



THE MODERN SEARCH MANUAL

A Tactical Guide for the Future of Healthcare Search

How to reach patients, physicians, and customers in all the places they're searching. Now featuring the CRISP Framework for AI-ready content.

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Now includes:
CRISP for
Agentic AI

Introduction

Get to know Search 2.0

Not long ago, search was a marketing channel comprising just a handful of search engines. The lion's share of the search market went to Google, and everyone followed the SEO playbook du jour to maintain visibility and drive traffic.

Search has evolved significantly since its inception, but we're seeing the greatest changes in the market right now. AI's widespread adoption is changing where and how people search.

In fact, 37% of consumers now start searches in AI tools rather than traditional search engines ([Search Engine Land, Jan. 2026](#)). This doesn't replace Google searches, but it changes the entry point into the patient journey for many.

Patients have more options than ever when looking for health services, products, or information.

Websites across the industry are experiencing this shift, with reduced traffic and conversions. The options are clear: Adapt your strategy for the future of search or lose visibility and relevance.

AI search (ChatGPT, Perplexity, AI Overviews) is here now. Agentic AI — AI that acts on behalf of users, not just answers questions — is coming fast. The organizations that will thrive are already preparing their content infrastructure to support it.

This guide offers an overview of today's search climate, along with practical strategies, resources, and steps you can implement right away to make measurable gains. Read on for insights to position your brand as a leader in this new era of search.

Table of contents

1 How search has changed

- Diversification of search channels
- Decreases in traffic
- Changing consumer behaviors
- New SERP appearance

2 Modern healthcare search strategies

1. Focus on MOFU/BOFU content
2. Optimize your website content for AI
3. Accommodate modern search behaviors
4. Leverage videos and images
5. Integrate your social and search strategies
6. Tailor content for voice search
7. Refine your digital presence
8. Grow your owned channels

3 Next steps for healthcare marketing leaders

- Step 1. Audit
- Step 2. Optimize
- Step 3. Strategize
- Step 4. Socialize
- Step 5. Plan

4 Conclusion

Addendum: GEO checklist

Part 1

How search has changed

Marketing channels evolve, and search is no different. But outside shifts in the digital world have rapidly transformed the “where” and “how” of search — both for consumers and the marketers who want to reach them.

What are those digital shifts? The rise of AI on a consumer level and the increasing use of social media platforms as search engines.

Bottom line up front:

- Search now happens in a variety of places.
- AI is stealing organic search traffic.
- People search (and approach) content differently.
- Visibility is a limited commodity.

Diversification of search channels

Google is no longer the only place where search happens. The pool of options is deeper. Consumers don't have to rely on organic rankings to get queries answered. They can go to their favorite AI tool or social media platform instead.

With search no longer confined to traditional search engines, search strategies must cover a range of channels. Marketers must now focus on — and split their efforts between — several different sources of traffic.



Part 1

How search has changed

Decreases in traffic

AI's invasion has brought unforeseen consequences to marketing departments and SEO teams. Many healthcare searches (especially top-of-funnel queries like "what is tinnitus?") can be quickly answered by AI Overviews or AI chatbots. This gives users little reason or desire to click through to the sources.

AI intensified the phenomenon of zero-click searches (a term coined by Amanda Natividad at SparkToro), decimating organic traffic across the board.

But this change isn't all bad. Users who do click through to your website now represent more qualified traffic. They're looking for something beyond a surface-level answer. Use this insight to your advantage.



While generative search decreases traffic to websites, it also creates opportunities to think more deeply about the digital experience and how to support customer needs. We expect that people coming to our website are more informed than ever and arrive with greater intent to engage with us. We're focusing on deeper content, connecting the dots between our clinicians and services, guiding people to the next best step, and supporting online scheduling or other opportunities to engage our services.

Aaron Watkins, AVP, Digital Strategy at NorthBay Health

Part 1

How search has changed

Changing consumer behaviors

Shifts in the digital market are sparking new trends in search behavior. As people are getting accustomed to the back-and-forth nature of chatting with AI assistants, they're swapping the short-form queries of the past for more conversational search terms.

Queries are becoming longer, question-based, and more specific. Instead of "heart attack signs," we're moving toward "how do I know if I'm having a heart attack?" or "does fast heartbeat and sweating mean I'm having a heart attack?"

Traditional query	Long-tail query
"flu symptoms"	"What are the first signs of the flu?"
"pediatrician near me"	"Where can I find a pediatrician near me who is taking new patients?"
"best hospital for heart surgery"	"Which hospital has the best success rate for heart surgeries?"
"diabetes diet plan"	"What foods should I eat to manage my diabetes?"
"urgent care wait times"	"How long is the wait at [Name] urgent care center?"

