

[ PART 2 OF 2: THE PAID MEDIA SOLUTION TO AI SEARCH DISRUPTION ]

# Adapting to WIN

## How Paid Media Secures Online Visibility

By Kim Kelley,  
FRBMA

In Part 1, we explored how AI search has fundamentally disrupted organic visibility for radiology practices. Now comes the critical question: how do you maintain visibility when traditional SEO no longer guarantees your website will be seen? The answer lies in a strategic paid media approach—one that acknowledges the new reality while providing guaranteed placement above AI-generated summaries.

### Paid Media: The Visibility Guarantee

Here's the uncomfortable truth: organic visibility can no longer be earned through SEO alone. When 58% of searches end without a click and AI Overviews dominate the top of search results, paid advertising has transformed from a nice-to-have growth tactic into an essential visibility layer.

As stated in Part 1 of this series, the future of radiology marketing requires us to shift our thinking from “rankings and clicks” to “relevance and visibility.” Paid media is the only guaranteed way to appear above AI summaries and maintain visibility throughout the patient research journey.

Healthcare organizations that maintained a consistent paid search presence after AI Overviews launched recovered visibility 30% faster than those that paused campaigns. The data is clear: when organic visibility becomes unreliable, paid media becomes non-negotiable.

### The Cost Reality

Yes, competition has intensified. Cost-per-click (CPC) for medical specialties has increased 22% year-over-year as more advertisers compete for limited above-the-fold



space. For radiology-specific terms like “mammogram near me” or “MRI open Saturday,” these increases are even more pronounced.

But here's what the CPC numbers don't reveal: lead quality has improved. When AI Overviews answer casual research queries, the patients who still click through paid ads are further along in their decision journey. They're not just browsing—they're ready to schedule. This means higher conversion rates despite higher costs, resulting in comparable or better cost-per-acquisition metrics.

### Intent-Based Campaign Architecture

The most effective radiology paid media strategies now follow a three-tier intent structure:

**Awareness (Conditions & Symptoms):** Target searches like “dense breast tissue” or “persistent shoulder pain” with informative, compliant creative that positions your practice as an educational resource. These campaigns build brand recognition and feed downstream conversion.

