

The rise of **voice activated search**

By Carl Burroughs

Do you remember your first experience of a voice activated device? For many of us, it was reminiscent of Monty Python Hungarian Phrase Book Sketch (under 40? Google it – it's still very funny today) – with results that bared little resemblance to what was spoken.

Fast-forward to today and things are very different. The technology has improved so much that voice search and voice activated devices very often deliver better and certainly quicker results than the equivalent typed command. According to Forbes* the use of voice search features on mobile devices will grow from 45% in late 2018 to a whopping 82% by 2020.

It is no surprise that the world's most successful technology companies, Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft have achieved in a matter of just a few years, what the telecommunication companies of the world failed to achieve, even though they have been trying to for two decades. If you use Siri, Google Assistant, Alexa or Contana, the chances are you will get swift and accurate results. Compare this with the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology the telco's have been using, which frustrate most of us to a point of shouting obscenities down the phone at a machine! (or is that just me?)

But how does this relate to the marketing of your dental practice? And does it produce any opportunities?

As I have mentioned many times in this column over the years, when it comes to dental marketing, "first in – best dressed". Trends happen so quickly these days; when you see the rise of something new, you should embrace it as soon as possible as there is a window of opportunity where you will get a disproportionate benefit, whilst your competition try and catch-up. Back

in 2005, I published an article explaining why letting patients book on-line would be revolutionary and bring benefits to both patients and practices alike. Today, I have clients who have over 80% of all their appointments booked on-line. More recently, I have been espousing the benefits of Live Chat, which still only has a modest take-up by the dental profession, but has a proven track record of producing new patients at a very low cost.

In terms of Voice Search, there are three key elements I would like you to focus on. Firstly, when you use the voice search button on Google and say something like "Dentist in Balwyn" – it will give you the exact results, as you would find from a typed search on your smartphone. Why is this important? Well it is yet another reason why Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)



is so important. Year after year, people predict the imminent death of SEO and every year, it becomes more and more relevant for local businesses. So, make sure your SEO company gets you to the top of Google maps and to the top of the page as there are even more reasons to dominate this space coming down the track.

The second area of opportunity is from the rise of services such as Siri. These services are very often used in sentence format. A typical question may be "what is the best dentist in (suburb) Cronulla" This will bring back practices with the highest reputation. Siri will tell you about the practice, it's opening hours and even make a call to the practice with the right command. So, your action point here is to make sure that your online reputation – i.e. your Google and Facebook reviews are plentiful, genuine and positive.

The third area also relates to the use of Siri, Alexa and the like. We are starting to ask questions of these devices. For example, a user may ask Siri "What is the lowest price of an examination scale and clean in Chisholm?"

Siri will then show the results of what is displayed on a local website in Chisholm. So, making sure core messages are prominent (and in text – not flat artwork) is important. A really good way of increasing your chances of getting found first on these searches is by having a really comprehensive FAQ section that matches the most popular asked questions.

So, how important is 'Voice Search'? – Well like all shifts, it will become very important, which is why you should act now, so you are benefiting before your local competition is and also you are already on top of the trend when it becomes vital.

For a free analysis of how to 'Voice Search Friendly' your website and your web presence contact the team at IDM. ♦

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