Consumers aren't just bringing long-form queries to the search picnic. They're also approaching digital media with more skepticism in response to the influx of questionable AI-generated content. Public trust in online information is dwindling. Health brands must overcome this hurdle with authoritative, trustworthy content.

Part 1

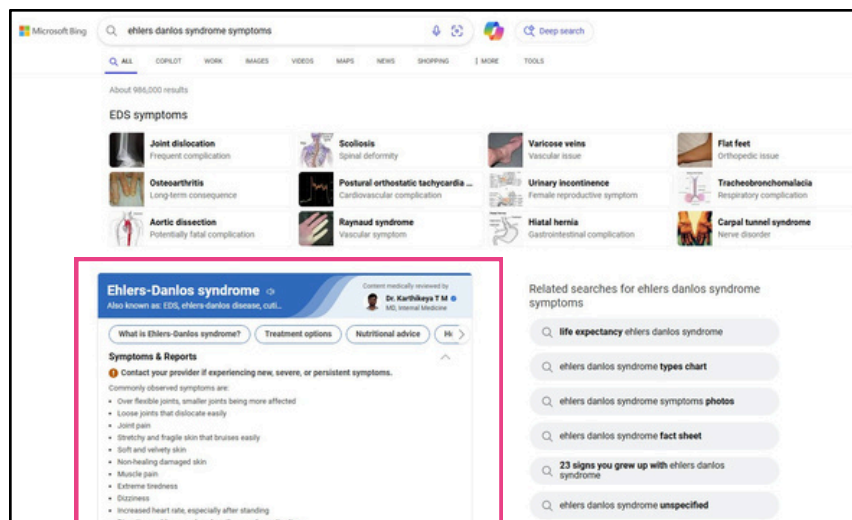
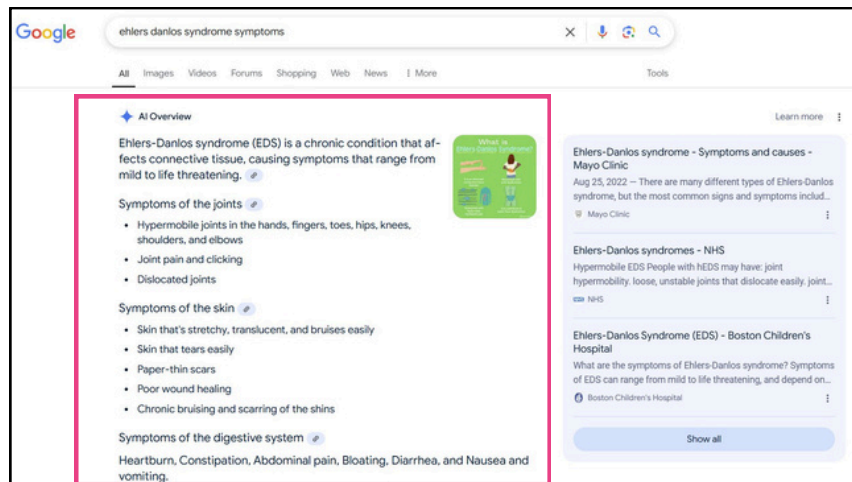
How search has changed

New SERP appearance

Search engines are also looking different lately. SERP layouts are cluttered with AI-generated results and search features that push organic results farther down the page. Between AI Overviews, knowledge graphs, local packs, featured snippets, video panels, and ads, it's getting increasingly difficult to land above the fold (or before the user scrolls).

Google isn't the only culprit — it's a similar story on other search engines.

But there's one silver lining to this mayhem. These search features offer new opportunities for websites to "rank" and drive traffic (that most brands aren't yet capitalizing on).



Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

Don't throw away your old search playbook — instead, grab your red pen and prepare to write in the margins. Read strategies for reaching and engaging patients, physicians, and healthcare customers in all the places they search for information.

1. Focus on middle- and bottom-of-funnel content

Top-of-funnel content is easy for AI platforms to summarize — and they often do. Users searching broad topics like “flu symptoms” may never reach your site.

That makes mid- and bottom-funnel content more valuable. These users are farther along in their journey, looking for comparisons, next steps, or ways to engage.

Instead of chasing keywords, focus on topics that support decision-making. Build content around search intent — not search volume.

