BROWN BEAR DIGITAL

Orthopedic SEO

What 27 Google results pages show about where your practice can win.

A practice owner's guide | 2026 edition

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SECTION 01

The short answer

01

Most orthopedic SEO advice tells you to rank for everything. Page one does not work that way. It splits into lanes. Private practices hold most local results, health systems hold the condition searches, and the split changes again by subspecialty. The goal is booked visits for the cases your surgeons want, not raw traffic.

What to do about it:

1

Pick searches you can win.

Procedure, surgeon, spine and cost searches. Leave condition head terms to the health systems.

2

Give every public-facing surgeon a Business Profile.

A 12-surgeon group with three offices goes from 3 chances in the map pack to 15.

3

Build one page per procedure, plus a cost page.

Written for your city, with the surgeon, recovery, price and a way to book.

4

Lead every surgeon page with the specialty.

Google and AI tools describe a generalist when the specialty is buried.

FROM BROWN BEAR'S ORTHOPEDIC SERP STUDY

Across 22 local orthopedic searches in 10 metros, private practices held 67% of the top 10 results. A single surgeon's own site showed up in 20 of the 22. On condition searches, health systems, reference sites and video platforms held 28 of 30 results. Top 10 organic results from Semrush, October 17, 2026.

Who this guide is for

Private orthopedic groups, surgeons with their own name on the door, sports medicine and spine practices, and the marketers who run a hospital's orthopedic service line.

SECTION 02

The Page-One Map

Who holds page one, by search type, and what it means for your plan.

02

We pulled Google's top 10 organic results from Semrush on October 17, 2026: "orthopedic surgeon" in 10 metros, sports medicine and spine searches in six of them, three condition searches and two cost searches. Map pack and ads are not counted.

Search type	Who holds page one	What it means for you
General local	Private practices 63%, health systems 33%. The top three spots split 15 to 15 across 10 cities.	→ Winnable, but hard. These terms carry Semrush difficulty scores of 47 to 66.
Sports medicine, local	A health system held #1 in all six metros and 13 of 18 top-three spots.	→ Fight below #1 with body-part and procedure pages, not the head term.
Spine, local	Private practices held 80% of results and 14 of 18 top-three spots. Single-surgeon sites alone were 32%.	→ The most open lane. A focused spine practice can reach the top three.
Condition	Health systems 60%. Reference sites, YouTube and Facebook 33%. Private practices 2 of 30.	→ Not a first target. Answer these inside procedure pages.
Cost	Financing, price lookup and benefits sites took most of page one. Health systems 2 of 20, private practices 5, none in the top three.	→ An open lane that practices barely use.

WHERE TO AIM FIRST

Go first: cost pages, deep surgeon pages and spine procedure pages, where competition is thinner and movement can come within a quarter. **Fight smart:** city and sports head terms, through procedure and surgeon pages for the city. **Leave alone:** condition head terms like "acl tear," about 60,500 searches a month, and "rotator cuff tear," about 33,100.

SECTION 03

Business Profiles for a multi-surgeon group

03

Local search is where most orthopedic visits start, and the Google Business Profile drives the map pack. Google's guidelines for representing your business set the rules for practices with more than one doctor.

Your setup	What Google's guidelines allow
Group with several public-facing surgeons	→ Each public-facing doctor can have a profile of their own, titled with only the doctor's name. The practice location keeps its own separate profile.
Solo surgeon at a branded location	→ The doctor and the practice share one profile, named "Brand: Doctor Name."

3 to 15

chances in the map pack for a 12-surgeon group with three offices, once each surgeon gets a profile with the right primary category and reviews from their own patients.

8 of 218

local results were directories or media lists. Healthgrades, Zocdoc and Vitals barely show up in the organic results.

Keep the basics clean

- **One practice name, address and phone number** on Google, Apple, Bing, Healthgrades and your site.
- **Fix odd variations first.** In Bryan's AI visibility audits, they are the most common actual error he finds, and the easiest one to fix.
- **Give each specialty a place to show.** Three office profiles that never say "hand surgeon" or "spine surgeon" spread every review and photo thin.

SECTION 04

Procedure, cost and surgeon pages

The pages that win are specific. "Total knee replacement in Plano" beats a general "Knee Services" page because it matches what the patient typed. Each procedure page should answer, near the top:

- Who the procedure is for, and who should try something else first
- Which of your surgeons does it, and how many they do
- What recovery looks like week by week
- What it costs, or how insurance usually handles it
- How to book, with the phone number and form above the fold

> **THE COST PAGE IS THE BIGGEST GAP**
>
> "Knee replacement cost" and "acl surgery cost" both carry Semrush difficulty scores in the mid 20s. CareCredit, Sidecar Health and MDsave led both searches, and no practice page reached the top three. A practice that explains real price ranges, insurance steps and self-pay options is competing against CareCredit, not Mayo Clinic.

