


Search Engine Marketing

Fueling traffic, driving sales

All clicks are not created equal*



The Year of SEO – Tips & Best Practices

The 5-Minute PPC Manager

Quick Start Blogging

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SEARCH ENGINE
MARKETING EXPERTS

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Fueling traffic, driving sales

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Table of Contents

If there is one constant we've learned in almost 12 years of Search Engine Marketing, it's that there aren't many constants. Done well, keeping up with changes in Search Engines' Best Practices on website optimization and Pay-per-Click Advertising is a full-time job. And now there's the fascinating world of social media, changing at lightning speed.

Still, there are a few basics we tell our clients that form the bedrock of good Search Marketing, and we're happy to share them with you here. Whether your SEM efforts are brand-new or you're trying to expand the possibilities of a mature account, we're sure there's some news here you can use.

The Year of SEO	4
Savvy Direct Marketers Know that Ongoing Search Engine Optimization is a Valuable Tool for Traffic Generation	
Getting Crawled	5
5 Timeless Tips to Keep the Spiders Coming to (and Crawling!) Your Site	
5-Minute PPC Manager	7
Easy Common Sense Strategies to Get the Most Out of Your PPC Campaigns	
Blogging Start-Up Guide	10
Answer 4 Important Questions Before You Get Started	

The Year of SEO

When the economy falters, marketing tactics shift and evolve. As we watched the S&P through Q4 2008, we predicted that 2009 will be the year of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Here's why.

Over the past ten years, we've seen a steady growth in interest in Paid Search Advertising (PPC). This is largely attributed to the fact that many of our clients are savvy direct marketers who see the value of a traffic generation program that is immediately accountable to ROI. Too, the fact that our PPC Management Service allows clients to offload most of the grunt work at an affordable cost has made doing so attractive.

An SEO program, on the other hand, requires a time and cost commitment from the client company that does not show a clear, immediate benefit in terms of dollars earned versus dollars spent. Instead it is a program that reaps benefits, some direct and some indirect, over a period of time, generally building significant momentum after the first 6 to 12 months. An additional, more recent benefit to the optimization of a website is the advent of Local Search. This is because Local Search listings now claim real estate at the top of many Google organic search returns.

Since management relies on its marketing team to deliver hard numbers quarter after quarter, it has been a hard sell for many marketers to convince their bosses that the less immediate strategy of SEO is a critical part of the marketing mix. However, as every line of this year's marketing budget is being scrutinized, the case for a low-cost, long-term lead generation and/or client acquisition program makes a great deal of sense.

Many of you are ahead of the curve in getting your SEO game on; for those of you who haven't extracted the most out of your site organically, it's time. Whether you do so with in-house talent or want to reach out to a Search Engine Marketing company for consultation on current best practices, remember that this is a long-term solution. Think about what your company needs its website to achieve not just in the next 12 months, but in the next couple of years. Then renew your Keyword Strategy with those goals and objectives in mind and take a fresh look at your content, page by page. Assess your needs for new content and put the plan and resources in place to make it happen. The results will help your marketing program have the teeth it needs to carry your company through to better economic times.

The First Step to Getting Ranked is Getting Crawled!

Effective Site Architecture Ensures Spiders will Find, and Completely Crawl, Your Site

Getting top rankings has prompted the authoring of entire books, including *Maximize Website Traffic*, from our founder and president, Susan O'Neil, back in 1999. In this booklet, we'll address the first step to getting those top rankings – making sure search engine spiders can crawl your website.

Spiders have to be able to find your site in order to crawl it. Listings in important directories is the first step in that process. Once a spider finds your site, it's important to make your pages as easy to crawl as possible, so the entire site can be indexed. Here are the 5 basics that can ensure your site is completely indexable to search engine spiders.

Title Tags

SEO tactics come and go, but one has remained steady for the 11+ years we've been in business – the effective use of the title tag. The title tag is the HTML title component that many call a tag, contained in the source code of each web page. Search engines continue to use the title as an essential “on-page” criterion to understand what your page is actually about so that their mammoth databases can store and return your page appropriately.

Making sure your title is coded correctly and includes the most relevant keywords for your page does more than tell search engines what a web page is about. Including keywords and compelling descriptions also provides information to web searchers, which will help influence whether they click on your link in the SERPs.

Title Tag Basics

1. Keep the title to 65 characters

The engines can index more but can't display more, so why bother writing more? Plus, a longer title can get truncated in the display, so results may not be as informative to searchers.

2. Put the most relevant keyword to a particular page at or **near the beginning** of the title.

Favorite Client Question

Shouldn't we start every title with our brand name?

We know how important your brand is to you, but ask yourself: how important is my brand to the person looking for a product like mine? If you are a well-established brand, having your brand in your title will probably increase your click-through rate. Still, don't place the brand at the beginning; reserve that real estate for your important keywords for that page.

3. **Repeat the keyword** in some way within the tag. For example, if your keyword is dog beds, a title might be, “**Dog beds** for every breed, from giant mastiff to toy poodle **beds**.”