Tactics

- **Shift your focus:** Prioritize middle- and bottom-of-funnel topics like “pediatric telehealth services near me” or “top healthcare CRM for small practices.”
- **Strengthen physician bios:** Optimize these assets for patient searches and physician referral marketing.
- **Create deeper-funnel assets:** Develop case studies, decision-making guides, and video tutorials.
- **Encourage conversions:** Use clear calls to action, like “Schedule an appointment” or “Download the guide.”



Outcomes

- Higher engagement and increased conversions
- Stronger visibility and relevance for patients and referrers
- Increased leads, patient engagement, and ROI from search

Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

2. Optimize your content for AI platforms

Traditional SEO now shares the stage with a slew of new acronyms: GEO (generative engine optimization), AIO (AI optimization), and LLMO (large language model optimization). These frameworks aren't all quite the same, but they all focus on tactics that drive visibility in AI platforms.

Call it what you want — but to truly optimize for AI search, you need more than surface-level tweaks. You need to treat your content as infrastructure.

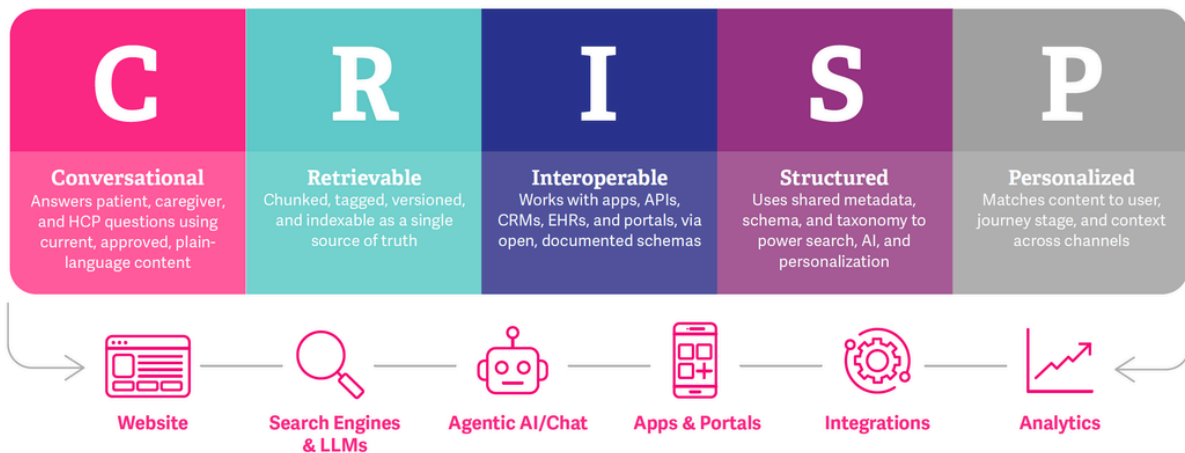
AI doesn't just use your content; it summarizes it. Every inconsistency, outdated page, buried PDF, and siloed department becomes visible the moment an AI agent tries to answer a patient's question using your website. The brands that win in AI search won't be the ones with the flashiest tools — they'll be the ones whose content is usable, governed, and scalable.

That's where the CRISP framework comes in.



CRISP Content for Healthcare: Prepare Your Content for Agentic AI

CRISP is a practical framework for turning your content into a data layer that can power websites, apps, and agentic AI experiences. It keeps your stories clear and on-brand while making your content machine-readable and ready for AI to use at scale.



