Search That Works: Digital Access in Healthcare

How Smarter Search Improves Access, Reduces Friction and Delivers on Digital Expectations

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The New Front Door

The patient journey doesn't start in a waiting room. It starts with a search.

Sometimes it's on Google. Often it's on your website, where visitors type in their expectations, frustrations and intent. Too often they leave empty-handed.

43% of visitors go straight to search
Forrester, 2023

Forty-three percent (43%) of visitors go straight to the search bar when they land on a healthcare site (*Forrester, 2023*). Many don't find what they need. They're looking for answers about coverage, providers or costs and end up with broken links, outdated directories or vague results that push them to call.

urgent care near me

Urgent Care – Camelback & 19th Ave
Walk-ins welcome • Open today until 8 p.m.
Next available reservation: 2:15 p.m.
Distance: 1.2 miles
Reserve Spot   **View Location**

Urgent Care – East Phoenix
Online check-in available • Open until 9 p.m.
Wait Time: Approx. 20 minutes
Distance: 2.3 miles
Check in Now   **Get Directions**

What to Expect at Urgent Care
Cough, flu, sprains, minor cuts, fever and more
See Full List of Conditions

Urgent vs. Emergency Care
Learn when to go to urgent care and when to visit the Emergency Room
Read More

Search is no longer a utility. It's the digital front door to your health system. It plays a direct role in access, conversion and satisfaction.

When digital friction delays access to care, the impact isn't just operational—it's clinical. In value-based care environments, poor experiences upstream lead to missed appointments, lower quality scores and gaps in follow-up. It's a risk to both outcomes and reimbursement.

Healthcare teams are under pressure. Staffing shortages, Medicaid churn and rising expectations from consumers mean your website has to carry more of the load. Most tools weren't built for it.

This guide shows how to change that. Patients expect fast, accurate answers and broken search creates friction that costs time, trust and revenue. We outline the barriers most health systems face, what patients want, and what digital teams need to succeed. Most importantly, we show how smarter search removes friction at the earliest touchpoint and becomes a strategic asset that connects more people to care, faster.
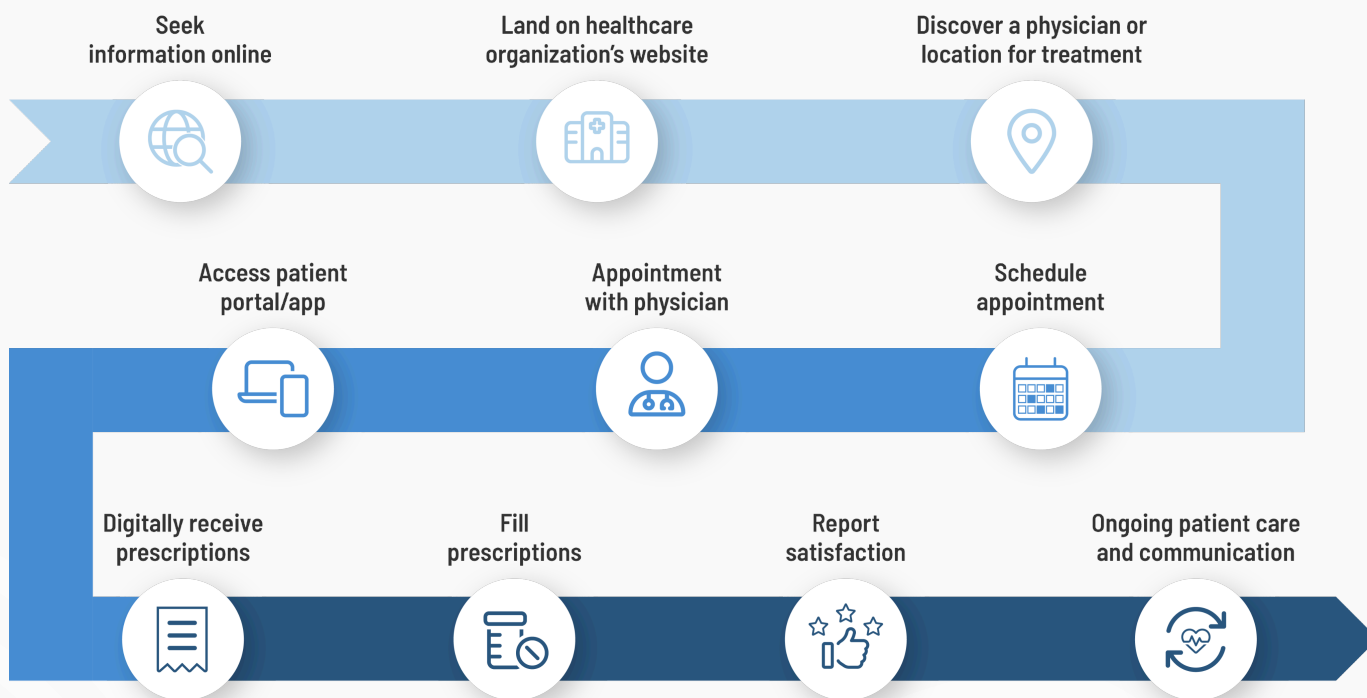
A typical patient journey begins with search