Site Maps

Why it's important: A site map is a page or series of pages that lists the entire content of your site. This helps guarantee a “complete crawl” – when the spider crawls every single page of the site. Offering this aid to the search engines and regularly updating your site map will go a long way to keeping your site fully indexed.

Robot.txt file

Why it's important: Used correctly, robot.txt files keep spiders from indexing private files or sections of your site that you prefer don't show up in search listings. But be careful how you use it! You do not want robot.txt files to inadvertently prevent spiders from crawling vital, indexable pages.

Healthy URLs

Why it's important: Making sure there is nothing confusing about your URLs will help spiders index your entire site. For every single page of content, there should be only a single URL to visit it. Improper use of dynamic URLs, session IDs and tracking visitor paths in URLs can confuse spiders and keep your site from being crawled effectively. Also, avoid the use of session IDs in your URLs, as they can become spider traps and prevent your site from getting completely indexed.

404 Error Page

Why it's important: Make sure you send visitors and spiders to a well-designed 404 for incorrect addresses and broken links. A 404 lets a search engine know that the link the spider followed leads to a non-existent page that shouldn't be indexed. Your visitors will get suitable navigation into your site instead of finding a “dead” page and quickly clicking away.

The 5-Minute PPC Manager

No, we're not suggesting anyone can manage a successful pay-per-click (PPC) campaign in five minutes! What we are suggesting is that, if you take a few minutes each week to review this checklist of common-sense strategies, you'll find it a little easier to keep your campaign on track.

1 Take Advantage of Trademarks & Brand

If you own a trademarked product, term or name, use the ® symbol in relevant PPC ad copy. This instills confidence in the searcher that yours is the “official site” and can increase conversion rates. Include your brand in ad creative when it is well known.

2 Track to the Keyword Level

Track each click to the keyword level to understand what's working and what's not. Doing so enables you to test aggressively, a requirement in today's hyper-competitive world. If you don't have a solid conversion tracking program, consider using Google's Conversion Tracking – it won't track across the other engines, but it's free.

3 Test, Test, Test

Test versions of ad copy for click-through rate and landing pages for conversion rate. Split test long enough to collect a significant data set before drawing any conclusions. Let the data drive the decision – don't “assume”!

4 Don't Throw Away Keywords Too Fast

Revisit keywords regularly, even those that have been paused. Keywords that may have not delivered an optimum ROI in the past should be re-tested. Just remember to try different ad copy and landing pages.

5 Consider Dayparting

If your daily budget requirements are preventing you from serving 24/7, identify times of the day or week that convert better for your campaign and test changing your campaigns to day or temporal parting settings to conserve a limited budget.

6 Try the Content Network

In Google, set up a separate campaign just for Content, so you

Favorite Client Question

How much should I spend on PPC?
Don't let artificial budget caps prevent you from capturing all your potential revenue. Once you've identified ad groups that are driving leads or sales at an acceptable rate of return, make sure these are fully funded 24x7. If you don't, you're literally leaving revenue or leads behind for someone else to capitalize upon. Once successful campaigns are driving all available profits, seed a little extra budget for Content Networks or other tests to find even more opportunity.

track the effectiveness of this additional avenue of ad distribution. Test both image ads and textual ads and adapt your keyword strategy to these non-search, publishing websites.

7 Geo-Target
Geo-targeting can be an effective way to tailor ad copy to specific regions and / or minimize your daily spend for ad groups and product keywords.

8 Use Your Tools
Mine your third-party analytics program, Google Analytics and Google's Search Query Report for additional keywords and negatives to add to your existing campaigns and inspire new ones. Review bounce rates for landing page effectiveness and note successful geo-locations to expand your Local campaigns. Turn this information into action: more testing.

9 Proceed with Caution
Be careful with changes. If something isn't working, don't jump the gun and assume the keyword is the culprit. Consider tweaking the ad copy or trying a new landing page before giving up on what might be a good keyword. And remember, allow time for sufficient data collection before giving up.

10 Don't Forget to Add the Talent!
Don't over-rely on technology. While great technology is important for a successful PPC campaign, tools alone are not enough. It takes experience and talent to get the job done. Allow time for smart humans to use the tools, extract the data and provide the analysis that will drive your campaigns to their most cost-efficient levels.

5 Fast Facts of PPC

- 1. PPC is fast: launch, collect data, review, adjust, and instantly reap the rewards**
- 2. Just because it works in Google doesn't mean it automatically works in the other engines.**
- 3. Don't forget about MSN - sometimes it's the Little Engine That Could. Product conversion rates might impress you.**
- 4. Searchers will always surprise you with the language / keywords they use to find your products.**
- 5. "Web only" offers really DO work!**

Terms to Help Navigate the Search Landscape

Bounce Rate

The percentage of initial visitors to a site who "bounce" away to a different site, rather than continue on to other pages within the same site. The formula used to calculate bounce rate is:

$$\text{Bounce Rate} = \text{Single Page Access} / \text{Entries}$$

"Crawling" or Indexing

The process a Search Engine Spider follows while downloading and visiting all the pages it can find on a site and storing the information it gathers.

Keywords

The words users type into a Search Engine to describe the information they seek. These keywords are then used to buy ads for pay-per-click sponsored search or to target content on a website to improve the chance of getting ranked organically during one of these related searches.