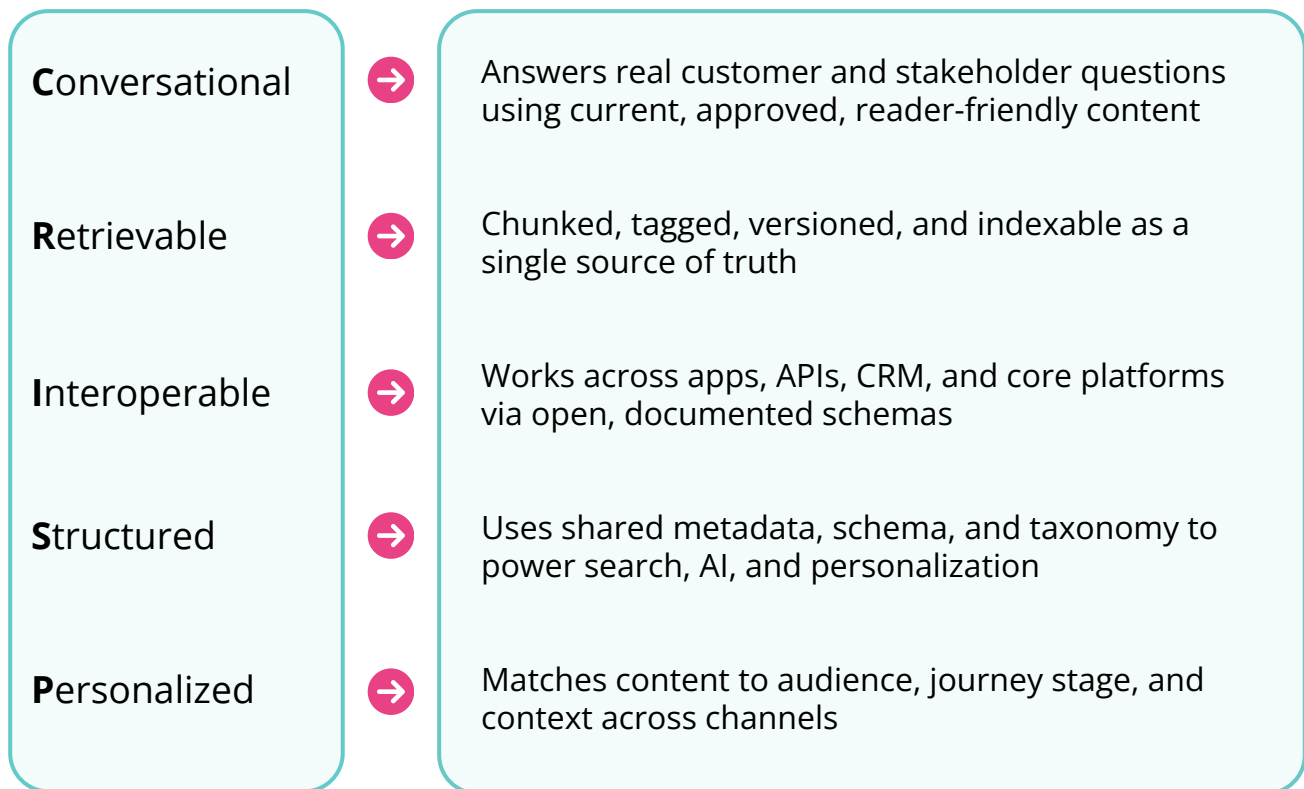
Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

The CRISP Framework continued

Developed by Ahava Leibtag, CRISP stands for Conversational, Retrievable, Interoperable, Structured, and Personalized.

It's a practical roadmap for transforming your content from formatted web pages into a data layer that powers your website, AI platforms, patient portals, and beyond.



Executing CRISP isn't a solo act. Marketing typically owns the conversational, retrievable, and personalized layers, while your digital and IT teams own interoperability and structure — with overlap in most areas. Getting these groups aligned is the work. And it's worth it.

Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

3. Accommodate modern search behaviors

Searchers are moving from concise queries to more natural language. Speak your audience's language to meet them where they are. Target search terms that are longer, conversational, and specific.

Tactics

- **Use long-tail phrases:** Incorporate long-tail search topics (made up of 3 or more words) in each piece of content.
- **Target 0-volume keywords:** Don't get too hung up on monthly search volume. Keyword research tools aren't always right, and new, trending topics take time to show up.
- **Answer questions:** Include the question in subheadings, where it's natural.
- **Use plain language:** Blend medical terminology with common names to ensure you're targeting search terms that your audience is using.



Outcome

- Rank for the keywords your audience is searching in the places where they're looking

