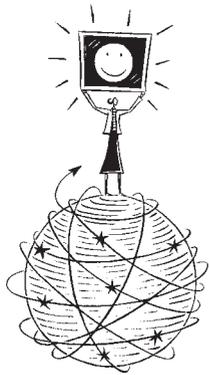


“Search engine results pages are the real estate of the new millennium.”
Tim Cohn, Advanced Marketing Consultants



Search engine marketing

We often seek the easiest and quickest way to do things in our busy lives, and search engines have helped many of us do this.

People will search for businesses through a variety of channels (many of which we have already discussed, e.g. print and online directories, voice services, mobile devices), so it is important your business is found in as many locations as possible. One of the more recent mechanisms available for people to search are online search engines.

Online search is a rapidly growing part of our culture. Anyone who has access to the internet is likely to use a search engine at one time or

another and for a variety of purposes. According to Sensis' research, 85% of Australian SMEs who search online are looking for information about products and services.

Further research suggests:

- Search is closing in on email as the primary daily online activity: 77% email and 63% search. (Kelsey Group 2006)
- 53% of United States web users said they used two or three search engines. (Kelsey Group 2006)
- 83% of consumers worldwide use search engines to find and access websites. (Forrester Research 2004)

For small businesses search engines can be critical sources of potential traffic and qualified leads, targeting users at the moment they are actively searching for products or information. In many cases, you only pay when someone makes contact with your advertisement, so theoretically you only pay for genuine potential customers, which means more qualified customers to your online front door.

What is search engine marketing?

Search engine marketing (SEM) refers to the overall process of marketing a website on search engines (both paid and unpaid methods). This includes submitting the right ad, optimising it well through style and placement, and ensuring it ranks highly in searches by paying for priority positioning where possible. But it does not end there. It is about improving how your site interacts with search engines overall so your target audience can find you. SEM is a continual process and not a one-off task. For that reason, while many small business owners choose to manage their own SEM, some may decide this is an area better left to the experts. We will discuss ways to select a search expert for your business later in this chapter.

What are search engines?

The term 'search engine' is often used generically to describe both crawler/spider or spider-based search engines and human-powered directories. These two types of search engines gather their listings in very different ways.

Crawler/spider-based search engines

Crawler/spider-based search engines, such as Google or sensis.com.au, create their listings automatically. They ‘crawl’ or ‘spider’ the web according to the search request and present the searcher with a list of all the related links found. People then search through their findings for the most relevant result. How quickly your business is found, and where your business ends up in the search results, will generally depend on how closely matched your business is to the search query and how easy your website is to find by the crawler or spider. Changing your web pages can impact the way you are found and listed, which is one reason why sometimes you might suddenly have more traffic after a change to your site. Page titles, text and other elements can all play a role. Search engines can also make changes to the way their crawlers behave, which can also impact the way you are found – one of the reasons why search engine optimisation is not a one-off task.

Human-powered directories

A human-powered directory such as Yellow™ OnLine works differently. Information databases are maintained by humans and the crawling mechanism is limited to information within those databases. This means changes to your web pages will not impact your ability to be found. As long as you have registered your name on the database, and you have nominated as many relevant keywords as possible, people can either type in your name or your business type and location and you should be found. We have already discussed online directories in chapter 14, so let’s focus on crawler/spider-based search engines such as sensis.com.au, Google, Yahoo! and Ninemsn.

Search engine submission: listing your business

Search engine submission means having your website listed with search engines. This does not necessarily mean you will rank well every time, but search engines should be able to locate your site.

Two ways you can get listed with search engines are:

1. Search engine optimisation (SEO) - adapting your site and employing methods to help increase your chance of being found for free
2. Paid-for listings - also known as ‘pay-per-click’ or ‘pay-for-performance,’ which we will call P4P. (More on this later.)

How search engines work

When you search for anything using a crawler/spider-based search engine, the search engine should sort through the millions of pages it can find and present you with results related in some way to your topic. The matches should also be ranked, so the most relevant ones come first.

Of course, the search engines don’t always get it right. Non-relevant pages make it through, and sometimes it may take a little more digging to find what you are looking for. Crawler/spider-based search engines go about determining relevancy by following a set of rules, known as an ‘algorithm’. Search engines are unlikely to share their rules or algorithms because it is a key ingredient in determining which search engines work better and who has the most successful search results. They can change the way their algorithm is set which can affect how the crawler or spider behaves, as mentioned earlier. This in turn can impact the way your site is listed and ranked. One way to help ensure your listing is not impacted by these changes is to pay for your placement.

