

Search engine marketing

Search engine marketing summary

Search Engine Marketing is the phrase used to cover a number of different marketing elements. In the context of this document the phrase refers to two specific activities:

Search Engine Optimisation

This is the process of creating web pages with specific attributes and text to take advantage of the way in which Internet search engines rank web sites when responding to a specific request. By taking advantage of this web sites can be developed so that they will rank highly within search engine results for particular search terms entered by users.

The process involves making specific alterations to web pages on an initial and then ongoing basis to continue to take advantage of the benefits of high search engine results rankings.

Costs are incurred through submitting the web site address in question to specific search engine indexes (such as Inktomi or FAST for example) whilst some other search indexes (e.g. Google) remain free of submission charges. Some paid submission services will revisit sites on a regular basis to check for updated content which will enable search engine marketers to continually alter the web site in question to improve rankings.

Whilst effective search engine optimisation can bring great benefits in terms of the web site traffic received from high ranking search engine results, search engine companies offer no guarantee that a particular web site will be shown in a particular place within the standard search engine results. (For information on how to guarantee a specific position, refer to point 2 below). The changeable nature of search engine

technology and algorithms means that there are times when even the most well optimised web site may experience a drop in rankings – for this reason other search engine marketing options can also be used to counter any risk of this occurring.

Paid Placement Advertising (Pay Per Click)

Paid Placement Advertising is the term used to refer to services run by companies such as Overture and Google AdWords. These companies provide additional search engine results to the main search engines to display alongside the results discussed in 1, however the difference here is that placement within the results is determined by the amount the advertiser (i.e. the target web site) is prepared to pay to guarantee visibility at a particular point in the search engine. The providers effectively operate an auction-style model where the highest bid per click will be shown in the position and so on. The exception to this model is Google AdWords which adds a relevancy weighting established by its main index to the maximum cost a user is prepared to pay. (This means in theory a relevant ad with a bid of 5p could be shown above a less relevant ad with a bid of 10p)

Paid Placement is an extremely effective method for attracting web site visitors as it is often somewhat difficult to establish which search engine results have been paid for and which have come direct from the search engine – meaning that the user is often not aware that they are effectively clicking on a text advert rather than a true search result. The paid results often masquerade as 'Featured Sites' although most major sites are now attempting to make the paid nature of the results clearer. To date however this has not affected the number of people who choose to follow these results.



Types of SEO solutions currently on offer

Manual Page Optimisation

Manual SEO involves the creation of hand-built, tailor made pages, specific to your site, which are then submitted to carefully evaluated search engines without the use of off-the-shelf software packages. Companies practising this form of SEO normally offer a variety of optimisation techniques, which can be deployed as appropriate to websites with different types of campaign requirements.

The agency will also take time to understand your overall campaign objectives, thoroughly researching search phrases (key words) in the process. Ongoing page re-optimisation should form a significant element of the overall strategy. Without this, and due to competitors' response and changes in search ranking algorithms, any hard-earned top placements will quickly fall.

Measurement of the campaign should also form a key element of the overall offering. Management reporting should be flexible and responsive allowing online analysis of your campaign's performance by a variety of criteria.

This approach requires continual research and development, in order to implement adaptive strategies in response to changes and developments in search engine ranking methodologies.

Customised manual campaigns address the long-term linking aspects of the website, its domain name, and its development roadmap. Ownership and copyright of optimised pages should reside with the client.

For:

- > In-depth key word research and understanding of your marketplace
- > Extensive research and development resources
- > Continual refinement of the optimised pages in order to maximise results
- > Responsive to competitor action
- > Performance-led
- > Can integrate a variety of methodologies over time
- > Flexible
- > Can integrate with different web platforms and content management systems
- > Reduced 'spamming' risk as software is not relied upon
- > Good ROI
- > Evolving, long-term approach

Against:

- > May involve more time to initially set-up
- > May be unsuitable for some budgets



Automated optimisation solutions

Companies that offer software-led strategies for optimising traffic are more common and vary from one man- bands through to larger agencies offering SEO as part of an overall online market strategy. The service may include keyword recommendation and placement guarantees, all for a one-off service fee.