What's Broken and What It's Costing You

Patients come to your site expecting answers. But when search doesn't work, they don't wait—they leave or they call.

Many health systems still rely on outdated tools. Search results are buried, inconsistent or missing. Provider directories are hard to use. Pricing is locked in PDFs. Common queries about Medicaid, urgent care or appointment scheduling return generic content or dead ends.

This creates friction at the exact moment patients are trying to engage. That friction has a cost.

Only 1% of systems meet call resolution benchmarks

4.4 minutes average hold time

$13.9M average annual call center cost

find a doctor near me

Finds answer

Calls center or leaves site

The ripple effect of broken search

When search fails, patients take their questions elsewhere. Often that means your call center.

- Average hold time is 4.4 minutes —far above the 50-second target set by the Healthcare Financial Management Association (*Dialog Health, Nov. 2024*)

- Only 1% of systems hit optimal first-call resolution rates (*Healow, 2024*)

- Annual operating costs for hospital call centers average $13.9 million, with 43% tied to staffing (*Dialog Health, 2024*)

That's budget and time spent handling questions your website should answer in seconds.

Beyond cost, poor search hurts digital performance. Bounce rates rise. Conversions drop. Self-service journeys stall. Your content works hard, but patients can't find it.

And in a value-based care model, delays in access can affect not just satisfaction but outcomes and reimbursement. Search failures become care delays.

Onsite search is fixable

Search doesn't need to be the weakest link in your digital experience. With smarter tools and clearer visibility, healthcare marketers can eliminate the bottlenecks and connect patients to the right next step, without redesigns or rebuilds.

> **" *I'm a firm believer that search is navigation. Navigation used to be menus, but now we find that it's really driven by search.***

Chris Pace | Former Senior Director of Digital Marketing | Banner Health

≋ Banner Health.

Patient Expectations are Rapidly Changing

Patients don't think of your website as simply a location finder, a doctor finder or a healthcare library; they treat it as a tool to connect the condition they have to the care they need.

Today's healthcare consumers bring expectations shaped by industries like travel, retail and banking. They want results, not roadblocks. When search falls short, they don't click around hoping to find the answer. **They leave.**