Location and frequency

The location and frequency of keywords on your web page can help or hinder your listing on search engines. An algorithm may assume your website is more relevant than your competitor’s because the search term is in your web address or at the top of your home page, whereas the same search term does not appear until your competitor’s third page. This means every word on your website can impact your business’ chances of being found. So it is important to ensure you consider the relevance of information when you are designing your website.

Frequency can also play a role in how search engines determine relevancy.

A search engine might analyse how often keywords appear in relation to other words in a web page. Those with a higher frequency might be deemed more relevant than other web pages. Some search engines 'index' or collect more web pages than others. Some search engines also index web pages more often than others. Consequently no search engine has the exact same collection of web pages to search through. That naturally produces differences in the results.

Search engines may also penalise pages or exclude them from the index, if they detect search engine 'spamming'. An example is when a word is repeated hundreds of times on a page, to increase the frequency and propel the page higher in the listings. Search engines can watch for common spamming methods in a variety of ways, including following up on complaints from their users.

Off-the-page consideration

As this market matures, many 'webmasters', or designers, are learning more about the way search engines operate and some are constantly rewriting their web pages in an attempt to gain better rankings. At the same time, crawler/spider-based search engines are becoming familiar with the ways people are doing this and, as a result, many of them now also make use of 'off-the-page' ranking criteria.

Off-the-page mechanisms are those a webmaster is generally unable to influence easily. Chief among these is link analysis. By analysing how pages link to each other, a search engine can determine what a page is about and whether the page might be important enough to achieve a higher ranking. In addition, sophisticated techniques are being used to screen attempts by webmasters to build artificial links designed to boost their rankings. One way to help improve your chances of being found is to build links to your website from other relevant and popular websites. Why? Because crawlers and spiders follow links, and by linking with popular sites you are more likely to be found by them.

Another off-the-page mechanism is click-through measurement. In short, this means some search engines may monitor what results people are selecting for a particular search and may drop previously higher ranking pages not being selected, while promoting the lower-ranking pages being selected. As with link analysis, systems are also available to determine artificial click-through mechanisms generated by webmasters.

Pay-for-performance (P4P) search engine marketing

Generally, search engines will offer some form of P4P listing service.

If managed well, P4P advertising can be one of the most cost-effective marketing solutions for businesses on the internet. Unlike SEO, P4P provides the opportunity to ensure a higher ranking on search engines in return for a fee. Website owners can usually bid for keywords so can determine how much they are prepared to spend. Search engines can also place a minimum price point on page placements to ensure top spots are not being sold too cheaply in the case where there is only one person bidding. Search engines might also offer reduced prices for websites with high click-through. This means popular sites aren't deterred from advertising because they have to pay every time someone selects them. (This means an advertiser with a high click-through rate might pay less in position #1 than an advertiser in position #2 with a lower click-through rate.)

When someone enters a keyword into a search engine, ads are usually displayed. The highest-ranking ad is likely to be determined by a combination of relevance, click-through rate (popularity) and the amount paid. The highest bid can usually ensure a higher place than anyone else, but may only guarantee you the highest placement if you have paid the minimum fee for that spot based also on your site's click-through rate. Importantly, though, P4P means website owners don't pay unless the person searching actually selects their ad. To help increase your options of ranking highly in a cost-effective manner, it is important to build up a strong click-through rate. A good way to do this is to ensure your site is user-friendly and you promote it, so people are more likely to recognise it and click on it when they see it.

Bid management

Bid management is the task of managing how much to pay, when to bid on keywords and which metrics to apply. This can be a complex element of P4P. You may want to consider outsourcing your bid management along with your P4P strategy to a search provider, which can offer a variety of services depending on how much you want to spend. There are automated management systems or systems where you can determine which metrics you want to apply to your listings, e.g. cost-per-click, cost-per-registration, paid-for page position, position of competitors, etc.

SmartyHost is an online company providing web hosting and domain name services. With just 25 employees they service more than 25,000 individual and business customers. SmartyHost predominantly advertises online to get new customers. They have found pay-per-click technology, such as Sensis BidSmart, is time efficient, measurable and delivers the most customers for the least amount of money. They have also advertised on TV and radio and in print, and have had articles printed in the press. "Pay-per-click advertising generates solid leads and we only have to pay for people who visit our website. We augment our strategy by using offline channels to build brand awareness."