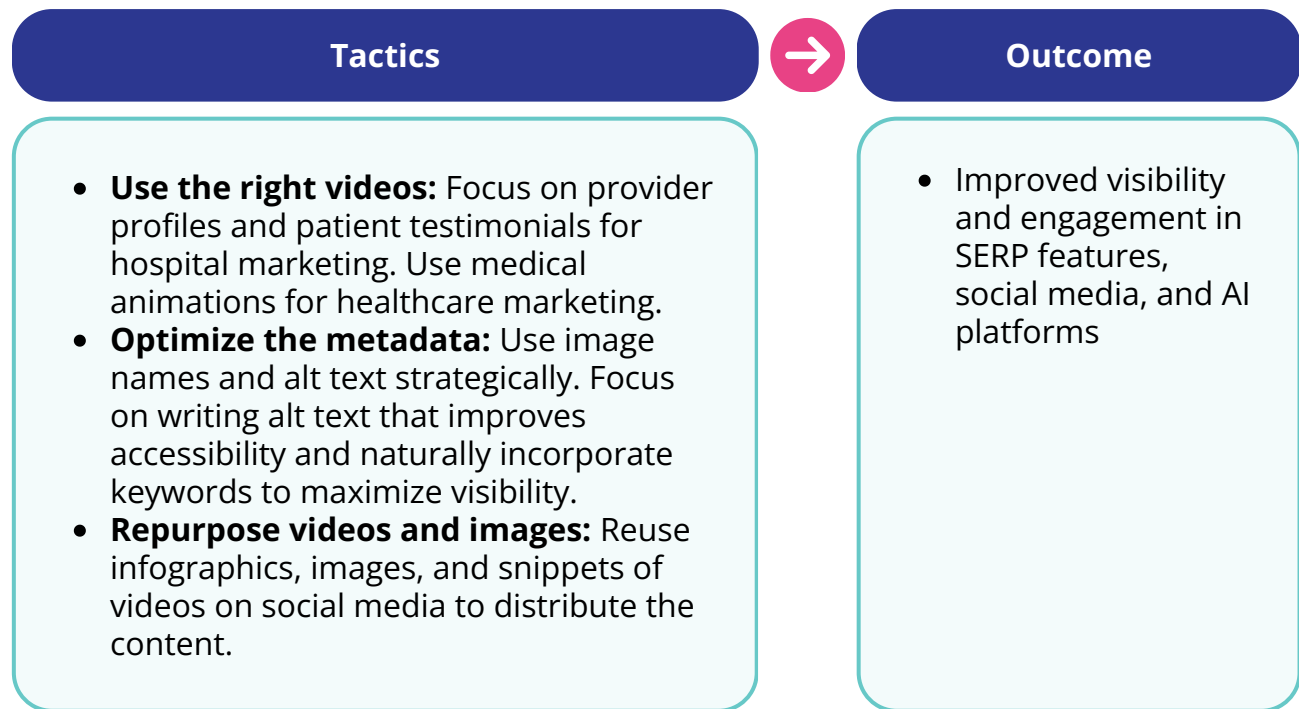
Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

4. Leverage high-quality videos and imagery

Search engines' video and image panels offer more opportunities to rank beyond organic search results (which now appear lower on SERPs). Sometimes, these visually driven search features are also less competitive than organic results.

Engaging videos and images also boost your content's visibility on AI and social media. Produce high-quality videos and images (like medical animations and infographics) to help your content rank, stand out, and drive clicks.

