

# The Domain Conundrum

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As brand planning for a launch brand moves forward, one of the most highly debated topics is often related to the use of multiple domains to house HCP and consumer content. It seems as if across the pharmaceutical industry, there is no standard process. For some companies, one domain will contain all HCP and consumer content, while others set up separate domains for each audience. There are positives and negatives to each approach, but when they are weighed against each other, one provides significantly more positives than the other.

Many pharma companies head down the pathway of leveraging one domain for both audiences. As an example, let's call it [www.pharmabrand.com](http://www.pharmabrand.com); the consumer focused website is typically on the root domain ([www.pharmabrand.com](http://www.pharmabrand.com)) and the HCP website on a subfolder ([www.pharmabrand.com/hcp](http://www.pharmabrand.com/hcp) or ["/professional"](http://www.pharmabrand.com/professional)).

The rationale for a single site for both audiences is straightforward enough. The costs of producing websites for 2 domains can be difficult for a brand on a slim budget. You're talking about 2 websites going through copy and design, legal review, and programming. The upfront costs can certainly raise a flag. However, from a search engine standpoint, the value that you can

gain, both from a paid and organic standpoint are well worth the upfront costs associated with launching on 2 separate domains.

## Search Engine Optimization

Looking at this from a SEO perspective, it is important to realize the ranking benefits associated with having 2 websites targeting consumers and HCPs. First, let's look at how a search engine sees an HCP website. As we previously said, the HCP website is most likely in a subfolder (["/hcp"](http://www.pharmabrand.com/hcp)). To a search engine, this is like building a mansion and living out of the guest house. The HCP website is looked at as a clear second best, diluting its ranking opportunity.

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The more important effect is that regardless of optimizations from a SEO standpoint, there is a very real possibility that a consumer page will rank for HCP terms or that the HCP website won't rank at all, even with a proper keyword segmentation strategy.

The reason for this is that, contextually, Google may consider 2 similar keywords synonymous, even if your SEO team has done their job to properly segment the keywords based on the audience that will be searching for them. Since only 1 page of a website generally ranks for a search query, this can lead to a poor user experience for HCPs who are generally looking for information quickly and now have to click through to the HCP website and find the page that is most applicable to their needs.

In a lot of cases the biggest fear and obstacle that pharma brand managers have is if it's possible to transition from a HCP website that already exists as a subfolder to a website. "Will the HCP website's authority be lost?" "Why would we want to start over?" "Can we afford to lose all of our rankings?" Fortunately, there is a quick fix for this that will prevent you from losing everything that you've already earned. Looking at the short term effects, appropriate leveraging of 301 redirects and canonical tags to a domain specifically for HCPs can drive nearly immediate returns from a rankings perspective. In the long run, it can actually be the catalyst that allows your organic rankings to break through their previous thresholds and also helps segment the properties according to their proper audience.

An added SEO benefit is the ability to take up additional real estate on a SERP (search engine results page). Particularly for branded keywords, there is a high likelihood that you can rank for 2 positions on the 1<sup>st</sup> page of a SERP.

According to numerous studies, these positions account for approximately 60% of branded organic clickthroughs on either desktop or mobile, and about 40% for unbranded results.

## Paid Search Marketing

Real estate is also a highly valued commodity for Search Engine Marketing (Pay Per Click Ads). When keywords have been identified as applicable to both consumer and HCP search behavior (also called "overlap"), an opportunity to occupy two spots on the SERP presents itself.

If two separate root domains exist, advertisers have the opportunity to "double serve" (having both a consumer ad and an HCP ad show at the same time) ads, allowing you to potentially bump your competitor out of position or off the SERP altogether. Additionally, serving ads that speak to both audiences' search behavior should increase your potential for the most qualified conversion. This is only possible when there are separate domains for each website, as the engines do not allow double serving when both landing pages share a root domain.

"Serving ads that speak to both audiences' search behavior should increase your potential for the most qualified conversion."

For more information on how to successfully manage a PPC campaign overlap, please review Justin Freid's "[Finding the Right Keywords Strategy for Both HCPs and Consumers](#)" whitepaper.

If only one root domain is available, only one ad can serve. With keywords that overlap audiences, this makes it harder to write highly targeted ad copy. Also, instead of occupying two spots on the SERP, only one ad can serve opening up that second ad space or position up to competitors. This can result in lower share of voice, a decrease in conversions and higher CPCs (Costs Per Click).

So if it is feasible to manage two separate domains, both SEM and SEO will work together to support your brand. If not, don't panic. CMI/Compas can still create, manage and optimize to ensure you are hitting your goals.

## In Conclusion

A well-developed digital marketing campaign looks at all of the areas for optimization and how to generate the right audiences for that content. With paid and organic traffic capable of driving such a high volume of ROI-friendly traffic to websites, it's time for brand managers to consider launching their HCP website separate from consumer or making the switch if they are already leveraging both on a single website.



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