Anoosh Manzoori, founder, SmartyHost

Tips to successful search engine copywriting

Search engine copywriting should satisfy two audiences:

- The search engines – which reward content-rich sites written according to SEO copywriting standards with higher positioning
- Your customers – who rely on relevant, easy to read and understand content to help enable their purchase decision and process.

Here are some tips for successful copywriting taken from the SEM Council's book *Search Marketing Demystified* and searchenginewriting.com:

1. Always research your keywords using trusted industry research tools. Unfortunately, many business owners claim to know the phrases their potential customers are likely to use, and forgo any actual research. This can be a very easy step and can deliver some good results. Popular research tools include:

- Sensis.com.au Keyword Suggestion Tool for BidSmart
 - Google AdWords Keyword Selection Tool
 - Yahoo Search Term Selection Tool.
2. Make sure your copy is well written, grammatically correct and void of spelling mistakes. While it can be important to include misspellings in your keyword list, making them visible on your site may affect the perceived professionalism of your business. (When purchasing keywords, you should try to anticipate common misspellings for example, a hotel should not limit its keywords to 'accommodation' and rule out other variations of the word such as 'acomodation', because they could miss out when someone spells it incorrectly).
 3. Choose two or three key words or phrases specific to every page in addition to keyphrases specific to each page. Remember, people can enter your site on any page, so a per-page optimisation strategy is vital. Try to include your key phrases at least three times each within the body text. If you are working with a highly competitive keyphrase, strategically insert the keyphrase more than three times if possible. Crawlers and spiders can zoom through your entire web page, indexing every word. The goal is to strategically scatter your key phrases throughout your page copy.
 4. Emphasise your key phrases in headlines and sub-headlines where appropriate. Emphasised text, like headlines, sub-headlines and boldface, can be important coding properties for search engines. This means key phrases appearing as emphasised text can stand out to crawlers and spiders and may help your site achieve higher positioning.
 5. Try to include a minimum of 250 words per page. Although this may seem like a lot of text, a 250-word count for each optimised page can help meet search engine and reader needs. This is because:
 - Search engine crawlers and spiders look for content. You may see a lot of words, but they are likely to see a document with lots of content to extract.

- A longer word count can make it easier to include your key phrases without sacrificing your marketing message. Potential customers are likely to want more product information than less – and they may leave your site if they don't find it.
6. Don't compromise your site to achieve search engine positioning. Some people may think that if mentioning a key phrase three times is good, then mentioning it 30 times on a page must be even better. Although the page may position well, visitors are likely to question keyphrase-packed writing and may not like your site.

Caterer's Warehouse is a small, national wholesale business based in New South Wales. They use a variety of advertising channels to ensure their customers can find them, wherever or whenever they are looking. "We advertise in the Yellow™ metropolitan and regional books, as well as online. Caterer's Warehouse had been achieving increased website traffic, but not sales, so we signed up with BidSmart. The results are both measurable and impressive – since using BidSmart our website traffic has increased 5% and sales have increased 20%."

Sharon Tierman, business manager, Caterer's Warehouse

Protect your brand online

The leading search providers offer varying degrees of protection to business owners, but you should also monitor competitor and affiliate activities. Generally, search engines have brand protection policies and business owners should take full advantage of these. Online marketing and research company Hitwise developed a Search Engine Brand Management White Paper which supports the following overview on search engine guidelines.

Sensis

Sensis provides clear guidelines on competitive keywords: 'Keywords based on the names of competitors or trademarks owned by third parties to the applying BidSmart customer are not acceptable.' Furthermore, 'BidSmart customers may only choose a keyword if it is relevant to their website and business. Any product or service that is implied by the keywords selected for BidSmart Listings must be clearly available on the landing page.'

The Sensis BidSmart product guidelines are available at: https://bidsmart.sensis.com.au/bidsmart/includes/product_guidelines.pdf

Google AdWords

Google does not arbitrate trademark disputes, but places the responsibility on advertisers for the keywords and ad content they use and offers to 'investigate matters raised by trademark owners'.

Google AdWords has different guidelines for trademark protection in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada than in the rest of the world, where they 'require an advertiser to remove the trademark and prevent them from using it in ad text in the future.'

Outside of the United Kingdom, United States and Canada, Google AdWords will ensure advertisements 'do not use a trademarked term in the ad content or as a keyword trigger.' The AdWords Trademark Complaint Procedures are available at: http://www.google.com/tm_complaint_adwords.html

Yahoo!

