in your portfolio, then your site should be in good shape to rank. And lastly, if you dedicate enough time every day, week or month to build the right links to your site from the right places, eventually you will rank at the top of the search engines.

## Useful Takeaways

I want to leave you with some useful tools and examples related to the core components of SEO that I just covered.

### Keyword Research Tools

There are a ton of free and paid keyword research tools. These tools are great to help you assess the keywords you brainstormed, and also expand on them. My favorite free tool is Aaron Wall’s SEO Book Keyword Suggestion Tool because it pulls data from a number of other sources.

Below is just a slice of the output data from that tool. I input “breast augmentation” and here are the top results that were returned:

WordTracker	WordTracker count	Google daily est	Yahoo! daily est	MSN daily est	Overall daily est
<a href="#">breast augmentation</a>	1457	<a href="#">1,821</a>	<a href="#">523</a>	<a href="#">227</a>	2,570
<a href="#">breast augmentation dallas</a>	233	<a href="#">291</a>	<a href="#">84</a>	<a href="#">36</a>	411
<a href="#">breast augmentation fort worth</a>	213	<a href="#">266</a>	<a href="#">76</a>	<a href="#">33</a>	376
<a href="#">breast augmentation manhattan</a>	171	<a href="#">214</a>	<a href="#">61</a>	<a href="#">27</a>	302
<a href="#">manhattan breast augmentation</a>	164	<a href="#">205</a>	<a href="#">59</a>	<a href="#">26</a>	289

You can see columns for WordTracker (which is a paid keyword research service that offers some free results), Google, Yahoo, etc. It should be noted that none of these numbers should be taken at face value. The collection methods for all of them have inherent flaws, so the best these numbers can be used for is to determine relative search volume of keywords to one another. So, in the above example, you can see the research tool estimates that “breast augmentation” gets 2,570 daily searches and “breast augmentation Dallas” gets 411 daily searches. The best that can be said is that “breast augmentation” gets a substantial number of daily searches, which is about six

times the number of searches that “breast augmentation Dallas” gets. The greatest value of a tool like this is the keywords it suggests, and the relative importance of all the keywords to one another.

### Assessing Competition

There is a simple, but effective way to check the relative level of competition for any given keyword. Simply perform a search for that keyword on Google and look at the number of results returned.

Below are the numbers of results returned for both “breast augmentation” and “breast augmentation Dallas.”

**Results 1 - 100 of about 2,980,000 for [breast augmentation](#). (0.40 seconds)**

**Results 1 - 100 of about 119,000 for [breast augmentation dallas](#). (0.58 seconds)**

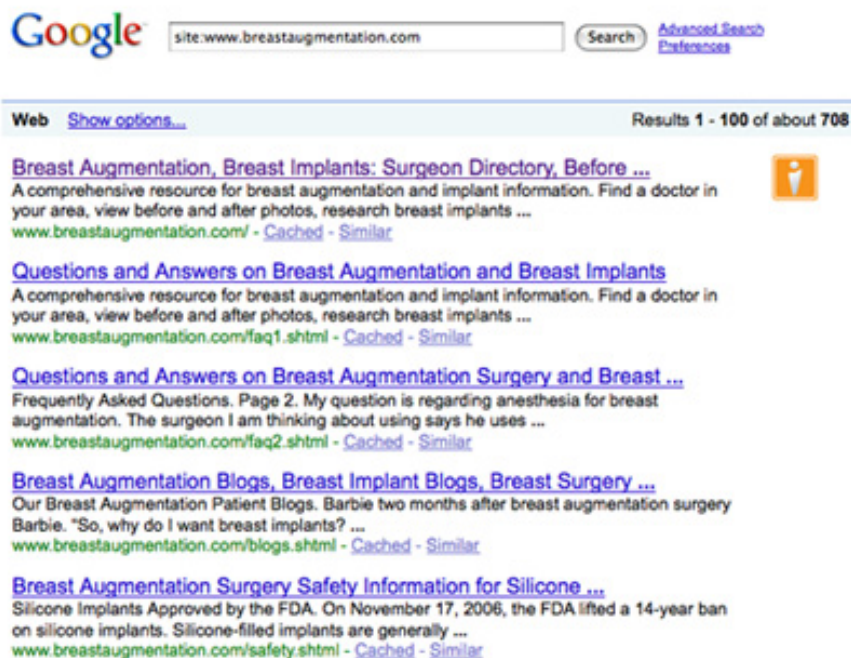
As you can see, “breast augmentation” returns about 2,980,000 results, while “breast augmentation Dallas” returns only about 119,000. If you want to rank for either of these terms, this is your competitive landscape. Carrying over our keyword research example from above, the “Dallas” search volume is about 1/6th of the generic search volume, but the competition for the “Dallas” phrase is a meager 1/25th of the generic search. This makes “breast augmentation Dallas” a very attractive keyword phrase to go after if you’re located in Dallas of course.