Every surgeon needs a page that could stand on its own

A single surgeon's own site showed up in 20 of 22 local searches. Those sites made up 20% of all local results, and 32% in spine. Patients search for people, not just practices.

Solo or two-surgeon practice

Your name is your strongest brand. A personal site or a deep surgeon page can rank on its own.

Group of eight or more

Keep surgeons on the practice domain, each with a full page and a Business Profile, so group authority lifts every page.

On every surgeon page:

- Board certification, fellowship training and the procedures they focus on
- The conditions they treat most, linked to the matching procedure pages
- Reviews from their own patients, a real photo, and hospital, surgery center and team physician roles

SECTION 05

Trust, technical SEO and AI search

05

E-E-A-T on clinical pages

Orthopedic care is Your Money or Your Life content. Show the surgeon's name and credentials, a reviewed-by line with a date, and claims that match medical consensus.

Reviews by surgeon and procedure

Ask so a review mentions "Dr. Patel" and "my shoulder," not just "great office." A review that never names the procedure helps the practice, not the specialty.

Reply without disclosing

Respond to every review, but never confirm the reviewer is a patient or mention any treatment. HHS has fined dental practices for this, and the same HIPAA rule applies.

Lead with the specialty

A fellowship-trained spine surgeon on a site that leads with "comprehensive orthopedic care" will be described exactly that way by AI tools.

1,046 KB

of JavaScript on the median homepage in Brown Bear's plastic surgery homepage study. The same templates, chat widgets and video headers are common on orthopedic sites.

25 of 131

homepages in that study had a main heading that only appeared once JavaScript ran.

Source: Brown Bear plastic surgery homepage JavaScript study, 2026. Plastic surgery, not orthopedics.

It matters more now because many AI crawlers read the raw page. Vercel's late 2024 analysis found that OpenAI's crawlers, ClaudeBot and PerplexityBot did not render JavaScript at all. Bryan's view is that schema is worth keeping tidy but is not the big lever. Crawlability is, along with content that is easy to pull apart: a heading, a direct answer, then the detail.

AI SEARCH IS NOT A SEPARATE PROJECT

Review sites, directories, local news and hospital affiliation pages shape what AI tools say about a practice. Keep the same listings, reviews and specific pages consistent everywhere a patient or a crawler might look.

SECTION 06

Plays by subspecialty

The competition changes by subspecialty, so check which searches your patients run before you pick a plan.

SPORTS MEDICINE

Up against a health system at #1

WHAT THE MAP SHOWS

A health system held #1 in all six metros, from Memorial Hermann in Houston to UCHealth in Denver. In Denver, two single-surgeon sites still made the top five.

THE PLAY

- Stop spending on the head term
- Build shoulder surgeon, ACL reconstruction and meniscus repair pages, each tied to a named surgeon
- Work the map pack for "sports medicine doctor near me," about 5,400 searches a month

HOSPITAL SERVICE LINES

Losing local searches to private groups

WHAT THE MAP SHOWS

Health systems held 60% of condition results and half the city top-three spots. In Houston, a private spine center held #1 for "spine surgeon houston."

THE PLAY

- Treat find-a-doctor pages as procedure pages
- Real bios, specialties and reviews, not directory rows
- Give spine surgeons the depth private groups give theirs

SPINE PRACTICES

The most open lane

WHAT THE MAP SHOWS

Private practices held 14 of 18 top-three spots and 80% of results. In Dallas, the top three were all private, with health systems at #4 and #5.

THE PLAY

- Surgeon pages first
- Procedure pages for herniated disc, spinal stenosis and minimally invasive fusion
- Expect neurosurgeons in the same searches

SAME BUDGET, BETTER ODDS

Picture a five-surgeon sports medicine group in Phoenix stuck at #7 for "sports medicine phoenix" behind a health system at #1. A page for "ACL reconstruction surgeon Phoenix," built around its two knee specialists, faces a different set of competitors. A cost page for ACL surgery faces almost none of them.

SECTION 07

Cost, timing and hiring an agency

07

$1,500 to $7,500

a month for specialized programs, based on published agency pricing.

2 to 3 months

for early movement on specific searches. Six to 12 months for competitive city terms.

Anyone who promises a major city term in 90 days is guessing. Bryan's rule of thumb from plastic surgery: a $1,500 to $2,000 monthly retainer over a year costs about the same as two procedures that came in through organic search.