Yahoo! allows only resellers, information sites that are not competitive and competitive comparison sites to bid on trademarked names. Yahoo! takes no responsibility to arbitrate trademark disputes, leaving the responsibility for respecting trademark laws to advertisers. Like Google, Yahoo! promises to review complaints from advertisers for improper use of trademarks.

The Yahoo! search marketing trademark policy is available at: <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/legal/trademarks.php>

ninemsn

ninemsn in Australia manages its sponsored listings through Yahoo! Search Marketing. Refer to the Yahoo! Search Marketing trademark policy mentioned previously.

Protecting yourself

The following are steps to help minimise competitor threats:

Ad placement – Your ad should appear toward the top of the search results page for searches on your brand. Unpaid listings are usually preceded by up to three sponsored listings. Business owners should consider bidding on their name to appear in the sponsored listings.

Ad copy – An increase in the volume of visits to a competitor from searches for your brand name could indicate particularly effective ad copy in a sponsored listing. Business owners can learn a great deal from competitors' successes.

Exclusion policies – Business owners can write exclusion policies into contracts with affiliates to prevent them from bidding on the brand.

Register misspelt domain names – Consider registering domain names for common misspellings of your brand name. For example, the domains www.qantas.com.au and www.quantas.com.au are both registered by Qantas, with users typing in those domains re-directed to the correct URL. This stops a competitor buying the common misspelt URL and accessing traffic otherwise meant for you.

Bidding on your brand name – Some believe it is unnecessary to bid on their brand's trademark as the brand owner's website will almost always be the first unpaid search result. Let's discuss some reasons why you should.

Reasons to bid on your own brand name

The main reason for business owners to bid on their own trademarked brand names is to help improve ad placement, ad copy, landing page and click-through rates.

Ad placement – A successful bid on your own brand name can mean your ad appears among the sponsored listings. While your listing may otherwise appear first in the unpaid results, it may be below a number of sponsored listings and other links provided by the search engine.

Ad copy – A successful bid on your brand name can allow you to control the ad copy that appears in your sponsored search results. For example, you may have your name rank first and the second and third rankings might be reviews of your business.

Landing page – A successful bid on your brand name can allow you to control the landing page. You can ensure your customers are sent to the most relevant page on your site, and therefore encourage a positive user experience.

Click-through rate – A study published in 2004 by Overture found when companies appear in both sponsored and organic listings, the average click-through rate increased by 51%.

Broad matching

Broad matching enables a search engine to include broad results that may be relevant to the requested search term, such as plurals. Search engines usually default to offer broad matching and offer 'exact matching' or 'phrase matching' as an option. Keep in mind if you are paying every time someone clicks on your link, it is better if they are actually interested in your business.

One way to ensure you are capturing relevant searches is to apply negative keywords. With negative keywords, your ad will not appear when the selected negative word is included in the search string. Consider the keyword 'bonds', a clothing brand in Australia. By broad matching the brand name, Bonds' ad would appear in the sponsored listings for searches for 'premium bonds', 'deposit bonds', and 'government bonds'. By adding negative keywords to the broad match, Bonds Australia can control when its ads appear. Another example, the Northern Territory government site might consider selecting Ford as a negative keyword to avoid being listed when people are searching for a Ford Territory.

An example of exact matching: Telstra Dome might register 'Telstra+Dome' as an exact match so they don't attract every search on Telstra.

Search providers can usually provide lists of commonly used terms often associated with a brand. In addition, the Hitwise Search Term Suggestion reports can be helpful for selecting negative keywords (go to www.hitwise.com.au).

Search term share

Search term share refers to the share of all internet searches for a particular keyword or search phrase. Charting brand searches over time offers insight into:

- Trends – whether searches for a brand are increasing or decreasing over time and at different times of the year
- Strengths – relative online strength of the key brand term compared to competitors
- Success of promotions – peaks in searches are often associated with promotions and campaigns.

Brand association

Brand association can be another key metric for business owners. The concepts and products consumers associate with a brand can have a significant impact on sales, product development and the timing of marketing activities. Brand managers can spend significant resources on building desirable, and reversing negative, associations. The internet is an immediate resource that can help business owners detect what consumers are thinking and saying about a brand, as news can spread rapidly through blogs, chat rooms and email. Brand association can also be gauged through charting when brand searches correlate with product seasonality. By charting a brand name against its generic product terms, it can be determined how closely the brand is associated with its category.

