Your Medical Group's Find-a-Provider:

The Foundation for Online Patient Acquisition

Historically, the healthcare industry has not enabled the level of direct-to-consumer engagement common in other industries.

The patient journey used to be fairly linear and predictable—local referring providers and word of mouth generated a reliable funnel of patients. However, consumers are taking a more active role in their healthcare decisions and using the internet as a key source of information. In fact, over half of all consumers—and between 60-70% of those who experienced a health issue—say they have looked online for information about health concerns or care providers.[1] As medical groups seek to acquire and retain patients, they face growing competition to capture their attention online.

Some healthcare organizations have focused their efforts on adding their providers to third-party provider listing sites, which list providers from all sorts of different and competing organizations, often at the expense of investing sufficiently in their own sites. Doing so has helped them attract some patients, but not break away from the competition by establishing direct relationships with patients and building brand loyalty.

To take control of your medical group's online patient acquisition strategy and improve retention, it has become increasingly important to own the patient relationship from the first introduction online through the ongoing engagement that occurs after the initial appointment ends. This means investing in all areas of the online access journey:

1. **Attracting** consumers directly to your website through search engine optimization (SEO) as they perform health-related research online

2. **Converting** demand with an action-oriented care search experience that enables consumers to easily find the right providers and book appointments

3. **Retaining** patients with modern digital interactions and self-service tools that keep your medical group top of mind when future care needs arise

1. Attracting Consumers Directly to Your Website

The key to attracting consumers online is understanding their search inquiries and appealing to their ultimate goal: finding the right provider. A 2020 study of 1,000 patients revealed that the internet is the top source that consumers turn to when conducting their own research to find a new healthcare provider. Combined with the fact that nearly 60% of online consumers use a search engine like Google, it's imperative to feature provider information prominently on your medical group's website and in your SEO strategy to attract consumers.[2]

As a starting point, work to ensure that your medical group's website ranks highly in search engines, as a significant majority of users do not go beyond the first page of Google search results. Your find-a-provider enables you to attract consumers by marketing the services they are looking for in their search queries. Optimizing search engine ranking requires aligning the entire website—from the underlying code to the keywords and headers on individual pages—with consumers' needs and search behaviors. For example, does your find-a-provider have dynamically populated search terms in its page titles? Are location and specialty web pages accessible in a way that easily resolves search queries?

To maximize your medical group's ability to attract consumers, leverage a richer understanding of consumer behavior, search inquiries, and user preferences to:

1. **Improve rankings** using structured data, a schema that helps search engines understand the contents of the site and index it for search.

2. **Appeal to consumers** by surfacing the content that mirrors the intent of their search (e.g., "cardiologists near me") in search engine meta descriptions.

3. **Improve SEO** organically by providing content that users are more likely to click in search engine results, such as patient ratings and reviews.

With a design in place to reflect consumer search queries and more effectively attract patients to your medical group's website, the next step is building a plan to provide the rich digital experiences consumers have grown accustomed to in other industries (e.g., the ability to self-schedule appointments online).