### Assessing your site’s “search engine friendliness”

Search engines provide a simple command that can help give you an indication of how accessible your site is to them, especially if it is a small site. The command is entered in the search box on any of the major engines and follows this format:

Site: [www.yoursiteURL.com](http://www.yoursiteURL.com)

Here’s an example of the first results returned for this command when it’s run on [www.breastaugmentation.com](http://www.breastaugmentation.com):



Note the format of the query in the search box and how the list of results is all pages from [breastaugmentation.com](http://breastaugmentation.com). In the top right you can see “Results 1 – 10 of about 708.” If you were the owner of this site and knew how many pages you had on the site, this simple test would give you a pretty good indication of whether or not your site was accessible to search engines. This “of about” number should be relatively close to your actual page count.

### Link Assessment

Doing link research on your site and your competitor’s site can help you gauge the amount of effort needed to compete on the link front in SEO. My favorite tool for doing this is SEOMoz’s Linkscape.

It offers limited access to data for free and a much more detailed access for a monthly subscription fee. This is the type of tool that any hired SEO consultant should have access to.

Here is the link detail returned on [breastaugmentation.com](http://breastaugmentation.com):

Most important, this free data shows you that this site has 1,162 external links pointing to it, but from only 118 domains. This is a very high link to domain ratio. What this means is that most of the sites that link to [breastaugmentation.com](http://breastaugmentation.com) link to it multiple times. It is much better to have diversity in these numbers, closer to a 1-to-1 parity where each link you get is from a new, unique domain.

A screenshot of the SEOMoz Linkscape tool interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the URL "http://www.breastaugmentation.com" and a "Run Basic Report" button. Below the search bar, there are tabs for "Basic Report", "Data Detail", and "Badges". The main content area displays a "Basic Intelligence Report for www.breastaugmentation.com" with the following data points: "most recently updated 2+ months ago", "mozRank 4.62 OUT OF 10", "External links 1,162 links", and "Root domains linking to this page 118 root domains".

Running this tool on your site and the sites that rank well for the keywords you've chosen for your portfolio will establish your relative position in terms of sheer link numbers compared to your competitors. This will be a good indication of the work you have ahead of you.

## **In Closing: A Brief Reality Check**

Combined with last month's paid search article, you should now have a much better understanding of search engine marketing and what it can mean for your business. The number of searchers continues to grow month after month and search engines are getting increasingly adept at targeting customers; so search engine marketing will continue to grow and will likely become the largest and most effective marketing channel available in the near future.

So what's the reality check? Consider that when you perform a search on any of the major search engines, the resulting SERP is made up of just two types of listings: paid and organic. This means if you want to compete in search engine marketing, you have two areas to focus on, PPC and SEO. This is a powerful statement when you consider the number of people that use search every month. Recent comScore statistics from March 2009 showed that 14 billion people used search to find what they were looking for on the web. Of course, there are other ways of promoting your site online, but the fact remains: if you are not appearing on a SERP for the keywords related to your business, you are missing out on a huge opportunity. You are doing business on a street that isn't on the map and that might as well have road blocks at all of its entrances.

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# **MENTORNOMICS**

## **Telling Your Value Story In Today's Economy Is Essential**

*By Susan Hopkins*

*Senior Director, Global Marketing & Sales Operations*

Today's economic headlines present a mix of good and bad news. When you examine the data, the common theme is that the economy's rate of deterioration is slowing down—an essential step before significant growth can resume.

In May, seven of the ten leading economic indicators that make up The Conference Board Leading Economic Index™ were positive<sup>1</sup>. However, the unemployment rate is expected to rise above 10% by the end of 2009 and to remain there throughout 2010. This means that although there is a shared consensus that the worst of the recession is behind us, things are not going to get wildly better soon.