Tips on engaging a search expert

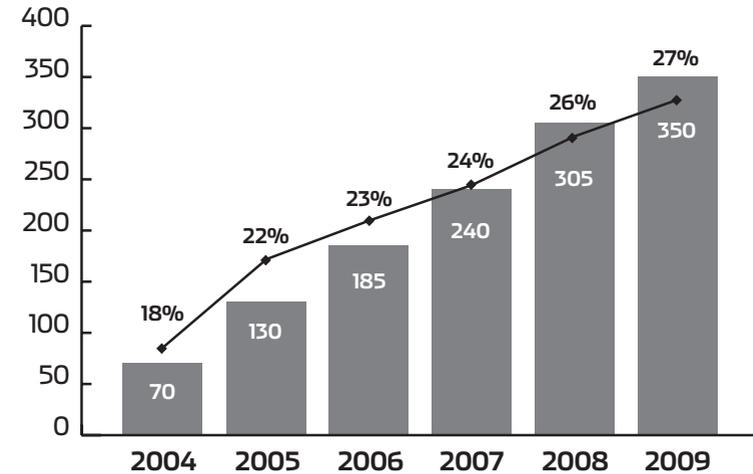
Choosing a provider for either SEO or P4P ad management can be a very important decision for your business. Get it right and it can help transform your business. Here are some tips to help you choose a quality SEM firm:

1. Do some research and know what you want before making enquiries. Are you looking to use P4P search advertising? Or SEO? Or both? Often there may be a solid business case for both. If you have some understanding of exactly what you are buying, you will be able to assess each company's capabilities more successfully
2. If you are looking for assistance with SEO, run a search on the companies you are talking to. If their own website does not rank in the major search engines' top 10 results for key search terms, then they may lack credibility (and perhaps expertise). Make some further checks to determine why they're not there.
3. Search marketing is a very specialist field. Specialist firms tend to do it better than the many generalist advertising, marketing and web design firms now offering P4P and SEO services. Some may simply outsource your work to an SEM firm (which can add extra agency fees to your overall SEM cost)
4. Ask for case studies of the SEM firm's previous work, and find out who some of their main clients are. A good SEM firm should be able to show you excellent case studies of previous clients, including rankings. If a SEM firm has well-known clients – and those clients rank well – then chances are you have found a quality firm
5. Shop on return on investment. If you opt for the cheapest possible quote, then you will probably get what you pay for. Achieving good search results in competitive fields can require a lot of work by the SEM firm and costs should be reflected in quotes. You should assess the cost of the service against the potential long-term returns for your business
6. Be realistic with your expectations. If you are a small mortgage broker then don't expect to rank #1 for 'home loans' with, say, a \$2,000 annual SEM budget. As an indication of the competition, a major bank may spend \$100,000+ per year to achieve page one results. (Highly competitive industries are likely to require continued marketing to maintain their position – it's not a one-off expense). If you wish to compete, make sure you have an appropriate budget for your market

7. Measure the results over the long term. Search marketing can be a long-term investment. That can mean 12 months or more to see good rankings for new websites. Be aware that good organic rankings may be hard to achieve, but good search rankings can remain for years after the SEM contract is finished. In other words, your return on SEM may be earned over years, not weeks or months
8. Don't expect 'guarantees'. No honest SEM firm can guarantee you #1 in organic search rankings. Think about it. The only people capable of guaranteeing you a #1 organic ranking are the people who own and run the search engines. Their search positions are not for sale. Google's website says it plainly: "No one can guarantee a #1 ranking on Google." Beware of SEM firms that guarantee rankings
9. Don't expect an SEM firm to miraculously transform your business. Be aware you are paying an SEM firm to send targeted visitors (search engine users) to your website. If your site is poor, or your products/ services don't meet customer expectations, then chances are you may have a problem. A good SEM firm will advise you of potential problems but ultimately you have to take some responsibility to make sure you retain customers once they have found you
10. If your preferred SEM firm is unable to help you in your time frames, ask them to refer you to another. Many firms are likely to refer you if they are too busy to help.

As demonstrated in this graph, the search market is growing rapidly and is forecast to continue to grow. It should be a consideration in every business' marketing plans. Importantly consider all the ways your consumer searches for you and measure the effectiveness of each one regularly.

Australian paid for performance search advertising forecast 2004-2009



Source: Frost and Sullivan, 2006