



Search Engine Optimization of home page increases daily unique visits by 59% — BMI Surgery

By Arthur Kay

Synopsis

It is no secret that most Web sites rely on search engine traffic to generate sales. Search engines allow the public to easily and quickly find information about their queries, and Internet searches act as an important gateway to relevant Web sites. With more than seven billion searches performed in December 2007 alone¹, landing in the top search results has never been more important.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a relatively new specialty within the Internet marketing industry. By strategically controlling Web page elements such as keywords, content and underlying code, companies can influence how and where their pages appear within search engine results.

In January 2008 Imaginary Landscape, a Web development company located in Chicago, implemented a number of SEO recommendations for the home page of Bariatric and Minimally Invasive Surgery (www.bmisurgery.org). These changes significantly increased search engine traffic to the BMI Surgery Web site in just 32 days.

Company Background

Located in Joliet, Illinois, BMI Surgery specializes in weight-loss surgery. After performing the first laparoscopic and LAP-BAND gastric bypass procedures in the greater Will and Grundy county areas of Illinois, BMI Surgery has been recognized as both a *Bariatric Surgery Center of Excellence* and a *Blue Distinction Surgery Center*. BMI Surgery is affiliated with Silver Cross Hospital – a *Solucient 100 Top Hospitals National Award* winner for three consecutive years.

BMI Web Strategy

The primary goal of the BMI Surgery Web site is to provide basic information about surgical options for weight loss. BMI Surgery encourages visitors to contact them for consultations by offering detailed information about their staff, their facility, case studies and the surgical procedures they perform.

Goals and Objectives

Imaginary Landscape has been BMI Surgery's Web developer since 2004. BMI Surgery looked to Imaginary Landscape to assist in increasing traffic to their site. An SEO analysis was performed by Imaginary Landscape in 2007.

Techniques

After a complete site analysis, SEO specialists at Imaginary Landscape identified areas in both the content and code structure which would improve search engine rankings for BMI Surgery’s home page.

First, a detailed competitive analysis was completed for three of BMI Surgery’s largest competitors. By looking at how competitors had structured their Web sites and online marketing, it became obvious that BMI Surgery would benefit from some basic SEO techniques.

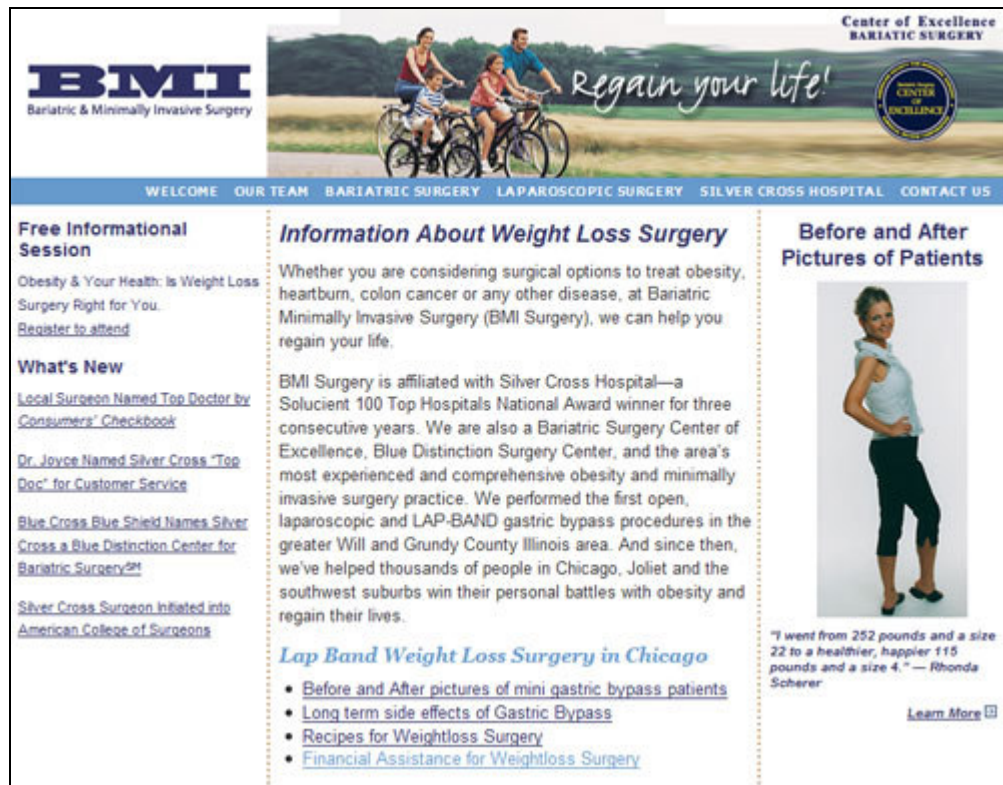
Next, Imaginary Landscape reviewed a list of key phrases which the client provided. These key phrases were analyzed using a variety of sources, including the site’s analytic data, WordTracker®, Microsoft® adCenter, and Google™ Webmaster Tools. After using these sources to compare more than 200 relevant key phrases, Imaginary Landscape’s SEO specialists identified more than 35 high performing phrases which could be used to optimize BMI Surgery’s home page.