Presenting basic provider information online is the first step in engaging prospective patients, but consumers are looking for more detailed provider information and richer digital experiences when searching for care. In addition to clinical needs, an effective find-a-provider must account for important non-clinical factors that influence consumer decisions, such as insurance accepted, appointment availability, and location (Figure 1). [2]
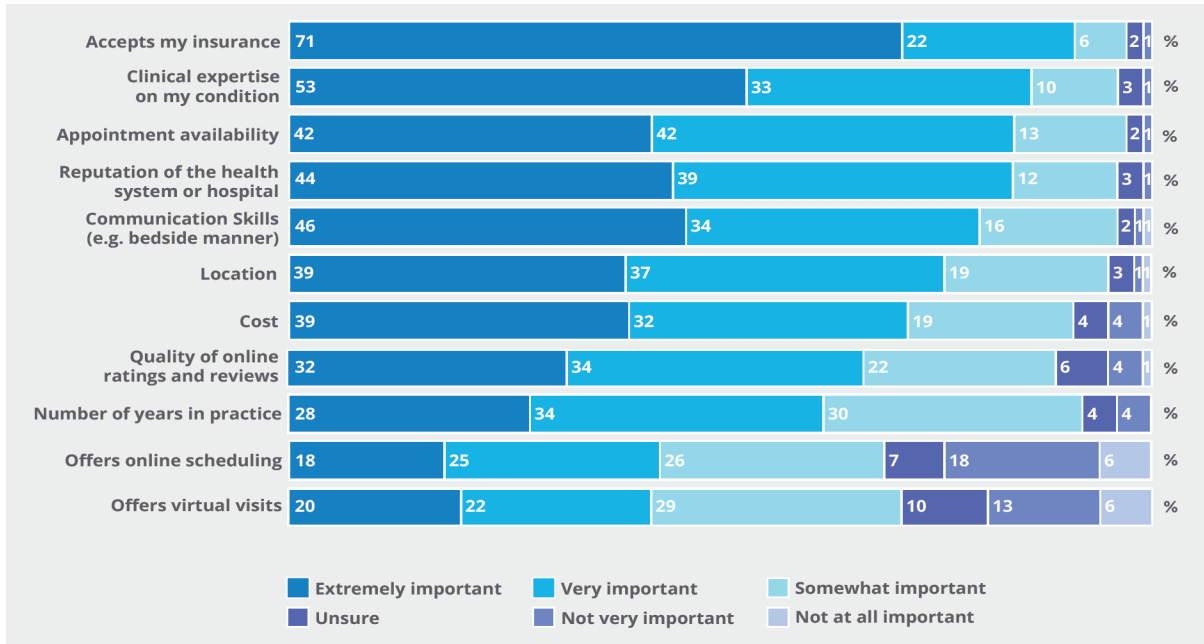

Figure 1: Most important criteria for consumers when selecting a provider [n=947]

Despite their importance to consumers, these provider attributes are often not accessible to patients online. And, even in cases where they do provide such information, the vast majority of find-a-providers lack the capabilities that make them valuable to consumers: keyword-based search (as opposed to basic specialty areas only), filters and sorting options for key criteria (e.g., insurance accepted, languages spoken), and typeahead search. Keyword-based search is particularly important in consumer-facing find-a-providers, as few people know the specific clinical terms for their symptoms and conditions. Most find-a-providers, however, don't allow consumers to search for a provider using the lay terms they know. For example, when a consumer understands their condition to be the abbreviated "afib" (atrial fibrillation), third-party listing sites are not equipped to route this lay synonym to an electrophysiologist. This can result in patient-provider mismatches, which lead to negative patient experiences.

In addition to rich information to help them select the right providers for their needs, today's consumers also increasingly want to be able to self-schedule their appointments online 24/7. And this demand for digital self-service is quickly rising: over 43% of consumers, and the majority of millennials and Gen Xers, prefer to book appointments online. Further, 57% of those who prefer online booking would switch providers for it.[2] This underscores the critical role find-a-provider sites play in converting demand to booked appointments. However, most find-a-providers lack the capabilities enable online consumer self-scheduling. These gaps put medical groups at risk of website abandonment as patients turn to Google, a third-party listing site, or a competitor, to access more providers and book appointments online.

As consumer demand for convenience grows, medical groups can differentiate themselves from competitors and effectively convert online demand with an intuitive care search and scheduling experience—all starting from the find-a-provider.

3. Retaining Patients with Modern Digital Options

Consumer digital access gaps also contribute to patient retention challenges. According to an Accenture study, "Patient loyalty: It's up for grabs," the rising demand for digital health capabilities makes providers—and in turn, care delivery organizations—vulnerable to patients switching to competitors. The increase in digital health capabilities adopted from other industries—such as patient ratings and online appointment scheduling—makes it easier for existing patients to seek treatment elsewhere.[3] Thus, investments in your organization's own digital presence stand to not only help you attract new patients, but also retain existing ones who are increasingly seeking more convenient access options.

Not investing sufficiently in your own, robust find-a-provider can lead to missed opportunities for building loyalty and driving patient retention:

- **Online brand awareness** - By not innovating digitally, you miss opportunities to build brand equity that can differentiate your medical group from competitors. This decreases the likelihood that your organization will be top of mind when the need for care arises in the future. Investing to expand the digital reach of your medical group—both within and beyond your website—can create brand awareness and affinity that will help attract and convert new patients, as well as build loyalty over time.

