

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation Outranks the Competition with Cohesive Organic Search Strategy

“Being well-positioned on the SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) is crucial to Novartis Pharmaceuticals’ long-term marketing strategy. Catalyst showed leadership and flexibility in meeting the SEO (Search Engine Optimization) demands of a complex, multinational organization operating in a strict regulatory environment. Their strategy and implementation allowed us to outpace our competition, with consistent top rankings on Google, Yahoo, MSN Live Search and Ask.”

Sue Zibelli
Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation
Manager, Media Services
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Summary

As Novartis’ Agency of Record for organic search, Catalyst uses sophisticated search engine strategy, the ability to navigate a Fortune 100 company and expertise in the pharmaceutical industry to position Novartis as a market leader online, generating highly qualified traffic in a cost-effective manner and creating a significant competitive advantage. As a result of Catalyst’s SEO, Novartis product sites consistently receive high organic rankings. In fact, when Novartis’ top five products are compared to the top five products of other pharmaceutical companies, all five Novartis products have higher rankings. Novartis receives more first page rankings than nine other competitors and twice as many Top 5 rankings as its closest competitor.

About Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation

The Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation is a world leader in the discovery, development, manufacture, and marketing of prescription medicine. The division’s goal is to provide a broad portfolio of innovative, effective and safe products and services to patients through healthcare professionals around the world.

In 2006, the business posted sales of USD 22.6 billion. The current product portfolio includes more than 45 products, many of which are leaders in their respective therapeutic areas.

The Pharmaceutical Division is one of four divisions of Novartis AG. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ approximately 101,000 associates and operate in over 140 countries around the world.

The Challenge

Ranked by IMS Health as one of the fastest-growing global pharmaceutical companies in recent years, Novartis has expanded its market share by introducing a stream of innovative new products and focusing on key markets worldwide.

In conjunction with this growth, Novartis wanted a long-term search marketing solution that would offer an economical, effective way to reach proactive consumers – those who were actively searching online for information on a particular condition, disease or treatment.

A company of Novartis’ size and complexity faces unique challenges when conducting search marketing. Given the diversity of its products, which are spread across eight major therapeutic areas, a strict regulatory environment, and an international consumer base, the company must select a vendor that combines in-depth understanding of search marketing and expertise in the pharmaceutical industry.



The goal of a successful organic search campaign is enhance the company's website through SEO to improve rankings. To successfully optimize multiple sites at Novartis, a vendor must interact with tiers of internal and external marketing, communications, advertising and public relations teams; market research; the regulatory team; external website design and development groups; internal IT; and a paid search vendor. In addition, the vendor must be aware of Novartis' relationships with numerous third-party organizations and associations.

Catalyst's challenge was to navigate this complex corporate structure, educate each group about how its function interacted with the SEO process, create streamlined communications, and control multiple variables to insure that Novartis would consistently obtain high rankings as well as delivering consistent messaging and user experience whether the visitor was from paid or organic search.

Solution

In 2002, Novartis chose Catalyst as its Agency of Record for organic search. Catalyst currently optimizes over twenty Novartis websites using a consistent process and shared knowledge base that is the vehicle for Novartis' success.

Working closely with the Novartis communications team, Catalyst developed a cohesive SEO strategy that encompassed outreach to all key entities within Novartis as well as outside agencies and affiliations.

Catalyst President Heather Frahm said, "We knew that in order to create and manage a successful SEO strategy with a company as large as Novartis would require intensive communication and education."

Catalyst began by consulting with the Novartis marketing team to educate the group on how people actually talk about their diseases and what terms they are likely to search on in order to develop an appropriate keyphrase strategy.

At the same time, they began a constant stream of communication with the website design and development teams. This included creating a search engine friendly information architecture, verifying that the appropriate keyphrases were included as navigation links, that page titles were keyphrase rich, that URLs would not be ignored by search engine spiders, all code was search engine friendly, that website copy would have the appropriate keyphrase density on relevant keyphrase pages and many other numerous best practices for a successful organic campaign

Catalyst worked with Novartis' internal IT, marketing and regulatory groups to educate them about search marketing and how to interact effectively with the SEO process.

Catalyst cooperated with Novartis' paid search vendor to make sure that the paid and organic campaigns were working together, sharing information about query volume and highest converting keyphrases and creating landing pages to insure a consistent message and user experience.

Catalyst coordinated with Novartis' advertising agencies to optimize terms contained in offline advertising and timed the release of the optimized sites to ensure that they were ranking organically at campaign launch. At the same time, Catalyst worked closely with in-house communications and external public relations to properly optimize and link company press releases.