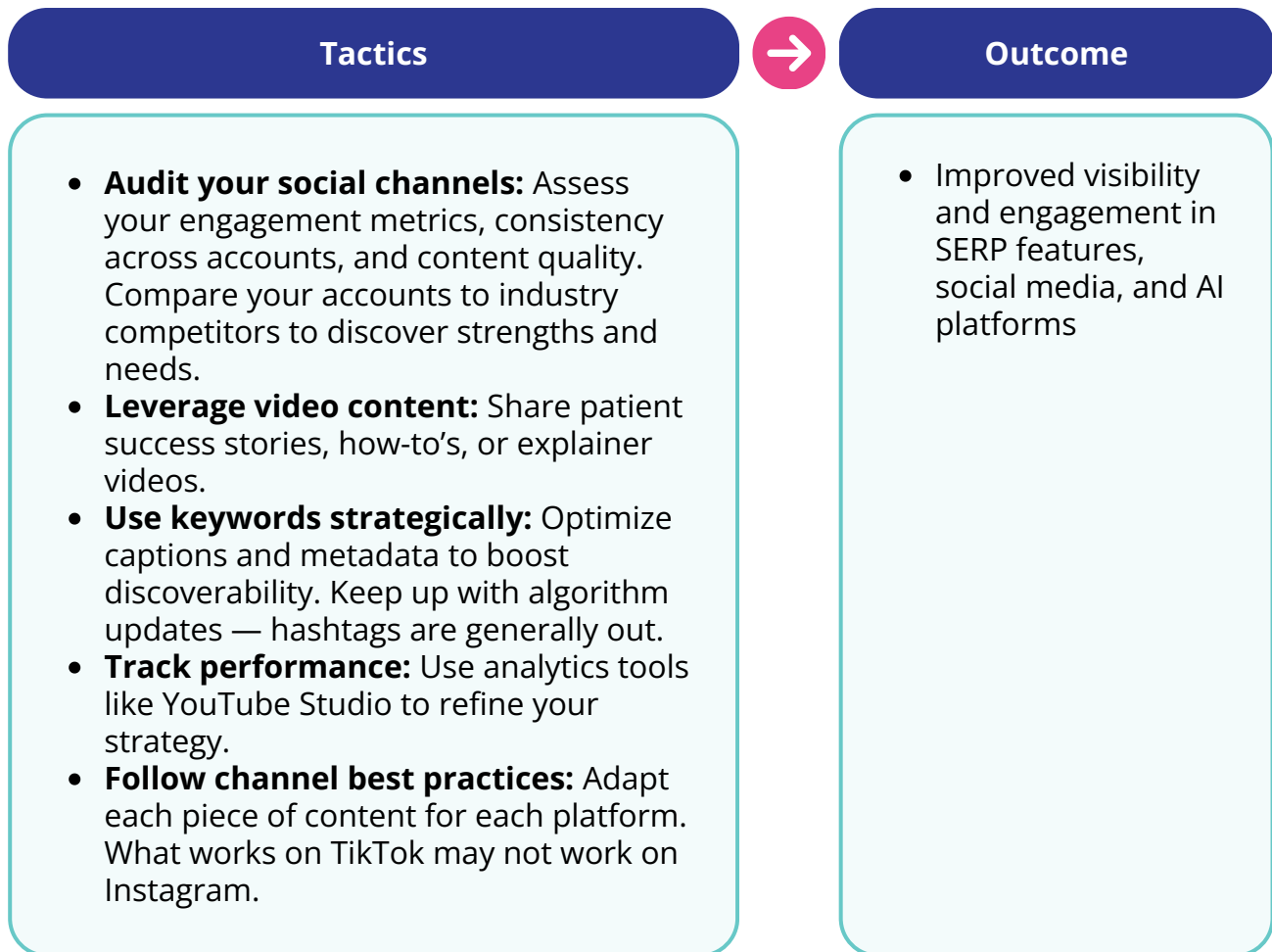


Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

5. Integrate your social and search strategies

Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are now de facto search engines. Understand each platform's different algorithms and audiences, and adapt your social media strategy to boost discoverability on these distinct search engines.



A note about social media

No one can predict the future of social media. Any platform can shut down overnight or undergo drastic changes without warning. Yet, despite the volatility of these platforms, ignoring them is not an option. Your audience is looking for information there — and if you don't provide it, your competitors will.

Build on rented land with caution and move your audience to owned channels before it's too late.

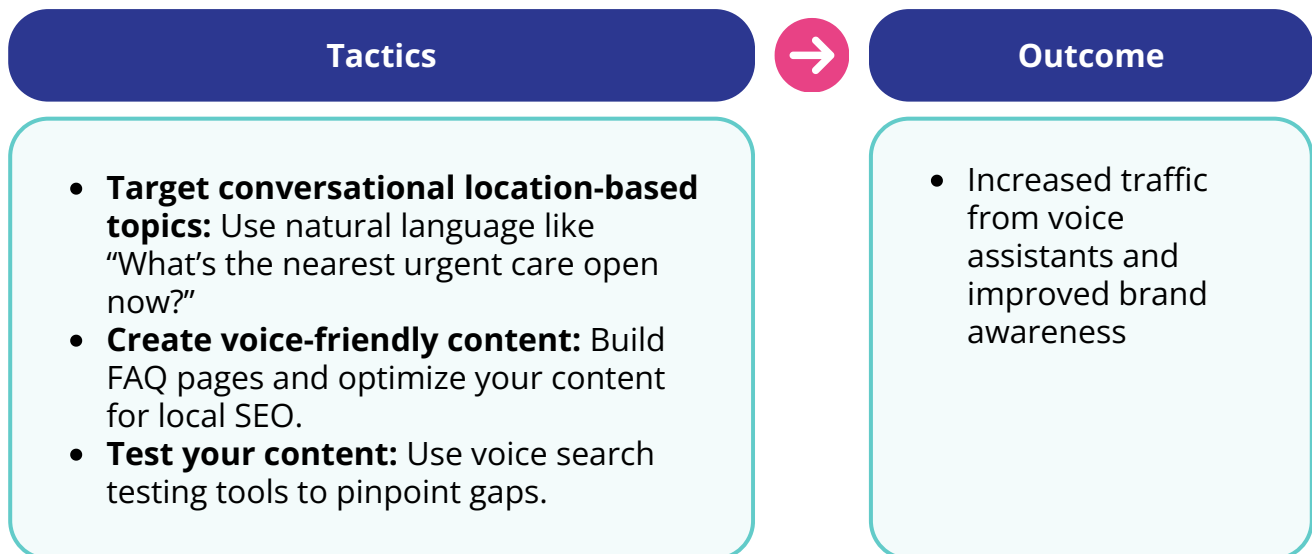
Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

6. Tailor content for voice search

Voice assistants like Alexa, Siri, and ChatGPT are key tools for location-based healthcare queries. It's quicker for busy parents to ask Siri for "the closest emergency room open now" while loading the kids into the car than to type in their search.