77% of patients search online before booking
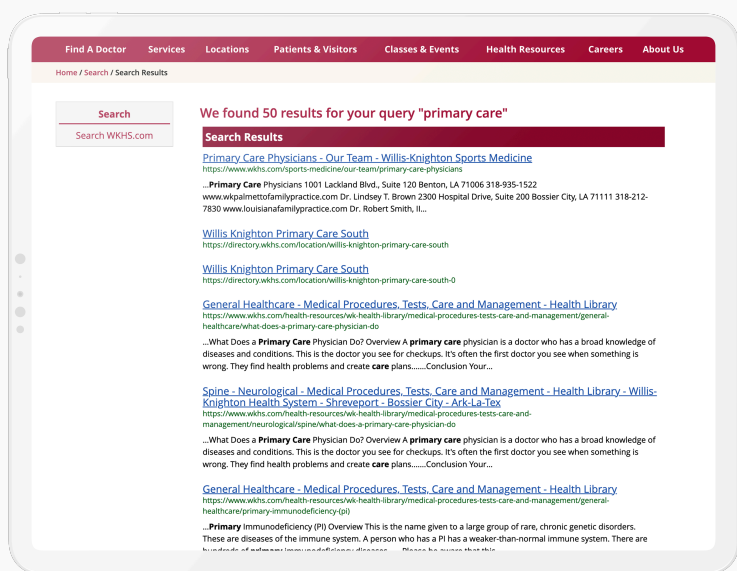*Growth Marketing Pro, 2024*

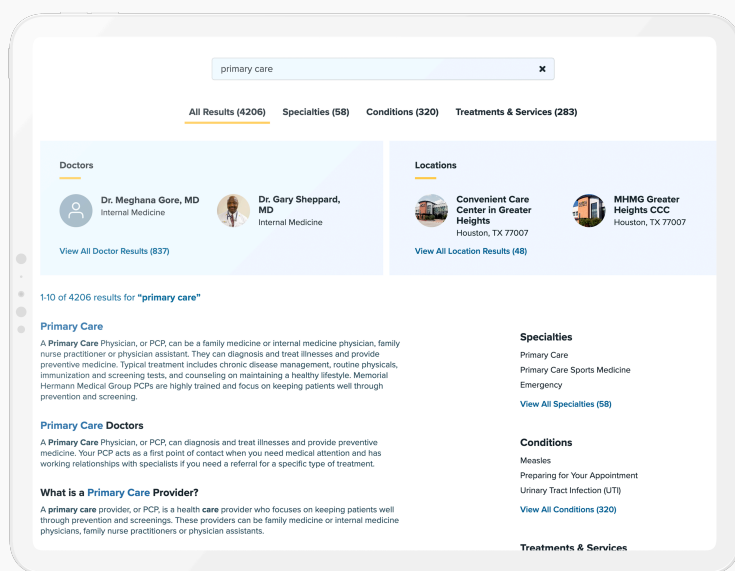**Over 50%** look for cost information
Experian, 2024

62% of health searches happen on mobile
Pew Research, 2024

Functional but outdated search experience

Streamlined, patient-focused search experience

Core expectations from search

Find a doctor who meets their needs
Patients expect to filter by specialty, location and insurance to get results that are relevant and accurate.

Understand the cost of care
Cost transparency is now table stakes. More than 50% of patients search for prices before making decisions (*Experian Health, Feb. 2024*).

Get answers without having to call
Whether it's Medicaid eligibility, urgent care hours or appointment logistics, patients want self-service options that match the convenience they're used to elsewhere.

Mobile-ready and accessible
More than 60% of health-related searches happen on smartphones (*Pew Research Center, June 2024*). Patients need fast-loading, accessible experiences that work in multiple languages and comply with Section 508.

When these expectations aren't met, patients drop off. That's not just lost opportunity—it's lost trust.

A patient who can't find cost info or the right provider doesn't assume it's a technical issue. They assume the health system doesn't have what they need. They move on.

Healthcare marketers work hard to attract patients online. But when the search experience fails, engagement and acquisition suffer. This is where friction starts—and where it should be solved.

What Healthcare Teams Actually Need From Site Search

Your digital and marketing teams face relentless demands. To succeed, they need more than tools. They need solutions that empower them, not slow them down.

This isn't about adding another vendor. It's about removing friction—inside your team and for your patients. Here's what healthcare marketers should expect from a modern search platform built for real-world needs.

