

Using the Web to Promote a Service Line

A South Dakota hospital turns to the web to tell the story of its behavioral health center to a national audience.

At a time when most hospitals are scaling back investments in mental health programs, Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center—part of Avera Health in Sioux Falls, South Dakota—has embraced the service line. In 2006 Avera McKennan built a state-of-the-art, 110-bed facility to house Avera Behavioral Health Center, one of the largest private mental health inpatient programs in the country. The Center boasts five specialized units—two units for adults and one each for seniors, adolescents, and children—a staff of 17 psychiatrists, and a team of psychologists and midlevel practitioners.

Avera McKennan's behavioral health program has gained prominence for a number of reasons: the facility has a world-class design; the program is committed to attending to the body, mind, and spirit; and the organization has a track record of service excellence. Patient satisfaction scores routinely place the behavioral health program in the 90th percentile. Much of this satisfaction can be attributed to the fact that the Center encourages patients and their families to take an active role in treatment.

With a new facility and a renowned staff of experts, Avera McKennan was well positioned to expand the behavioral health center's reputation as a national provider. Center staff began offering tours of the facility to industry leaders, as well as providing information on the service line to academic resources. But when it came time to increase awareness of the program and draw patients from a wider geographical area, Avera McKennan turned to the web to help tell the Center's story to a national audience.

The Objectives

Avera McKennan and its online solutions partner, Geonetric, created a web presence for the Avera Behavioral Health Center (www.averabehavioralhealth.com) as part of Avera McKennan's site and added new features and content to promote the Center. The features included two interactive tools to engage site visitors: a mental health awareness tool to help break the stigma of mental illness, and a meditation tool to promote the Center's mission of creating a peaceful, healing environment for patients.

Avera McKennan and Geonetric then created a targeted online marketing campaign. Designed to build on the hospital's existing web presence, the campaign had three key objectives:

- Establish the Avera Behavioral Health Center as a national provider
- Increase referrals to the Center
- Establish the Center's child and adolescent units as differentiators in the market

The campaign targeted parents of children with mental health conditions who would be willing to travel to get the best care. Seven primary cities were targeted: Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Des Moines, Milwaukee, Madison, and Minneapolis.

The web was chosen as the vehicle for the campaign because of its accessibility, especially to people living outside the hospital's service area. In addition, the web offers a level of comfort and privacy to those searching difficult topics, and they can do research at their convenience.

The Execution

Geonetric and Avera McKennan launched an ad campaign on the Google search engine, using Google's AdWords tool to create ads featuring keywords people would be likely to search for, such as ADHD help, teenage depression, and Asperger syndrome. When searchers on Google used one of these keywords, one of the hospital's text ads appeared as a sponsored link next to the search results.

Additionally, Avera McKennan placed text and banner ads on more than 30 websites, including revolutionhealth.com and parents.com. One-third of the ads on three Revolution Health Network sites were targeted to a national audience; the remaining two-thirds were targeted to the seven metropolitan areas mentioned above and their surrounding suburbs.

The banner ads, designed by Avera McKennan with input from Geonetric, featured male and female children and adolescents (Figures 1 and 2). Ad copy was designed to connect with the target audience, who probably had exhausted local resources. The ads—on a dark background that slowly lightened, illustrating the hope represented by Avera Behavioral Health Center—positioned the Center as the answer to the visitor's needs.

The Google AdWords campaigns focused on specific health conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), teen depression, and Asperger syndrome. Each campaign had its own unique landing page and content designed to match the ad copy, creating continuity between the ad and the corresponding website. This allowed Avera McKennan to build the site pages to match the exact search topic, such as teen depression or childhood ADHD, and to demonstrate that the hospital offered services to meet the visitor's needs. The landing pages also offered access to a virtual tour of the Center and, in a panel with a customized patient testimonial, touted the hospital's ranking in the top 10 percent of Press Ganey's national patient satisfaction database.

