

What's so Special About Search Marketing?

If your company is not aggressively conducting efforts that will increase your search engine traffic, then it is time to get in the game! Otherwise, your competitors will continue to eat away at your market share, welcoming paying customers to purchase their products/services right in front of your very own eyes. Can your company afford to not catch up to your Internet savvy competition?

: : The writing is on the wall.

The popularity, convenience and usefulness of search engines cannot be denied. Google and Yahoo are everyday information sources, much like CBS, ABC and NBC. Search engine usage is second only to email when it comes to the most popular activities performed by Internet users (Pew Internet study). Americans conduct more than 4 billion searches each month. Some research indicates that "searching" may overtake email as the number one action taken by an Internet user. As more and more U.S. households not only hook up to the Internet, but go high-speed, their online activities will increase; thus reducing their exposure to television, print media, and other channels used by traditional advertisers. If your company is accustomed to traditional advertising and behind "the search engine curve," it is time to take action. Look into the crystal ball of wireless communications and its ability to put search in the hands of every cell phone user in the world today! It's already here and on the brink of explosion; if you're company does not ready itself, it will be passed by.

Over the past couple of years, one of the most important questions about the benefits of search engine optimization (SEO) is the value and profitability it can yield for a company. Fortunately, many reputable third parties have conducted extensive surveys and released their findings for public consumption; comparing search marketing performance to other popular marketing and advertising vehicles:

* According to research from Georgia Tech, 85% of Internet users find websites and products through search engines. In fact, nearly 55% of online purchases originate from search.

* U.S. Bancorp's Piper Jaffray has estimated the average cost to acquire a new customer is:

- o Search Engine Optimization - \$8.50 per new customer
- o Yellow Page Advertising - \$20 per new customer
- o Email Marketing - \$60 per new customer
- o Direct Mail Campaigns - \$70 per new customer
- o Acquisition costs for television advertising were not available, due in part to the inability to track ROI.

* Piper Jaffray also reported on the costs associated with lead generation:

- o Search Engine Optimization - \$0.29/lead
- o Email Marketing - \$0.50/lead
- o Yellow Page Advertising - \$1.18/lead
- o Banner Advertising - \$2.00/lead
- o Direct Mail Campaigns - \$9.94/lead

* A July 2005 MarketingSherpa IT Benchmark Study received feedback from over 800 IT marketers about the most effective lead generation strategies out of 18 mainstream practices. It found:

- o The most effective lead generation practice was in person seminars/road shows (33% of respondents communicated it was very effective).

- o The second most effective lead generation strategy was search engine optimization (25% of respondents communicated it was very effective). The value of search engine optimization has proven itself to be a "must-do," when it comes to lead generation in all industries.
- o Paid Search Advertising (or PPC) came in seventh in the study.

The sheer act of a search is one of, if not, the most direct methods a user/buyer can make. The customer is asking for your product, service, or company offering. No other marketing medium can provide this type of qualified buyer, in such quantity. The ability to be in front of individuals who are requesting information is a marketer's dream. Why not make that dream a reality and organically position your company's website atop the major search engines?

: : How do you get in the game?

Now that you are drooling over the potential search can have for your business, the million dollar question is "How do we get to the top?" For a company that is going to allocate a budget to search engine optimization, it is absolutely critical that you research third party providers that specialize in search engine optimization. Simply reading a website or doing a search on Google for "search engine optimization" is not the answer; it's a start but you have to filter through the clever marketing pitches of SEO companies. Try established sources like SearchEngineWatch.com or MarketingSherpa.com. Look for a provider that not only offers you the fundamentals of ethical SEO, but more importantly customized solutions, short-term contracts, proprietary technologies, and has a passion for results-based search engine optimization. The SEO provider should put as much skin in the game as the customer, especially during an initial service engagement, until results, value, and confidence have been established.

If you're thinking about putting the responsibilities of search engine optimization on your in-house marketing team or technical team...think again! MarketingSherpa's 2nd Annual Search Marketing Survey, of over 3,200 marketers asked the question: How do search agencies and consultancies differ from in-house search marketers? The reported data compared results that were achieved over a six month period with both in-house teams and search agencies. The results found an SEO agency-optimized website experienced a 110% increase in traffic over six months while in-house-optimized websites experienced only a 38% increase in traffic. That is nearly three times more traffic in only a six month span, in favor of the expertise of SEO agencies!!

: : What's happening with your marketing?

How easily can you track and confirm bottom-line success from newspapers, yellow pages, radio, television, and other traditional vehicles? This can prove to be a nightmare for marketers that need to report back to the higher-ups on the success of their active marketing campaigns. The Internet, especially search engines, provides you with all of the information you can absorb and then some. Every finite detail, from revenues to geographic origins of your traffic, can be tracked, reported, and analyzed. This gives marketers tremendous insight and comprehension into what's working and if they should increase/decrease online marketing efforts. Analytics packages are available at nominal costs and increased competition in this space has provided marketers with a reasonable point of entry. Your search engine optimization provider should include analytics with its services, but be diligent in your research of the tool provided. It should be able to monitor traffic, visitor click paths, goal achievement, referring sources of traffic, search engine performance, cross-channel tracking, conversions, and ideally revenues and campaign profitability.

: : Welcome search with open arms

As high-speed Internet adoption continues to increase on American soil and as Google, Yahoo, MSN and others continue the race for international dominance, the value of search engines is destined to become greater for companies competing in the online marketplace. If your company's marketing and advertising strategies just aren't cutting the mustard and are stagnant look to search engine optimization to fuel its success. Your customers are searching for you...are they finding you?

:: About Scott Gardner

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