Finally, Imaginary Landscape manually re-submitted the home page to the major search engines to be “crawled” for new content.

On January 9, 2008 the changes recommended by Imaginary Landscape were approved by BMI Surgery and were implemented on the Web site.

Web Crawler²

A program or automated script which browses the World Wide Web in a methodical, automated manner. Many Web sites, in particular search engines, use crawling (or ‘spidering’) as a means of providing up-to-date data.





Methodology

One month after implementing the SEO recommendations on the BMI Surgery home page, Imaginary Landscape performed a review of key metrics. This data was then compared against data gathered for the two months prior to the changes.

In total, 94 days of analytic data (gathered from the site's log files) was used to determine success in five key metrics:

- **total hits**
- **unique visitors**
- **total page views**
- **average session length**
- **search engine referrals**

In order to accurately compare the analytic data, Imaginary Landscape used the following date ranges:

- November 9, 2007 – January 9, 2008 (62 days prior to implementation)
- January 10, 2008 – February 10, 2008 (32 days after implementation)

Although the before/after date ranges are not equal lengths of time, they were chosen for two specific reasons:

- The Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's holidays all fall within a month of each other, and Internet activity is atypical around these dates. Thus, using only December's data would not be an accurate comparison against January's data; averaging both November and December's data provided a more accurate picture of visitor activity before implementation.
- Using the most recent Web site statistics would be necessary to accurately depict any change in visitor activity. Data prior to November 2007 might not clearly demonstrate recent visitor trends.

To compensate for the unequal time periods, Imaginary Landscape averaged the data for each period. In this way, daily averages from before and after the changes would be compared against each other for the most accurate statistics possible.

Findings

Looking at the analytic data side-by-side, it immediately becomes clear that BMI Surgery had more visitors per day since the SEO changes were made:

	Before (62 days)	After (32 days)
Unique Visits	1,231	1,008
Daily Unique Visits (Avg)	19.9	31.5
Total Page Views	8,140	6,658
Daily Page Views (Avg)	131	208
Average Session (Avg)	2:49	2:29

Daily Unique Visits increased 58.7% and Daily Page Views increased by 58.5%. In addition the number of search engine referrals increased dramatically in the period subsequent to implementation. Comparing the data from before and after the SEO changes proves the effectiveness of the recommendations:

	Before (62 days)	After (32 days)
Average Daily Google	3.7 (40.0%)	6.9 (51.6%)
Average Daily Live	1.6 (20.5%)	2.7 (20.1%)
Average Daily Yahoo	1.3 (16.6%)	1.8 (13.8%)
Average Daily MSN	0.7 (8.9%)	0.6 (4.2%)
Total Percentages	7.2 (89.7%)	12.0 (93.0%)

Referrals from Google increased by 54%. Total referrals from the top four search engines increased by 60%.

The next step in the process was to eliminate external factors as possible causes for the increase. For example, if there was some event that greatly increased the number of global searches for bariatric-related terms, BMI Surgery would naturally see a spike in search engine traffic.