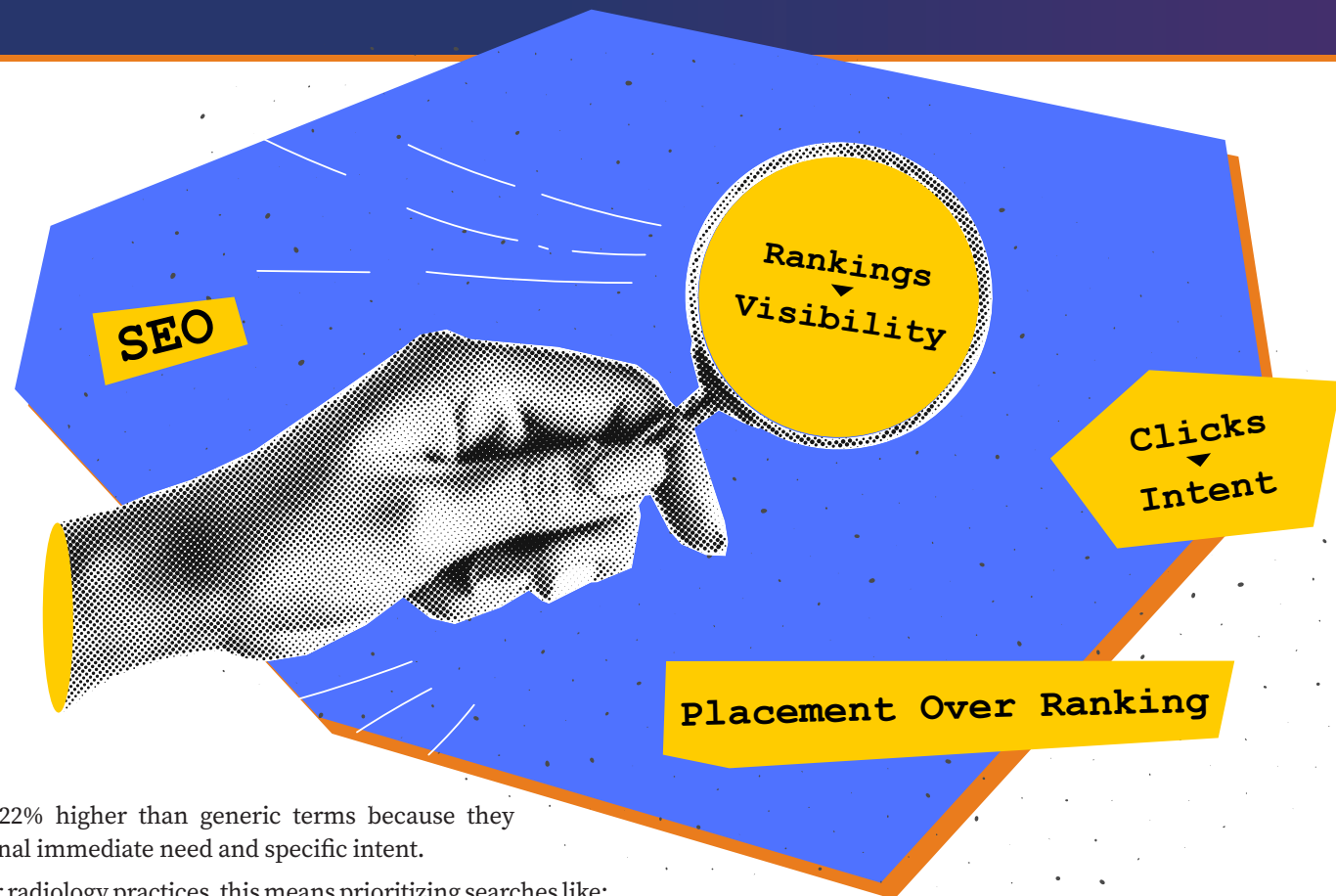
**Consideration (Services & Solutions):** Focus on procedure-specific terms such as “3D mammography benefits” or “low-dose lung screening.” Highlight outcomes, insurance acceptance, and convenient scheduling. This is where patients compare options.

**Conversion (Appointment & Access):** Dominate high-intent searches including “book MRI appointment,” “imaging center open now,” and “accepts [insurance plan] imaging.” Use call extensions, location extensions, and direct booking links. Every element should remove friction from the scheduling process.

This tiered approach ensures you're visible throughout the patient journey while allocating budget toward searches most likely to convert.

### The Power of Long-Tail Search

As AI absorbs broad, general queries, long-tail keywords—those with three or more words—have become increasingly valuable. Healthcare-specific long-tail searches convert



12-22% higher than generic terms because they signal immediate need and specific intent.

For radiology practices, this means prioritizing searches like:

- “MRI today near me”
- “CT scan with [insurance plan]”
- “mammogram results same day”
- “workers comp imaging facility”

Lower search volume doesn't mean lower value. In fact, quality engagement now matters more than traffic volume. A handful of highly qualified appointment requests outperforms hundreds of information-seeking clicks.

### Performance Max vs. Manual Control

Google's Performance Max (PMax) campaigns offer AI-powered automation across Search, Display, YouTube, and Maps—promising efficiency and reach. For radiology practices, PMax has shown significant improvements in click-through rates across multi-location campaigns when properly configured.

However, PMax comes with risks. The platform can overreach into loosely relevant queries and requires careful monitoring to ensure budget efficiency. Manual search campaigns, while

requiring more management, provide transparent keyword control and stronger oversight for sensitive medical terms.

