

Want to get more online business?

Search engine marketing can help *By Claire Carvall*

Since over 90% of web users use search engines to find information about a company and its products or services, search engine marketing (SEM) can provide a valuable source of new business leads, putting the “warm” customer directly in front of you.

However, in an online era where competition has intensified and become more sophisticated, SEM can be a bit of a minefield and many businesses struggle to address the opportunity, relying on more traditional methods of marketing and sales activity.

There are two main types of SEM you can use to increase your online presence: search engine optimisation (SEO) and pay per click advertising (PPC). This article will focus on the lower cost method, SEO - with tips for approaching it.

Search Engine Optimisation

SEO involves achieving the highest possible ranking on a search engine's listings after a “keyword”, or more commonly “keyphrase”, is entered. It is itself a non paid for technique, although SEO agencies will gladly take your money to advise on how to climb Mount Search Page!

Significantly, research has shown that users tend to choose the natural SEO search results in preference to the paid for search listings (such as PPC), as users

become more experienced and cynical about companies paying for high listings.

For tips on submitting your site to search engines, take a look at the search engine watch website: www.searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/index.php

How can you rank higher?

The ingredients for ranking high on the popular search pages of Google, Yahoo and MSN can be quite complex. Fairly obviously, you need to ensure key words and phrases that a potential client may search for are on your site. But it's not just about the word triggers, it also has to do with the site design and formatting. For example, search engines will also look at:

Title tags - the names you give to individual web pages, which appear at the top of the users' web browser

Meta tags - key words which tell search engines what the page is about

Links - into the page from other pages or other sites will also help your site as search engines count these as hits.

This is where research and, quite often, advice from an expert could be useful.

The SEO agency

It's understandable that most business people will be slightly put off by the idea of tackling this challenge, so SEO agencies can be sought to filter out the jargon and technical boundaries. If searching for an agency, it's worth checking a few things out before you choose. For example:

Do they specialise in SEO alone or is it a bolt-on service to a wider offering?

What is their own search engine ranking?

Can they give you the names of some of their clients so that you can check their ranking too?

Are they happy for you to talk to their clients?

Above all, you need to discuss your objectives with the agency, make sure they understand your brand and positioning, agree realistic targets and then measure the impact on your bottom line (assuming all other elements of your marketing are in place). Also, beware of unrealistic promises such as “guaranteed No 1 ranking on Google”!

Want to get more online business? *Cont'd*

Key Words and Phrases

It is all very well knowing that you must have key words or phrases to trigger a listing, but which ones? Research shows that more than 86% of all searches are for two or more words. This indicates key phrases will have more impact. There are tools to help you research the most appropriate key phrase triggers, based on actual customer behaviour. These are available through all of the main search providers such as Google, Espotting and Overture. Try visiting Overture's "keyword assistant" - a link can be found at www.hydemarketing.com. This will show you related searches which include your phrase and how many times the term was searched for over the last month.

Call to action

So far we've highlighted how to get noticed but this could be a wasted effort if your 'call to action' doesn't strike a chord. Once your potential customer has found the results, they'll typically spend only a few seconds digesting the headlines and then decide on the site to visit. It is important for you to get inside your target audience's head and make sure that one sentence is relevant to them, or else they may glaze over your listing and click through to your competitor's site.

Search Engine Optimisation can be a very effective method of generating new business but it is just one



of the many different ways of driving leads online, as well as offline. If you would like to discuss maximising your sales opportunities through any element of the promotional mix, then please don't hesitate to contact Alan Brooks or Claire Carvall on **020 7022 0054** or at acb@hydemarketing.com.