74%
Better outcomes with no-code tools
Gartner, 2024

+25%
Higher conversion with data-informed strategies
McKinsey, 2024

+15%
Rise in healthcare breaches
HIPAA Journal, 2023

No-code control and agility

Healthcare marketers are stretched thin. Waiting on IT for every minor update isn't sustainable. Look for tools that let your team:

- **Promote** key service lines or update provider content without developer support

- **Respond** to emerging search trends—like flu season, Medicaid updates or urgent care spikes—in minutes

- **Customize** search experiences for high-value lines like oncology or orthopedics, with no backend rework

Gartner reports that 74% of marketing teams see improved results when they have no-code or low-code control *(Gartner, Jan. 2024, gartner.com)*.

Data-driven insights you can act on

Every patient search is a signal. Modern platforms should deliver real-time analytics that help teams:

- Track top queries and high-drop-off terms

- Surface content gaps where patients aren't getting answers

- Measure which service lines or provider pages are performing best

McKinsey found that healthcare marketers using data-informed strategies saw up to **25% higher patient conversion** (*McKinsey & Company, Feb. 2024, mckinsey.com*).

Built-in compliance and security

Smart search shouldn't create risk. With HIPAA-conscious architecture, your team moves fast and stays compliant. Look for:

- Certified HIPAA-compliant infrastructure

- Regular third-party security audits (SOC 2, ISO 27001)

- Full documentation for audits and procurement review

In 2023, **healthcare data breaches rose 15%**, underscoring the need for secure digital platforms (*HIPAA Journal, Dec. 2023, hipaajournal.com*).

CMS-agnostic and enterprise-ready

Many healthcare sites still run on legacy CMS platforms. Your search solution should work with your existing infrastructure, not require a full rebuild.

SearchStax supports:

- Multi-site, multi-brand environments

- Directories powered by Kyruus, DexCare, Healthgrades or custom APIs

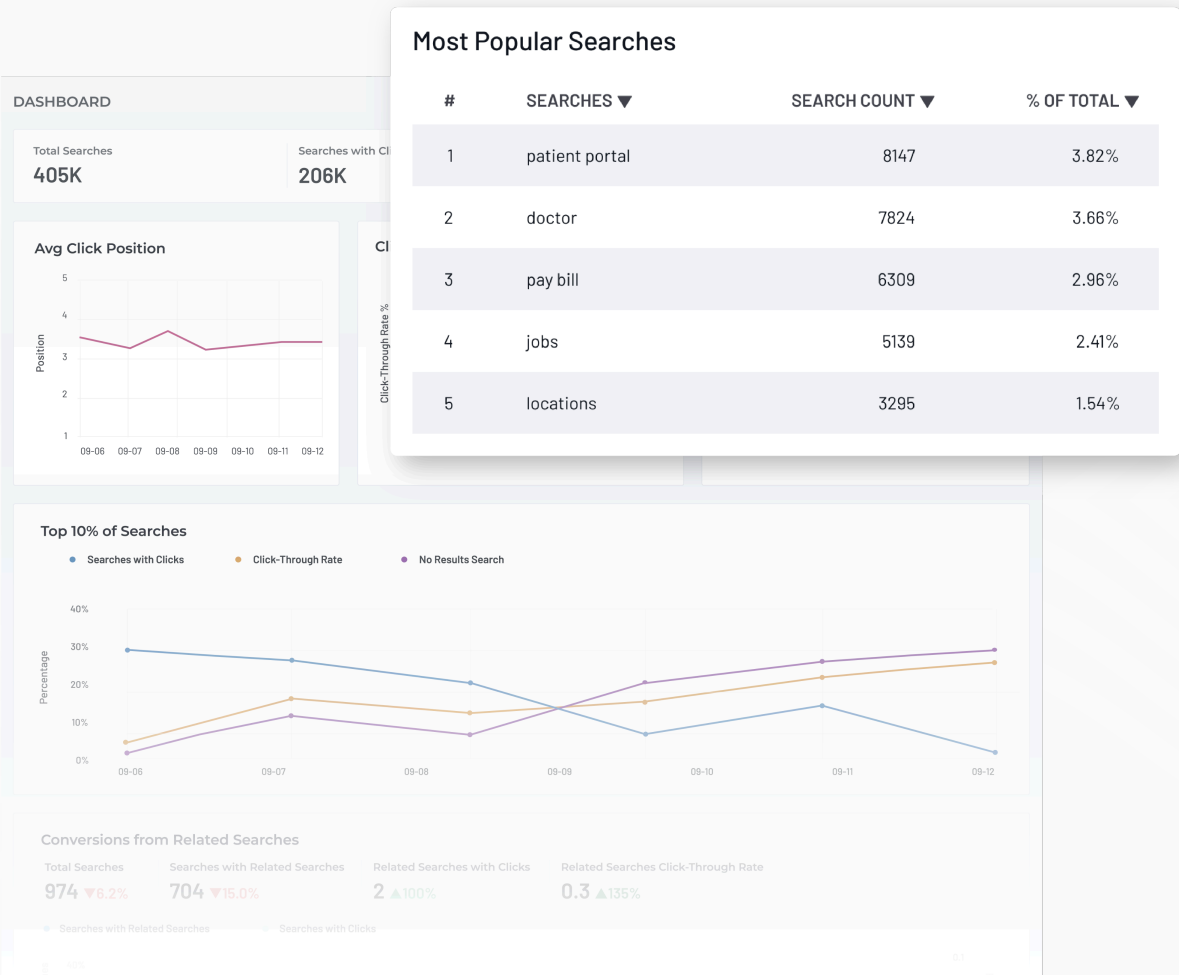- Smooth integration during redesigns or phased migrations