The winning approach? A blended strategy. Use manual campaigns for high-value, compliance-sensitive terms like specific procedures and physician names. Deploy Performance Max for awareness and discovery, but with strict negative keyword lists and conversion tracking that feeds real patient outcomes back to Google's algorithm.

### Tracking and Attribution Challenges

The cookie era has ended, making measurement more complex than ever. While large health systems may have resources for sophisticated tracking integrations, most radiology practices must balance optimization goals with strict HIPAA compliance requirements and practical budget constraints.

Focus on what you can measure safely: call tracking systems that don't capture protected health information, form submissions with clear consent language, and aggregate performance data by campaign and keyword. Use conversion actions like “contact form submitted” or “phone call received” rather than attempting to track individual patient outcomes through ad platforms.

The goal is directional confidence rather than perfect attribution. Track leading indicators like qualified inquiries, appointment request volume, and cost-per-contact to guide budget allocation decisions while maintaining compliance.

“ The most effective radiology paid media strategies now follow a three-tier intent structure... This tiered approach ensures you're visible throughout the patient journey while allocating budget toward searches most likely to convert. ”

### Owning Multiple SERP Layers

The modern search engine results page (SERP) is no longer a simple list—it's a complex landscape of AI Overviews, paid ads, local map packs, and organic results. The goal is multi-layer dominance.

When your practice appears in both paid placements and local listings simultaneously, patient trust increases and click-through rates improve. The combined presence signals authority and availability. Even if AI summaries reduce organic clicks, your paid placement ensures visibility while your Google Business Profile provides credibility through reviews and photos.

This coordinated approach also strengthens AI's understanding of your practice as an authoritative entity. Sustained ad presence contributes to the trust signals that determine whether AI systems cite your content in generated summaries—creating a positive feedback loop between paid visibility and organic authority.

### Beyond Search: The Full-Funnel Approach

While search captures existing demand, complementary channels create it. Connected TV (CTV) advertising and programmatic display extend your reach to patients before they start actively searching. A patient who sees your 15-second CTV ad about breast cancer screening is more likely to search for your facility name when their physician recommends a mammogram.

The most effective radiology marketing now operates as an integrated system: CTV builds awareness, programmatic display retargets engaged visitors, and paid search captures high-intent conversion moments. Each channel reinforces the others, creating sustained visibility across the patient journey.

### Measuring What Matters

Traditional metrics like impressions and clicks tell an incomplete story. The practices winning in the AI era track outcomes that tie directly to business impact:

- Cost per qualified inquiry (phone call or form submission)
- Appointment request volume by channel
- Share of voice in local market
- Return on ad spend by service line

Work with your practice management team to understand appointment volume trends and correlate them with campaign timing and budget levels. While perfect attribution may be elusive, directional insights are sufficient for smart budget allocation.

### The Path Forward

AI search isn't going away—it's accelerating. In 2026, advertising within AI chat platforms—like sponsored answers in ChatGPT or Perplexity—will create entirely new opportunities. Early adopters of AI-native ad formats will gain more local visibility than competitors still relying solely on traditional search.

The radiology practices that thrive won't be those with the biggest budgets—they'll be those that adapt fastest, test continuously, and measure rigorously. Success in this new era requires moving from a “set-it-and-forget-it” mentality to one of continuous optimization and experimentation.

Your new role as a radiology marketer isn't just managing campaigns—it's being a strategist who understands how AI is reshaping patient behavior and positioning your practice for visibility in every format patients use to find care.

The question isn't whether to invest in paid media. It's whether you'll adapt your strategy before or after your competitors do. In the age of AI search, visibility isn't earned through organic rankings alone—it must be secured through strategic, data-driven paid media that guarantees your practice appears when and where patients are searching.

*This concludes our two-part series on AI Search and Radiology Marketing.* ■



**Kim Kelley, FRBMA**  
 Founder & Creative Director  
 Ali'i Marketing by Design

