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## MSN HealthVault.com

Earlier this month, Microsoft launched the website HealthVault.com. HealthVault.com is an online data warehouse for secure storage and sharing of health records. What makes the site unique is the options it provides for uploading data; users can import records from their doctors, enter data manually, or upload data from health monitoring devices.

The site also incorporates a health-specific search engine that delivers results in a format similar to Ask.com and also offers users the ability to save searches. This is the only portion of the HealthVault.com site that will serve advertisements.

### A New Opportunity for Advertisers

At first glance, HealthVault.com appears a tantalizing option for health marketers. Among its many benefits are support from Microsoft, strong partnerships with health advocacy groups and medical device manufacturers, and the ability to leverage traffic from the MSN Live search engine.

### Obstacles to Widespread Adoption

Looks however, can be deceiving. HealthVault still needs to overcome several substantial hurdles to widespread adoption. These include:

**Crowded Marketplace** – HealthVault is not only contending with health portals such as WebMD and Yahoo Health, it also has to compete with Personal Health Record sites offered by insurance providers, AOL, and possibly Google.

**Privacy** – Despite considerable efforts to alleviate concerns, questions over privacy and data ownership remain. In fact, they are exacerbated by a lack of governmental oversight or regulatory protection. Making matters worse, Microsoft may need to overcome its own reputation in order to make users comfortable.

**Poor Search Quality** – Despite access to MSN Live search technology, the quality of HealthVault.com search results is poor, especially compared to other search and health search engines. It's unlikely that searchers will abandon their current, trusted sites in favor of HealthVault, relegating it to an alternative or secondary search engine at best.



## A Viable Advertising Opportunity?

The issues above should give any health marketer pause when considering HealthVault as a viable marketing medium. Until resolved, it appears there is little reason to expect that the site can generate the impressions, traffic, or ROI comparable to that of leading health portals or PPC advertising.

However, it would be foolish to completely write off HealthVault. The site is still young, and many of its problems are correctable. While not currently a viable advertising opportunity, it may very well turn into one in upcoming months or years, and merits periodic monitoring. Until then, HealthVault.com is only a viable option for larger campaigns seeking 100% saturation.