The main drawbacks associated with using software to implement and manage a campaign include the 'one size fits all' methodology, generic nature of optimisation, and reporting practice.

The tasks associated with search engine positioning go beyond simply optimising and submitting client's site pages using automated tools. Staying on top of changes and developments within the industry are imperative to effective SEO. Although the exact algorithms for each search engine are secret and are constantly changing, SEO technicians should test constantly to identify best results. This reiterates the need for SEO experience and continual development of techniques in order to apply the correct, most effective SEO strategies.

For:

- > Basic optimisation for your website and help with key word selection
- > Low-cost set-up fees

Against:

- > One-size-fits-all nature increasingly ineffective
- > Guarantees usually worthless
- > Campaign may be limited to less popular keyphrases to ensure guarantees are fulfilled
- > Inability to respond quickly to individual search engine changes
- > Reliance on software supplier to maintain software
- > Maintaining placements very difficult as only a single methodology is understood
- > Key phrase analysis may be inadequate and assumption based
- > Risky, if detected site may be penalised or banned

Submission Only Services

Companies that offer to submit your website to hundreds or even thousands search engines are a waste of your company's time and money. Submission to numerous search engines, including unusual foreign engines, may seem appealing. However, 90% of web traffic uses the top 5 or so search engines, which link and feed to and from each other. So being number one in an obscure, unheard of index may be flattering but the search engines that your website is submitted to need to be those that will be used by your customers.

Submission only services do not optimise your web pages. As there are so many similar websites on the Internet, your site needs to be able to rank more highly than your competitors'. As submission only services do not create optimised pages, they do not provide a competitive solution.

For:

- > If your site is highly spiderable already and you, for example, have specialist academic content then somebody may find you (just maybe!)

Against:

- > Your website only needs to be submitted to the search engines that your customers will use
- > Submission without optimisation rarely delivers results
- > May get your site penalised for over submitting



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Search engine marketing

pay for inclusion services

Some key search engines such as Yahoo! and LookSmart charge for inclusion into them.

In the case of Yahoo! And LookSmart this does not guarantee a listing but merely ensure that your website will be reviewed. As these engines are potentially key traffic drivers to you site getting a listing is highly beneficial. Additionally indices such as Inktomi feed many other engines, for example, MSN and AOL so you get multiple inclusions for a single fee. These engines should be considered as a key element in your SEO planning.

Paying a search engine for inclusion does not guarantee a good placement, it only ensures that your site has a good chance of being included in the search engine's database of millions of sites – for your money to be well spent you still need to optimise the site being promoted.

For:

- > A review of your site is guaranteed within a few days
- > Once included into Inktomi your submitted pages will be 're-indexed' every 48 hours
- > Pages which have been optimised will benefit from the regular re-indexing
- > Being included into one portal means exposure on the partnering search engines

Against:

- > After paying the initial fee for a review, a listing is not guaranteed
- > Still requires optimisation. Even if included, an un-optimised site can be buried in the results

pay-per-click or cost-per-click listings

Some of the popular search engines, for example Overture, offer an 'auction service' in which you can bid for positions on individual key words. The price of the bid is charged to the advertiser whenever a user clicks on their entry. The key difference between SEO and pay-per-click (PPC) is that the placement within the search results is 'purchased' by the advertiser rather than determined, as they are with most search engines, by complex formulae relating to relevance or popularity.

PPC engines may feed results to other search engines, which can be an advantage, but the number of search engines, which the pay-for-placement engine will serve, is still limited. However, as many search engines now list websites from PPC engines at the top of the first page of search results, a PPC strategy can be a beneficial part of your overall search engine strategy.