People also use longer, more natural queries when talking to an audio chatbot. Shift your content strategy to improve your brand's performance in both AI and voice search.



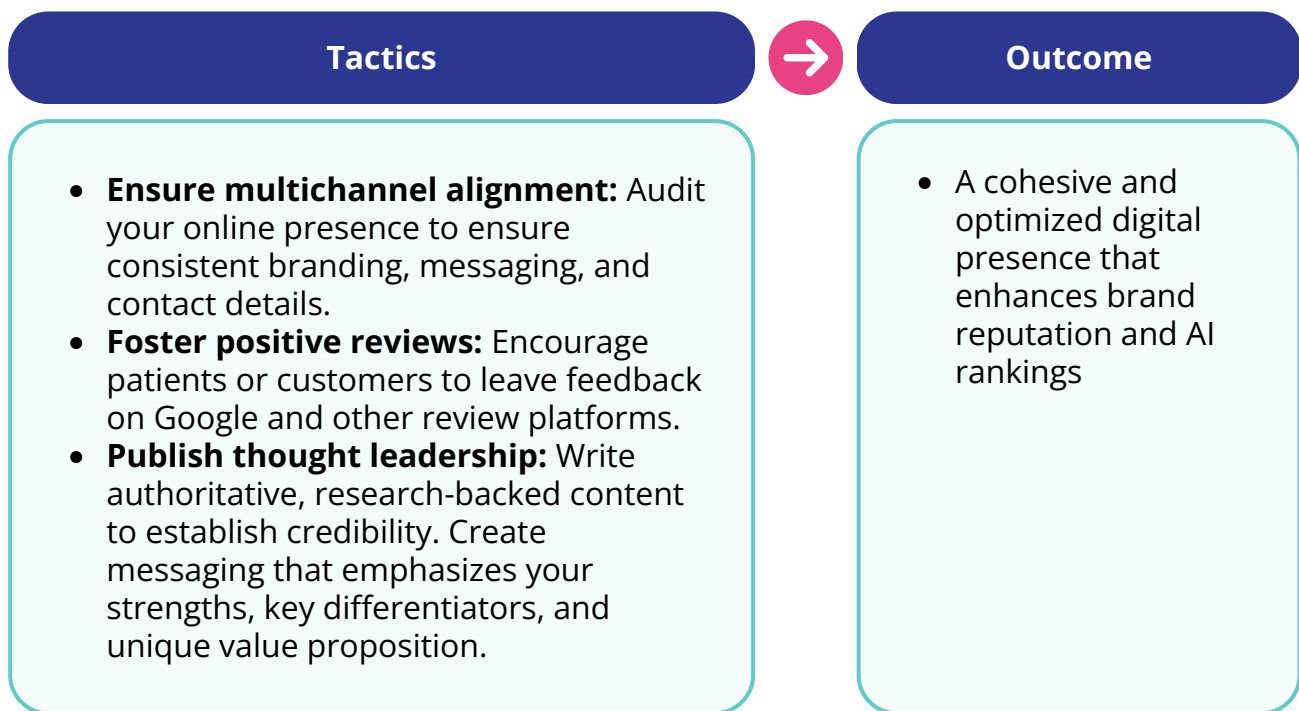
Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

7. Refine your digital presence

Trust is a dwindling resource. People are bombarded by misinformation. They want reliable health information from a reputable source. Answer that call as a consistent, trustworthy voice in your space.

Authoritative content builds institutional trust and improves brand perception. It can also improve your chances in AI platforms, as AI uses brand perception signals when answering queries like “best hospitals for cancer treatment.” Credibility and cross-channel brand consistency are critical for rankings, reputation, and conversion.



Authentic content that is clear, concise, and consistent with your brand voice is going to be more important than ever. Standing out in an AI-generated content world means building trust with the audience.

Chris Pace, Senior Healthcare Marketing Executive

Part 2

Modern healthcare search strategies

8. Grow your owned channels

Search engine algorithms will continue to change unpredictably. AI platforms will keep competing, iterating, and adapting. Social media platforms will come and go, getting banned and unbanned, with algorithms that also change overnight and threaten your reach.