Page Rank

A link analysis algorithm used for Organic search by the Google search engine that assigns a numerical weighting to each element of a hyperlinked set of documents, such as the World Wide Web, with the purpose of "measuring" its relative importance within the set.

The more numerous and higher quality links a web page has, the higher its Page Rank.

Quality Score

A dynamic metric assigned to each of your keywords in Paid Search, calculated by using a variety of factors. Quality Score measures how relevant your keyword is to your ad group and to a user's search query. The higher a keyword's Quality Score, the lower its cost per click (CPC) and the better its ad position.

Important components of QS: click through rate, landing page quality, keyword and ad text relevance, account performance.

Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

The listing of web pages returned by a search engine in response to a keyword query. The results normally include a list of web pages with titles, a link to the page and a short description showing where the keywords have matched content within the page.

Search Engine Spider

A Web crawler is a computer program that browses the World Wide Web in a methodical, automated manner. Typically the program downloads and stores all of the data on a web page, then identifies and visits all the links on the page.

The Corporate Blogger's Start-up Guide

Answering 4 Important Questions Now Will Guarantee a Great Company Blog

WHY *Be able to state clearly what a blog will bring your company that you don't already have. Without clarity of a true need and opportunity, you won't have the impetus to pull off a successful blog.*

In order to fully understand why you should blog, define what a successful blog means to you. How will you measure success? Will you depend on interactive reader input? Will the number of postings be key for you? Do you want the blog to lead to other things, such as speaking engagements, media notice, or more sales? Must you show a monetary return for what you put into the blog, or is this a public relations gambit?

WHO *Make the time and resources available to maintain and expand the features of your blog. Identify the key personnel who will be involved, and be realistic about how much time they will need to devote to this effort. Remember that for your blog to be successful it must engage your customers and prospective customers. Fresh content and compelling topics will pull customers into the discussion and encourage their contributions of suggestions, photos, reviews and more.*

One of the mistakes that planners make about their blogging initiatives is that they believe existing personnel will just add blogging in to their usual workload, even if those people are not interested in the subject or not very good at writing. Be warned: If you don't have a person whose sole responsibility it is to create fresh content and monitor and respond to comments, your blog cannot be successful. Similarly, while it's nice to imagine that your CEO will commit to blogging many times a week, this likely won't happen. CEOs are busy building and growing the company, and shouldn't be relied on as the main provider of blog content.

WHAT *Define the content and tone of your blog. Once you've decided on your subject and tone, don't deviate. You want your readers to return often and contribute to the conversation you've initiated, and if you change midstream you may lose their loyalty.*

Once you've chosen your subject and voice, develop an outline of potential subjects you'd like to cover in the near term, middle term and long term. For example, what topics are best conveyed conversationally? What topics are

timely? Seasonal? A word of caution: a real enthusiasm for the subject matter is a must. Readers have plenty of places to interact on their favorite subjects. They won't take the time to get involved with your blog if you don't appear to be just as interested as they are.

HOW *Review the skills of the staff you've assigned and choose your tools accordingly. Determining the tools you'll use and the guidelines staff will follow when submitting content and artwork will help prevent painful gaffes and stumbles appearing live on your company blog.*

When choosing a blogging platform, be mindful of how interactive you'd like to be and which staff will be uploading content. If you're assigning non-tech people to use the software, make sure they're capable of using the software, or make sure they're trained properly if they need it.

Decide if you want to include multi-media aspects to your blog.

Ask yourself these questions: Will you have still photos, video, audio? Who will take photos and with what equipment? Where else can photos or video come from? Do you need video- and photo-editing software? Does someone need to be trained to use the new programs?

Develop internal blog policies and clearly train contributors.

Ask yourself these questions: Who, if anybody, must approve content before going live? Will reader comments be allowed? Who, if anybody, must approve reader comments before they go live? What topics cannot be discussed, ever? What topics may be discussed, but may need vetting?

Building Awareness of Your New Blog

Where's Your Blog? Add clear links on your website so visitors can discover your blog, issue a press release, mention your blog in print collateral and alert staff.

Take Time to Listen Participate in the "blogosphere" by reading and commenting on other blogs and social media sites so others notice your blog and link to it. Remember, when you post on other blogs, don't go there just to "sell" — but don't try to hide your connection with your company either.

Monitor Your Reputation It's now a critical component of every company's marketing communications program to monitor other blogs and social media sites for mentions. Keep in mind that a negative comment is still a marketing opportunity. How you handle a complaint can validate or diffuse it.

Don't Sit on Your Laurels After 3 months, conduct interviews internally and externally to find what's been working and what hasn't. Consider adding new features to further encourage interaction with readers.

About @Website Publicity Search Marketing

@Website Publicity provides leading-edge Search Engine Marketing services, blogging services, consulting and training to brands such as Yankee Candle Company, Green Mountain Coffee, Keurig and Lindt & Sprüngli Chocolate. An early innovator in search engine positioning, the company excels at creating successful online programs, advancing mature SEO & PPC campaigns as well as managing product feeds to the shopping engines.

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