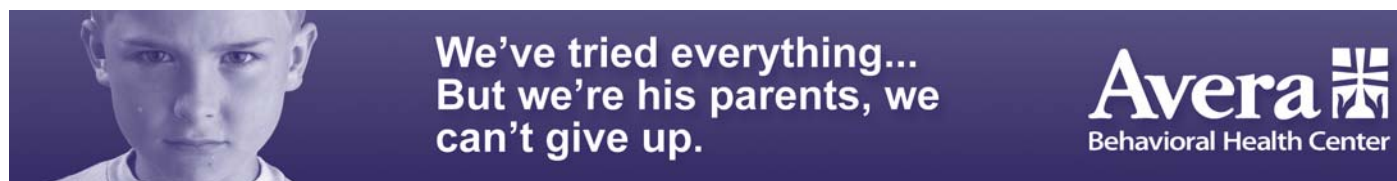
The campaign began in early September 2008 and ran for one month.

Web Results

The campaign increased the number of visitors to the Center's site, improved the site's search engine position, and identified important keywords. Google AdWords successfully generated interest, at times bringing more than 200 new visitors per day to the site. In other results:

- The campaign successfully doubled Avera Behavioral Health Center site traffic.
- 96 percent of visitors linking to the site had not visited the site previously.

Figure 1. Banner Ad, Avera Behavioral Health Center's Childhood ADHD Campaign



- The precisely targeted Revolution Health ads delivered visitors who tended to stay on the site longer and “bounce” (leave the site soon after arriving) less than other ad venues.
- The campaign accounted for more than 600,000 total ad impressions.

To make certain that the ads would have high visibility in the search engine results pages, constant bidding adjustments were made during the campaign to ensure a top-three sponsored listing when possible. During the campaign the average position of the ads for all keywords was 2.7. Many variables influence search engine results, including the maximum bid amount, bidding competition for each keyword, relevance of the ad copy to the search term, and relevance of the landing page to the search term.

The Asperger syndrome ad group had a phenomenal response, resulting in nearly 300 visits to the site. For this campaign, the average ad position in the sponsored links was 1.6. The high ranking indicates that both the banner ad copy and the website copy were extremely relevant to the visitor's keyword search, resulting in a high click-through rate. The ADHD campaign also drew a heavy response; it was the first to go live and accounted for nearly one-third of all clicks.

The results also identified some surprising services that received high response rates. For example, the keyword “teenage drinking” had a very high click-through rate—at 7.33 percent of visitors to the site, second only to the Asperger syndrome keyword, with 8.55 percent.

Call Traffic Results

Phone traffic results were even more impressive. The behavioral health call center reported an overall increase of 62.48 percent in call traffic during the online marketing campaign. Excluding South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa (states that already had significant calling traffic before the campaign), average traffic in September/October 2008, the period during which the campaign ran, increased 238 percent over average traffic in July/August. Seventeen states saw an increase in call traffic during the September/October time frame, with 11 of those states having no previous call traffic.

Lessons Learned

Overall, Avera McKennan is excited about the results of the campaign and is working with Geonetric on a second campaign for 2009. The hospital is considering tactics to better track conversion from the campaign ads to the call center. Recommendations include building a contact form for the site or establishing a second 800-number specifically for the campaign.

“The first campaign was successful in terms of fact finding—we learned what advertisements and keywords our target

Figure 2. Banner Ad, Avera Behavioral Health Center's Teen Depression Campaign



audience responds to, as well as whether current site content is meeting their needs,” says Michelle Lavalley, senior vice president, strategic marketing and communications, at Avera McKennan. “The campaign gave us insight into visitors' behavior on our site, as well as what to target in our next campaign. For example, knowing that teenage drinking was a popular search will help us develop future messages for that audience.”

Steve Lindquist, executive director of Avera McKennan Behavioral Health Services, says the campaign “showed us we had been much too clinical in our approach to marketing. This project allowed us to see our services from the consumer's point of view, especially when selecting keywords. We had to change our perspective—from the clinician's viewpoint to that of a parent looking for help for his or her child. This approach will help us not only in future campaigns, but in all of our marketing efforts.”

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