For:

- > The key phrase purchased will be displayed very quickly, or within a few days
- > Strategy can be changed quickly and is flexible
- > Does not require any changes to your website

Against:

- > 'Dutch auction' – as you are competing directly cost for popular terms can become unrealistic
- > Can be time consuming to manage listings and expensive to bid on the most competitive terms
- > Results may be viewed with scepticism by some Internet users, as bid price is always visible
- > Results are purely commercial. When results are fed into partner search engines they are clearly set apart as 'advertising', so users know that they are not genuine search results
- > Requires knowledge of customer search behaviour to determine search phrases



An examination of current SEM practice

Key Phrase research

SEO providers may claim to use specialised key phrase planning by subjecting keyphrases to analysis by a panel of web-wise surfers. This 'brainstorming' approach is inadequate, as it does not reveal what terms are actually searched for. Additionally does the agency understand your market and your competitors sufficiently to determine suitable key words?

The search engine promoter needs to understand how to theme and focus a promotion, specific to the site content and target market required. A good SEO provider will have in depth strategies for key word selection, and cross-reference phrases against databases containing Key Phrases actually used by web users.

Guarantees

Many SEO companies offer guarantees regarding the positions they can achieve for your website. However, it is wise to question the benefits of such guarantees for the SEO company. Obscure key words and phrases may enable the SEO company to provide you with guaranteed positioning, but will it drive traffic to your site? For example, guarantees may entail a promise to achieve 5 top placements in the search results for 20 of your Key Phrases. However, guarantees create an incentive for an SEO company to meet their targets for you, but are inherently a disincentive in promoting the most competitive (and by definition most popular) Key Phrases.

In order to drive the maximum amount of traffic to your website, you cannot risk anything interfering with choosing the most constructive Key Phrases for your campaign. Moreover, the ability to achieve a comprehensive promotion, rather than merely use disparate keywords, has recently become more valuable as a number of search engines are implementing theming technology, in an attempt to provide more relevant results. Thus you must not allow

an SEO provider to take the easy option of choosing non-competitive keywords, which will enable the company to achieve their search engine placement targets for you, but will not drive traffic to your site. The SEO provider you select should have the competence and confidence to view the selection and optimisation of targeted, competitive key words, as a challenge. Track record is king; ask to see live examples of searches for competitive search terms in major search engines.

Reporting

Adequate understanding of the effectiveness of your SEO campaign is imperative to assessing its effectiveness. Many SEO companies offer reports regarding your website's positioning progress; yet merely use software such as Topdog and WebPositionGold to provide such results. A good SEO company should offer you a regular, convenient, tailored, flexible reporting system, rather than an off-the-shelf program.

Link Popularity

Most search engines, most notably Google, now take into account how "popular" a site is by counting how many links it enjoys from other websites. This measure of popularity is factored into search results, the more popular websites subsequently achieving higher search engine positions.

Many search engine promotion agencies offer link popularity enhancement programs, but care must be taken to ensure exactly what this entails. For example, "link farms" are an automated service, which increase link popularity artificially by generating many pages full of links and submitting these to search engines. However, most search engines have become aware of this technique, have defined it as Spam and now disregard websites who have participated in this practice, from their databases.

Only genuine links from sites with related content are really worth developing.



An examination of current SEM practice

MetaTags

MetaTags are a legitimate element of SEO practice. However, optimisation companies, which claim that MetaTags are the “holy grail” of SEO, are misleading. The importance of MetaTags has decreased drastically in recent years. Many search engines no longer use MetaTags in order to calculate the relevance of a site. They should be considered as a minor element of the optimisation equation.

Gateway Pages

Gateway pages are a skeletal version of the pages of a website, which are designed to be optimally legible to search engines. The pages are based on the key words, which are selected as being most suited to attracting traffic to your site. The pages are html based and include the key words of a campaign written in a ‘bare bones’ format so that the graphics, JavaScript code etc. do not distract the search engine spiders. For example, the home page of your website would include an invisible instruction, which redirects the spiders to the optimised pages and then a final instruction at the end of the optimised page, which passes the user straight to the home page. Gateway pages are independent of any changes within a website, so do not present content management issues. However, solutions utilising Gateway Pages, which redirect users to a different page, are becoming increasingly liable to detection by search engine ranking algorithms.