Finally, since directory submissions and third party links are critical to the optimization process, Catalyst used its proprietary list of authoritative and credible directories to submit Novartis sites for maximum return, avoiding directories that Google does not deem valuable. At the same time, Catalyst evaluated organizations that Novartis has relationships with to identify sites with the highest authority in the search engines and implemented a campaign to acquire those incoming links.

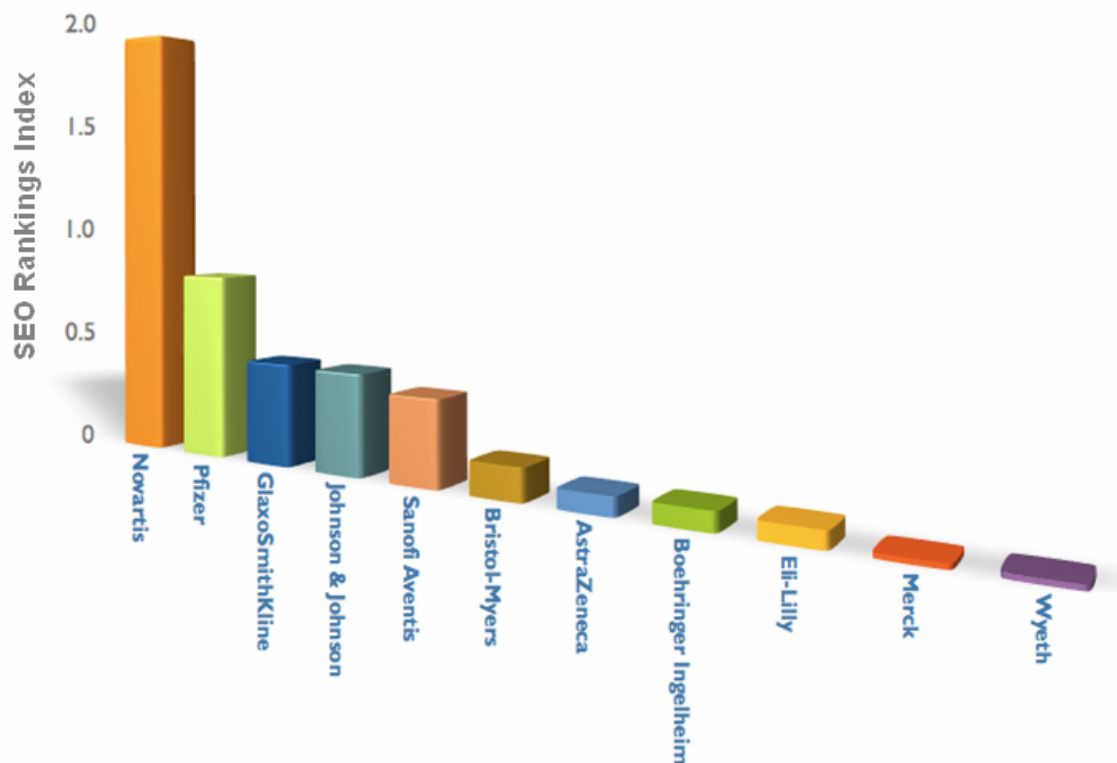
Results

With Catalyst as its Agency of Record for organic search, Novartis has become a digital market leader, generating highly qualified traffic in a cost-effective manner and gaining a significant competitive advantage.

As a result of Catalyst's SEO, Novartis product sites consistently receive high organic rankings. In fact, when Novartis' top five products are compared to the top five products of other pharmaceutical companies, all five Novartis products have higher rankings. Novartis receives more first page rankings than nine other competitors and twice as many Top 5 rankings as its closest competitor.

The results compared keyphrases including "indication", "indication treatment," "indication medication" and "indication symptoms" across the top four search engines -- Google, Yahoo, MSN Live Search and Ask.

2007 Competitive SEO Rankings Report



Conclusion

Catalyst's cohesive approach, experience in the pharmaceutical industry, search expertise, and superior project management allowed Novartis to leverage search marketing to its full advantage.

Catalyst's ten-year relationships with every major search engine allow us to ensure the best possible response to their algorithms. We have a special ability to meet quality, technical and regulatory requirements gained from our experience with highly regulated industries such as pharmaceutical and biotech. And our experience with Fortune 100 companies allows us to manage the big company landscape successfully and effectively collaborate with multiple divisions and outside agencies.

Not only did Novartis achieve high organic rankings on the SERPs, the collaborative process resulted in consistent messaging and user experience for both organic and paid searchers; streamlined management and implementation; efficient communication and planning; and greater cost-effectiveness.