But your ability to reach your email subscribers can't be stifled quite as easily. And if you can make your website your audience's go-to source for information, that channel is a close second. Invest in owned channels that provide reliable, long-term ROI.

Tactics

- **Drive subscribes:** Move your social and search audience to email with compelling opt-in forms and reasons to subscribe.
- **Segment your audience:** Use insights from your search strategy to tailor email campaigns.
- **Deliver consistent value:** Share exclusive guides, updates, or video content that subscribers can't find elsewhere.
- **Improve user experience:** Offer engaging, trustworthy content about topics that are important to your audience with a modern, intuitive design that creates a positive experience.
- **Track results:** Measure metrics like open rates and conversions to refine your approach.



Outcome

- A stronger connection with your audience and less reliance on volatile channels

Part 3

Next steps for healthcare marketing leaders

This new search landscape calls for marketers to be agile but calculated. We can't bury our heads in the sand, but we also can't dive headfirst into the waves. Scan the horizon, dip your toe in the water, and take it one step at a time.

Step 1. Audit your search performance across channels

Take stock of your current search performance. Audit each of your search channels, including social media and AI platforms.

Audit goals:

- **Measure** the traffic being driven by each channel.
- **Track** engagement metrics like bounce rates, click-throughs, and conversions.
- **Identify** top-performing pages and referral sources, including AI-driven platforms.
- **Spot** inconsistencies in branding or messaging across channels.
- **Map** out opportunities to optimize existing content for AI search.
- **Understand** how your SEO and GEO results stack up against competitors and gain inspiration.

Step 2. Optimize your web content

During the audit, you found your low-hanging fruit and the juiciest apples at the top of the tree (like untapped keywords and new opportunities to land in search features).

Use these findings to inform your content optimization plan. Prioritize your middle- and bottom-of-funnel assets that are more likely to drive traffic and conversions. Follow the GEO checklist on page 19 when rewriting and optimizing your website content.

Step 3. Adjust your search strategy

Rework your search strategy with new approaches from the guide, performance metrics, and content workflows. Figure out how you'll track success and schedule a date to evaluate progress, like 90 days after implementation.

Part 3

Next steps for healthcare marketing leaders (continued)

Step 4. Socialize changes with your team

Share your audit findings and strategic shifts. Develop your team's skills for today's state of search, including GEO, and emphasize the value of executing these new strategies.

Step 5. Approach content planning from a fresh lens

As you plan your next quarter of content, incorporate the 8 strategies in this guide. Experiment with new tactics, monitor the metrics, and adjust accordingly to reach your objectives. Focus on building an aligned digital presence that engages your audience and develops brand authority.

Part 4

Conclusion

Search's new reality doesn't have to be bad news for your traffic, visibility, and marketing ROI. View these changes as opportunities to increase your brand's reach and connection with your audience.

Looking to fast-track your growth in the modern search market? Get a clear picture of your brand's search performance with custom strategies you can implement ASAP.

Learn about our [AI visibility audit](#) that packs a powerful punch.

About Aha Media Group

Aha Media Group is a leading healthcare content strategy and copywriting consultancy. With over 60 content marketing experts, our team produces award-winning strategies and campaigns for 200+ healthcare organizations.

Digital marketing has changed a lot since our founding in 2005. What hasn't changed? Our commitment to following the latest advances and helping our clients handle every curveball.

Don't stress over new search. We've got your back.

[Get in touch](#)



Addendum

Search checklist

SEO isn't dead, but it's sharing the stage with other search channels. Follow these best practices to optimize your content and boost your visibility in the new age of search.

Before clicking "send" on that piece of content, did you ...

- Target long-tail phrases** that resemble conversational language?
- Target ideas** that represent niche or trending topics (even if "0-volume")?
- Perform an AI search analysis** for the target topic(s) to find similarities and gaps in the ranking results?
- Answer questions** about the topic and target question-based search terms?
- Create hyper-relevant content** that matches search intent?
- Break up the information** into chunks, lists, and Q&As to help readers and AI understand it?
- Include expertise, unique insights**, and details that a generative engine can't?
- Demonstrate authority** by including metrics, research, expert quotes, testimonials, awards, or messaging about your institutional differentiators?
- Use rich visuals** like infographics, provider videos, medical animations, or patient testimonial videos?
- Balance medical terminology** with plain language?
- Fact-check** the information and cite your sources?
- Encourage conversion** with clear calls to action and smooth user pathways?
- Partner with IT or your CMS manager** to ensure content can be accessed via API or structured feeds across platforms?