Visible Optimised Pages

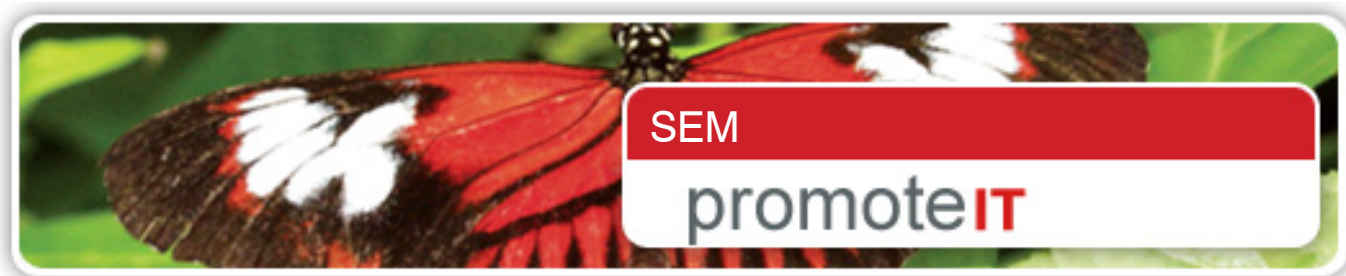
Visible optimised pages or ‘Alias Pages’ are pages of a website, which are integrated into the look, feel and navigation of the site and include optimised, targeted content, in order to generate high search engine listings. They serve as entry points for users ‘landing’ from the search engines. A landing page approach can provide a successful, strategic and long-term search engine solution, which will build stable results and keep the risks of ‘spamming’ to an absolute minimum.

The use of visible optimised pages is the most ethical, long-term approach you can take. Whilst it will require the generation of unique content, designed specifically for targeted search terms, it is a practice acceptable to all search engines and end users.

Stealth or cloaked pages

The use of Stealth Promotion or cloaked pages is a high risk strategy. Cloaking involves delivering one web page to search engines, whilst delivering a different page to the Web user. Cloaked pages use IP redirection software. This software is able to identify who is looking at the website, before the user has received the pages. If the software identifies that a search engine is reviewing the web pages, it will send the optimised pages to the search engine, rather than the real web pages. If the software were to fail, the user would be delivered the optimised pages, rather than the web pages, which would be meaningless to the web user.

Cloaked pages may enable companies to give their website development team free rein regarding content, branding, graphic usage, etc. However, cloaking is, technically, spamming and many search engines (such as Google) will blacklist your site from their directories if they detect the use of such techniques.



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About red technology

We pride ourselves on working in close collaboration with our clients and to this end our working methods are fully transparent and accountable. Our breadth of experience in delivering projects within different working and industry arenas means that we can provide you with the solution that best fits your requirements and needs.

With a highly comprehensive approach RED uses proven, manual search engine optimisation techniques to deliver significant results - fast.

REDtechnology.com:

- > Offer a multi-faceted approach to search engine optimisation methodology focusing on low-risk, long term methods of generating traffic
 - > Manually optimise each key phrase for different search engine algorithms
 - > Manually submit and re-submit to hand picked directories and indices
 - > Have an extensive, on-going research and development roadmap to ensure our campaigns are utilising the most appropriate technology
 - > Create pages that, when viewed, are seamless to the end user
 - > Allow the code to be owned and hosted by the client
 - > Re-optimize pages in response to changes in search methodology and the actions of competing sites
- > Assign you an eMarketing Consultant, who will oversee the development and maintenance of your website's SEO campaign
 - > Integrate your SEO campaign with your overall marketing goals
 - > Accommodate any expansion of your website and marketing goals, promotion to foreign markets and offer foreign language services
 - > Thoroughly research Key Phrases against competitors, search engines' most popular terms, frequency algorithms, natural language patterns
 - > Offer detailed management reporting. Our reporting services enable you to track changes in your website's positioning over time in