According to the National Federation of Independent Business, about 20% of their members are decreasing prices as we pass the mid point of 2009<sup>2</sup>. This downward pressure on pricing is impacting even highly complicated and service-oriented fields including plastic surgery. So, if you're wondering if your competitors are cutting prices—many are.

However, price cutting may not be your best option. It may even conflict with the standard of care you take pride in providing your patients. Instead, it is essential that you are prepared to tell your value story and comfortable sharing it with your patients. Beverly Evans, LPN, shares this perspective: "We must continue to show our patients we are caring, dependable and provide superior service."

### **Economic Indicators That Impact Aesthetics**

There is positive and negative news in today's economic indicators. Personal income and consumer spending are showing upward "ticks," however, unemployment and manufacturing are still headlining negative news.

Which indicators should you be most concerned about as a plastic surgeon? As discussed in the first edition of Mentornomics™, the two primary economic indicators most relevant to plastic surgery practices are GDP and personal income. Looking at indicators after the fact is helpful to understanding what we've experienced. But what can we predict about the future?

In their July 1 Update on Economic Recovery<sup>2</sup>, The Conference Board forecast minimal GDP growth for the end of 2009, and 2% to 3% growth in 2010. This upward trend is certainly good news for plastic surgeons, as is the fact that personal income rose 1.4% in May. On July 8, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) improved their forecast for the US predicting 0.8% GDP growth in 2010<sup>3</sup>. We'd all agree some growth is better than no growth, so these forecasts are better news than we've seen in a while.

The correlation between personal income and aesthetic procedures discussed in last month's column demonstrates the care and service you provide as a plastic surgeon rank very high with current and prospective patients in terms of important personal needs.

When a prospective patient comes in for a consultation, you can be confident you are in a good position knowing they will cut back on activities paid for with disposable income, so they can afford plastic surgery procedures that significantly enhance their quality of life.

### Be Prepared To Tell Your Value Story

It is important not to be caught off guard when patients try to negotiate price with you, as this is happening more and more in today's economic climate. Instead, when patients initiate a discussion about price, you should initiate a discussion about value.

Your value statement can be a simple, brief conversation about the aspects of care, service and outcomes your patients really care about. Here are some examples:

- Safety
- Trust
- Special services that differentiate you from other surgeons
- Your depth of experience
- Your standard of care
- Your commitment to ongoing training on the newest techniques and products
- You and your entire team's dedication to providing excellent care
- our history of outstanding outcomes and patient testimonials

Listen to understand what your patients value most, and be prepared to speak about these aspects during every consultation. You don't have to cover all of the above points because each may not apply equally to you. In fact, trying to say they do all at once could undermine your credibility. Focus on your and your team's real strengths.

Simply create a few sentences in your mind that clearly communicate your core strengths in a way you are confident presenting and that is compelling to your patients.

Emphasizing your value story can be much more effective than cutting prices. Here's why: price cutting can work against you by devaluing your work. Competitors may follow your move and reduce their prices further. And it can be difficult to bring your prices back up once you start cutting them.

### The Take-Away

In today's market, don't be surprised when patients talk to you about price. Instead, assume they will and have your value statement ready. Your value statement is a way for you to communicate your strengths and the standard of care you provide your patients. In fact, proactively talking about value can help patients understand why the service and outcomes you provide are well worth the price you charge.

	2009				2010			
Annualized Percent Change	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Real GDP	-5.5	-2.4	0.4	1.6	2.1	2.0	2.3	3.2
Real Consumer Spending	1.4	0.0	1.6	1.4	1.3	2.4	2.5	2.4
Unemployment Rate (%)	8.1	9.4	9.7	10.1	10.2	10.3	10.2	10.1

\* Actual

\*\* Source: The Conference Board<sup>2</sup>

#### References:

1. The Conference Board Leading Economic Index™, June 18, 2009
2. *Growth and Flexibility in Mid-Markets, the Future of Mid-Markets in the Economic Recovery*. Bart van Ark, Vice President and Chief Economist, The Conference Board, and William Dunkelberg, Chief Economist, National Federation of Independent Business, July 1, 2009
3. World Economic Outlook Update, the international Monetary Fund, July 8, 2009.