- **Digital self-service** - Consumers are increasingly looking for convenient, self-service tools as illustrated by the growing preference for online booking across all age groups—and especially among millennials, up 28 percentage points in the past year alone. Not only is there a growing desire to book online, but also consumers are more likely to switch providers for this capability; 57% of those who prefer online booking would switch for it.[2] Building a robust find-a-provider and seamless online scheduling experience can help your medical group retain these digital-first patients over time.

- **Data quality** - For medical groups, whose providers and services are their 'products,' it is critical to have complete and accurate provider data. However, many find-a-providers are limited in their ability to capture a provider's clinical areas of focus beyond specialty or subspecialty. Missing or inconsistent data can lead to patient-provider mismatches, ultimately resulting in a poor patient experience and/or suboptimal care. By ensuring the accuracy and consistency of provider data in your medical group's find-a-provider, you create positive patient interactions and build trust that will help to retain patients long term.

Investing in your medical group's website and find-a-provider can build sustainable competitive advantage through online brand awareness, digital self-service tools, and high-quality provider data. By understanding consumer needs and catering to their preferences, you can create a seamless, differentiated digital access experience that drives long-term retention.

As you consider new digital access strategies, it's critical to understand the important role your medical group's find-a-provider plays in helping your organization acquire new patients, convert demand, and boost retention. By investing in your medical group's own digital properties—and especially your find-a-provider—you create opportunities to meet modern consumers where they are, to build and differentiate your brand, and ultimately to convert online consumers into loyal patients.

Ready to take a closer look at areas of opportunity for your find-a-provider? Check out the list of five must-haves below.

Acquiring and Retaining Patients Online:
Five Find-a-Provider Must-Haves

1. Effective Search Engine Optimization

57% of online researchers use Google when searching for a provider.[2] **Some basic optimizations can help your website rank higher in search engines.**

- **Dynamic page titles** - Website page titles for provider profiles that include provider name, location and specialty
- **Structured data** - Markup code on your website to help search engines understand content and return more informative results for users
- **Mobile optimization** - Mobile-friendly websites that are prioritized in Google search results for mobile users

2. Easy Searching and Filtering

Useful features such as keyword-based search and dynamic filters enhance the ease with which patients can find the information they're looking for.

- **Keyword search** - Search that supports a wide range of keyword terms—beyond specialty—that are mapped to relevant providers
- **Availability search** - Ability to find a provider based on the day and time that is convenient to the patient
- **Filters for location proximity and insurances accepted** - Filters for narrowing results based on key criteria that patients deem most important

3. Differentiated User Experience

Healthcare information is complex and can be difficult to navigate. Basic user assistance can greatly reduce user error and deliver a positive experience.

- **Typeahead search (i.e. autocomplete)** - Search feature that predicts a user's input and provides potential matches for him/her to select
- **Sorting options** - Ability to sort, such as by distance or availability, helps consumers prioritize their needs
- **Synonym keyword search** - Ability to search using clinical terms, as well as the lay synonyms that consumers use to express their needs

Want to know more about investing in your own brand and breaking away from the competition? Request a complimentary Find-a-Provider Assessment today at www.kyruus.com/find-a-provider-assessment.

4. Clear Calls to Action

Action-oriented websites with clear calls to action (CTAs) make provider profile pages more effective at converting demand.

- **Book appointment CTA** - Prominent CTAs, whether to call or book online, that help to convert demand more quickly
- **Appointment request form** - Appointment request web forms that offer self-service options when direct scheduling is not available
- **Online scheduling** - Online appointment booking that enables consumers to schedule an appointment at a time most convenient to them

5. High Quality Provider Data

The key to a robust provider directory is the underlying provider data, and ensuring it is accurate, complete, and always up-to-date is critical.

- **Data sources** - The most reliable data sources for provider profile elements, and the business rules for consolidating sources
- **Data processing** - Technology-enabled processes that streamline data quality efforts to cleanse and merge disparate provider records
- **Data management** - A centralized way to access, update, and manage provider data changes

Citations

1. Deloitte, Health Care Consumer Engagement: No One-Size-Fits-All Approach, 2015.
2. Kyruus, Patient Access Journey Report, 2020.
3. Accenture, Matthew Collier and Leslie Meyer Basham, Patient Loyalty: It's Up for Grabs, 2016.

To learn more about Kyruus' patient access solutions for medical groups, visit www.kyruus.com/medical-groups.