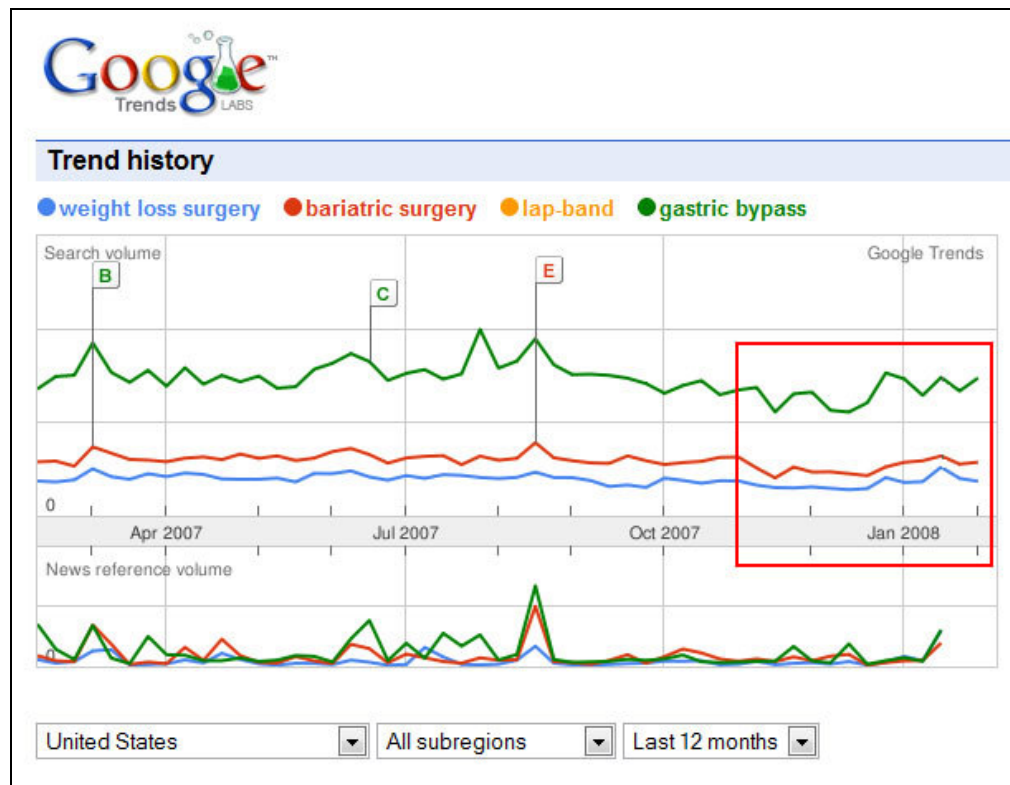
To eliminate external influences, Imaginary Landscape checked Google™ Trends to see if there were any spikes for search terms related to BMI Surgery during the time after our changes were made. The query on Google™ Trends was limited to the United States (all sub-regions) over the past 12 months. The query was performed on February 13, 2007 and included the following terms:

- weight loss surgery
- bariatric surgery
- lap-band
- gastric bypass

Google Trends³

Google Trends charts how often a particular search term is entered relative the total search volume across various regions of the world, and in various languages.

The horizontal axis of the main graph represents time, and the vertical is how often a term is searched for relative the total number of searches.



As depicted in the graph above, there was no significant change in search traffic for the terms identified. As such, we concluded that there were no external factors that influenced the results and concluded the increase in traffic was the result of the SEO implementation.

Summary

The increase in search traffic from the four major search engines, particularly Google™, clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the SEO recommendations made by Imaginary Landscape. With more visitors viewing its content, the BMI Surgery Web site is now operating as a more effective marketing tool for the client.

Interested in Search Engine Optimization for your Web site? Find out how Imaginary Landscape can improve your business. Contact us today by calling 773-275-9144 or visit us online at imagescape.com.

¹ Nielsen Online Announces December U.S. Search Share Rankings, Nielsen Online, viewed January 18, 2008, <http://www.netratings.com/pr/pr_080118.pdf>

² Web Crawler, Wikipedia, viewed February 13, 2008, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_crawler>

³ Google Trends, Wikipedia, viewed February 27, 2008, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_trends>

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