Gartner notes that **82% of digital transformation projects fail due to inflexible tools and unclear requirements** (*Gartner, March 2024, gartner.com*).

Truly patient-first design

Smart search platforms anticipate how real people ask questions and need answers. Look for:

- **Intent detection** that understands natural language queries like "cost of MRI" or "how to schedule a visit" and provides highly relevant responses, unlike basic keyword matching

- **Language accessibility and mobile optimization** for better equity and usability

- **Insights** to help you improve and personalize over time

More than 67 million Americans speak a language other than English at home (*U.S. Census Bureau, Aug. 2024, census.gov*). **Inclusive search isn't a feature—it's a necessity.**

Most Popular Searches

#	SEARCHES ▼	SEARCH COUNT ▼	% OF TOTAL ▼
1	patient portal	8147	3.82%
2	doctor	7824	3.66%
3	pay bill	6309	2.96%
4	jobs	5139	2.41%
5	locations	3295	1.54%

Smarter Search in Action

When a patient searches "urgent care near me," they're not browsing, they are trying to find care immediately, and near their location. Traditional site search wasn't built for the complexity of a patient journey. SearchStax is.

SearchStax Site Search with its AI capabilities like Smart Ranking and Smart Answers are purpose-built to remove friction from the digital journey. They transform outdated search into an intuitive, helpful tool that connects patients to care faster.

> *We're a knowledge engine. And SearchStax is what helps us power that engine at scale.*
>
> Director at Leading Healthcare Publication

Instant answers with Smart Answers

Smart Answers uses generative AI to provide direct responses from your existing content. Instead of a list of links, patients get the right information immediately.

Here's how it works in real patient scenarios:

- **"Can I see a doctor today?"**
  Smart Answers shows nearby clinics, hours and scheduling links in seconds—reducing call volume and increasing conversions.

- **"How much does an MRI cost?"**
  Patients get an estimated price range, coverage guidance and financial assistance info—helping them make informed decisions without a phone call.

- **"Is this visit covered by Medicaid?"**
  The platform responds with eligibility details, accepted plans and how to check coverage—delivering clarity for a high-need population.

These are real moments that reduce drop-offs and improve access when patients are ready to engage.

Do you offer financial assistance?