Payback worksheet

Line	How to work it out	Your number
A. Monthly SEO investment	Retainer plus any content or tools	
B. Months in the program	12 is a fair first look	
C. Contribution per surgical case	Collected revenue after payer adjustments, times your margin if you use one	
D. Surgical cases to break even	A times B, divided by C, rounded up	
E. Organic patients who go on to surgery	A percent, from your own records	
F. New organic patients needed	D divided by E	

Before you sign, ask an agency for:

- A page-one review of your top five procedures in your city: who ranks and why.
- A Business Profile plan: one per location and per public-facing surgeon.
- Reporting on booked appointments by procedure, not just traffic.
- Who writes and who medically reviews clinical pages, and how surgeons sign off.

SECTION 08

Is your SEO built for orthopedics?

08

Answer for your current strategy, whether you run it in-house or through an agency. Each "no" is a gap. Fix the ones closest to a booked visit first.

Question	Yes	Partly	No
SEARCH TARGETING			
Do you know who ranks on page one for your top five procedures in your city?	☐	☐	☐
Do condition terms get answered inside procedure pages, not chased as a first target?	☐	☐	☐
BUSINESS PROFILES			
Does every location and every public-facing surgeon have its own Business Profile?	☐	☐	☐
Do your name, address and phone match on every listing and on your site?	☐	☐	☐
PROCEDURE AND COST PAGES			
Does each procedure have its own city page with surgeon, recovery, cost and booking?	☐	☐	☐
Do you have a plain-language cost page with ranges, insurance steps and self-pay options?	☐	☐	☐
SURGEON PAGES			
Could every surgeon's page stand on its own, with training, focus, reviews and a real photo?	☐	☐	☐
Does each surgeon and procedure page lead with the specialty in plain words?	☐	☐	☐
TRUST AND REVIEWS			
Do you ask for reviews by surgeon and by procedure, not just for the practice?	☐	☐	☐
Do clinical pages carry the surgeon's credentials and a dated reviewed-by line?	☐	☐	☐
TECHNICAL AND REPORTING			
Do your main heading and content show without waiting for JavaScript?	☐	☐	☐
Do you track booked appointments by procedure, not just traffic and rankings?	☐	☐	☐

YES	PARTLY	NO
_____	_____	_____

SECTION 09

Frequently asked questions

09

Q What is orthopedic SEO?

The work of getting an orthopedic practice found, and then chosen, by patients searching Google and AI tools for a surgeon, a procedure or a fix for a joint, spine or sports injury. It covers the map pack, the organic results and the AI answers above both.

Q Should we try to rank for "acl tear"?

Not first. Health systems held every top-three spot for the condition searches we pulled. Answer the condition briefly inside your ACL reconstruction page and link to a trusted source like OrthoInfo for depth.

Q Does every surgeon need their own website?

No. Every surgeon needs a page that could stand on its own. Solo and two-surgeon practices can rank a personal site. Groups of eight or more should keep surgeons on the practice domain.

Q How many Business Profiles should a group have?

One per location, plus one for each public-facing doctor, titled with only the doctor's name. A solo surgeon at a branded location shares one profile named "Brand: Doctor Name."

Q Are directories like Healthgrades worth chasing?

They barely show up in the organic results. Only 8 of 218 local results were directories or media lists. Keep your details consistent there, but page one is won on your own pages.

Q How much does it cost, and how long does it take?

About $1,500 to $7,500 a month based on published agency pricing. Expect early movement on specific searches in two to three months, and six to 12 months for competitive city terms.

Q Does AI search change the plan?

Not much. Lead every page with the specialty, keep listings and reviews consistent, and make pages easy to crawl without JavaScript. AI tools read third-party sites before they recommend anyone.

SECTION 10

Next steps

10

1. **Run the self-audit** on the previous pages. Be honest.
2. **Map page one for your top five procedures** in your city and pick the lane you can win.
3. **Fix your Business Profiles and build your cost page** before you chase a city head term.
4. **Talk to someone who does this for medical practices.** A clear look at where your practice stands, and which searches to leave alone.

WORK WITH BROWN BEAR

Brown Bear Digital builds the page-one map for medical practices, then does the listing, page and AI search work that follows from it. brownbear.digital/contact | bryan@brownbear.digital

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Passanisi is the founder of Brown Bear Digital. He has 15 years of experience across SEO, paid search, and AI search strategy, and received a 2025 Semrush AI Visibility Award with the QuickBooks team. He started Brown Bear to give businesses direct access to senior search expertise without the agency overhead.

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For informational purposes only. This guide is not legal, medical, or professional advice, and results are not guaranteed.

Study data reflects the top 10 organic results from Semrush on October 17, 2026. Rankings change. Check HIPAA rules and your state medical board guidelines before you reply to reviews or publish prices.