



SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING 101

YOU'VE LAUNCHED A WEBSITE, NOW WHAT?

By Morry W. Galonoy

THERE WAS A BRIEF TIME when simply launching a website would guarantee traffic and success, but that was before there were several billion indexed web pages with millions of site owners aggressively competing to attract prospective users/customers to their sites.

With more businesses competing for online audiences and with search engines accounting for more than 80 percent of all web traffic, search marketing—marketing methods that increase the visibility of a website in search engine results—has become a major component of driving traffic to

websites and a critical part of overall marketing strategies.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Research shows search engines are responsible for the majority of all website traffic, and most users don't go beyond the first two pages of search results. The key to getting the most out of your website is Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the process of preparing your website to get it to the top of search engine results. With 97 percent of Fortune 100 companies reporting they use SEO strategies for their websites, it

has become a fundamental part of any web marketing strategy.

SELECT KEY PHRASES

Not long ago SEO meant creating a list of key words for your site, using those key words in your website's meta tags, and then submitting your site to search engines. (Meta tags are part of the HTML code providing information about page content. This information isn't displayed but can be indexed by search engines.)

Meta tags aren't nearly as important as they once were. Today, page title tag is more important. Google and many ►►





other search engines ignore key word meta tags (because too many people used them to spam engines using irrelevant keywords). You should still use meta tags but spend more time on other aspects of SEO.

The most important step to optimizing search engine results is deciding on key phrases and words—especially those relevant to what you do. Why? Put simply, most internet users search with phrases, not just one word.

Once you choose the key phrases, find out if web users actually search using the phrases you've selected. After all, why waste your effort using a phrase nobody searches for or one that is already overused by other sites optimizing with that phrase?

RAISING AWARENESS

Promoting a website can be done offline with simple options like putting your URL on all collateral items (note pads, letterhead and promotional products), mentioning it in your on-hold announcement and in staff voice mail messages, and/or including it in all your print and broadcast advertisements.

Most professional optimizers use software or fee-based services that give access to databases of searched terms on the internet. These resources supply you with the number of searches performed in a given period and the number of competing sites associated with or optimized for that term. Some will even provide related terms that can help you choose a more competitive key phrase.

HIGHLIGHT YOUR NICHE

If the key phrase you've chosen is too broad or all encompassing, you will be directly competing with many other companies. For example, search for "cell phone provider," and you will be inundated with an endless assortment of links. If you run

a large company that already has a dominant web presence and an inordinate amount of relevant sites linking to you, no problem. If not, know that it's difficult to unseat the top sites without paying a substantial amount for Pay-For-Placement (PEP) or online advertising.

Don't give up—just find a niche to make yourself more competitive. You don't want the most competitive search key phrase—you simply want one that accurately describes what you do and separates you from the pack.

For example, if you own an herb seed company specializing in spicy herbs, consider your existing marketing focus or positioning. Optimize the key phrase "spicy organic." It's crucial to find key phrases that are searched, aren't overly competitive, and complement what you do, who you are or where you are located.

Stay away from generic terms like "our products," "our services" or "FAQs." These phrases are fine as ►►

text on a web page, but they won't help search engines find you. To optimize these terms, rewrite them as "Organic Herb Products" or "Organic Herb Gardening FAQs."

CONTENT

After determining your key phrases, optimize your site content with them. A rule of thumb is to repeat key phrases at least three times. Integrate them into the web page text so the copy doesn't come off as stilted. Don't put a long list of key words or phrases at the bottom of your page or hide it from the user by putting it in your code for the search engine robots to find. This practice is called "spamming a search engine" and, along with other questionable SEO tactics, can get you banned from search engines. No ranking is worse than a low ranking.

SUBMITTING TO SITES

Don't jump the gun trying to get listed by submitting right away. If you get indexed under the wrong key phrases, it's difficult to get the sites to change your listing. It's better to have everything in order before you submit.

It's usually a waste of money to pay services that claim they can submit your site to 200 engines. There are only about 10 engines and directories on which to focus. If you're in those, you will be more than covered. You can submit individually to directories, or acquire software to help you.

SPEAK THE LINGO

Advertising Network: Also called an online advertising network or ad network, this is a collection of (often unrelated) online advertising inventory. Online advertising inventory comes in many different forms and can be found on websites, in instant messaging applications, in adware, in e-mails, and on other sources. Some examples of advertising inventory include: banner ads, text links and e-mails.

Adware: Also called advertising-supported software, it is any software package that automatically plays, displays or downloads advertising material to a computer after the software is installed on it or while the application is being used.

Meta Tags: Part of the HTML code providing information about page content, meta tag information isn't displayed but can be indexed by search engines.

Online Advertising: This includes search engine advertising, advertising networks and opt-in e-mail advertising.

Opt-in E-Mail Advertising or Permission Marketing: This is a method of advertising by electronic mail where the ad recipient has consented to receive it. It is one of several ways developed by marketers to eliminate the disadvantages of e-mail marketing.

Pay-Per-Click: This advertising technique is used on websites, advertising networks and search engines. With search engines, PPC advertisements are usually text ads placed near search results; when a site visitor clicks on the advertisement, the advertiser is charged a small amount.

Pay-For-Placement: This advertising technique guarantees your site appears at or near the top of search listings when surfers are looking for specific products or services.

Professional Optimizer: This professional consultant specializes in online marketing.

Be sure to include your key phrases in your description for the directories as these are reviewed individually. Don't hype it up because you can get banned from engines for spamming, or your description might change and you have no control over how it's changed. Also, be sure to submit to the appropriate category.

MONITOR YOUR SITE

Once your optimization is complete it can be days, weeks or even months before you start seeing changes. In some

cases, sites will continue to climb in the rankings. If you've hit on a particularly hot key phrase, you might start seeing your competition tweak their sites as well. It's beneficial to monitor and update your site accordingly.

Search rankings can fluctuate greatly over time, based on many factors including competing websites, newly launched websites and changes the search companies make to their algorithms. By monitoring your rankings, you can review, adjust, maintain or improve your site rankings. ►►

SEARCH ENGINE ADVERTISING

Search engine advertising is a general term that comprises several different paid methods to get your site listed. One popular advertising form, paid submissions, which guarantee fast inclusion in a search engine's listings, has become virtually obsolete. Yahoo! is the only major engine still offering paid submissions.

Pay-For-Placement or Pay-Per-Click (PPC) is now the most popular and some argue the most cost-effective and measurable form of search

advertising. You can see examples of PPC when you search on Google and see the sponsored ads in the far right column. These ads appear based on the key words or phrases web surfers type in when searching on the internet. Google's AdWords, Yahoo!'s Overture and Microsoft's MSN are perhaps the most well-known search advertising programs out there. However, newer programs offered by upstart search sites, such as Snap.com, and the viral community-based Stumble

Upon, can be watched carefully as they offer much more targeted and viral options.

Many argue that you can't beat paying for key words, and you should carefully consider search engine advertising as part of your overall marketing plan and budget. Keep in mind there are many options and search engines as well as online marketing firms selling ad words, so do your research. If you're not careful, it can cost thousands of dollars per month, especially when paying by the click. **PC**

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