Yes. We offer multiple programs including charity care and payment plans. Learn more at
🔗 **Financial Help Page**

Contextual understanding with Smart Ranking

Not every search is a question. As searches are getting longer with more detail, there's also an expectation that the search bar should understand the meaning of the query.

Smart Ranking from SearchStax uses AI to evaluate the contextual meaning of longer search terms, for example "mammogram frequency recommendation" and instantly reorders the results with the most relevant topic landing at the top of the page. Instead of treating the search as a straight keyword match, which could throw off the results list quality by attempting to match words like "recommendation" and "frequency."

Built to show results fast

You don't have to wait for a redesign to fix your search.

SearchStax integrates with your existing CMS, provider directory and analytics stack. Teams typically go live in 60 to 90 days and see measurable improvements within the first 30 days.

Smart Answers can reduce repetitive calls by up to 35%, while enhanced site search consistently improves click-through and conversion rates (*SearchStax customer data, July 2025*).

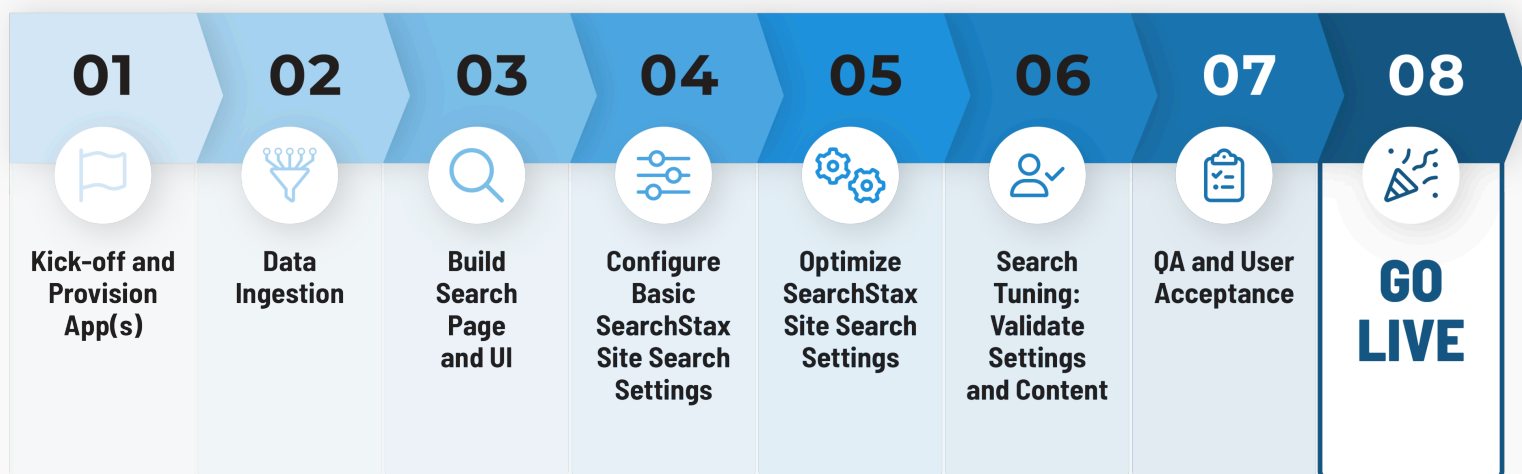# 🔑 The Path to Better Search: Remove Friction, Drive Access

Patients want clarity and speed. Teams want tools that deliver. The gap between those needs is where friction lives, and it's costing you.

When search doesn't work, the ripple effects are immediate. Missed appointments. Overflowing call centers. Dropped sessions. Delayed care. But improving digital access doesn't require a full redesign or months of planning. Smarter search delivers impact fast.

Smarter search means better access

In value-based care environments, every barrier to access matters. Search isn't just about UX anymore. It's a strategic lever that improves digital engagement, boosts conversion and helps close the loop between marketing and outcomes.

Modernizing your search experience removes friction at the start of the journey and helps more people connect to care faster. It's an optimization you can make on your existing website, with quick deployment and measurable results in weeks—not months.

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
Kick-off and Provision App(s)	Data Ingestion	Build Search Page and UI	Configure Basic SearchStax Site Search Settings	Optimize SearchStax Site Search Settings	Search Tuning: Validate Settings and Content	QA and User Acceptance	GO LIVE

Fast time to value

SearchStax customers typically go live in 60 to 90 days. No new CMS. No replatforming. No disruption. Just a better experience built on what you already have. SearchStax Site Search is CMS- and DXP-agnostic, so it works with any platform you're on today and can move with you as your tech stack changes.

- Works with your existing tech stack

- Requires minimal lift from IT

- Puts marketing and digital teams in control

You start seeing results right away—from higher engagement and lower bounce rates to fewer inbound calls and more scheduled visits. With the cost of a phone call to your call center averaging $10-20, and the average revenue of a primary care appointment around $100, the return on investment can be rationalized immediately after implementation.

> **"** *We needed an efficient way to build key pages like Find a Doctor, Find Clinical Trials and Find a Location; SearchStax allowed us to easily build those pages off of indexes, using relevancy and results modeling to guarantee that users have a great experience and find the location or service they need.*

Nicholas Lauritzen | Programmer – Lead, Web App Dev. | UChicago Medicine

AT THE FOREFRONT
UChicago Medicine

Move fast with compliance in place

Healthcare marketing needs speed. But it also needs security. SearchStax is built on HIPAA-conscious architecture with full compliance documentation and third-party certifications that stand up to audit scrutiny.

You can move fast and stay compliant—without compromise.

Start here

If you're seeing high bounce rates, call center complaints or friction in high-value service lines, search may be the missing link. Start by evaluating your current performance.

SearchStax offers a complimentary search audit and experience scorecard to show where patients get stuck and where you can improve.

Smart search is no longer optional. It's the clearest path to better digital performance.

Learn more at SearchStax.com

REQUEST A DEMO →

SEARCHSTAX

Is Your Search Strategy Serving Patients or Sending Them Away?

Your search experience is more than a box on a page—it's the first signal of how easy it is for patients to engage with your organization.

Use this checklist to see if your current search is working for you—or costing you.

☑ Search Experience Checklist

PATIENT EXPERIENCE	Yes	No	Comments
Can patients find the right provider in two clicks or less?			
Are search results relevant, personalized and location-aware?			
Does the search support common phrases like "flu shot near me" or "does this take Medicaid"?			

MOBILE AND ACCESSIBILITY	Yes	No	Comments
Is search optimized for fast loading on mobile?			
Does it meet Section 508 accessibility standards?			
Can patients search in Spanish or other languages common in your region?			

MARKETING AGILITY	Yes	No	Comments
Can your team adjust search results or promote content without IT?			
Are you able to respond to real-time trends—like COVID surges, wildfire smoke or flu season?			
Can you track what patients are searching for and what they're clicking?			

PERFORMANCE AND INTEGRATION	Yes	No	Comments
Does your current search integrate with your CMS, directories and analytics?			
Is implementation measured in weeks—not quarters?			
Are you seeing improvements in time on site, click-throughs or form completions?			

COMPLIANCE AND SECURITY	Yes	No	Comments
Is your search vendor HIPAA-conscious and audit-ready?			
Do you have SOC 2 or ISO documentation for procurement and compliance reviews?			
Is patient data protected across the full search experience?			

⚠ **If you answered "no" to three or more of these, it's time to take a closer look.**

➡ Next Step: Get Your Search Experience Scorecard

We'll show you where patients get stuck, where content is missed and how to unlock real performance from your current site—no redesign required.

> ❝ *I think search is at the core of anything. Unless our users can find something within one, maybe two clicks, they're going to jump to the search.*
>
> Colleen Weiss-Ramirez | Dir., Digital Engagement and Web Development, Banner Health
>
> ≈ **Banner Health**