

Understanding Search Engine Marketing

Anyone selling online should consider search engine marketing (SEM) as a way of generating potential customers to their website. But what does this unique kind of marketing involve? In this article, I'll explain a few search engine basics... For most Internet users it's virtually second nature to use a search engine to look for information, products or services. As expected, when they search on a particular word or combinations of words, the search engines come up with a host of results. Each result represents a website that supposedly has the information, products or services the Internet user looking for. They can click on the link and ta-da! the website does or does not give them what they want. It's important to note that the search engines don't rank websites as a whole; they rank specific webpages. In any case, the higher that your webpages appear in the SERPs, the more people who are likely to see your description and click on your link. However, SEM experts tend to vary in their view on whether it's better to have the top position in both or either the free and paid results. While most believe that having the top rank in the free results attracts the most clicks and traffic; some SEM experts believe that it's more cost-effective to have the second, third or lower listing in the paid results. Nevertheless, most agree that you want your free and/or paid results to be on the first page. The two main strands of search marketing are search engine optimization (SEO) and paid search. Search engine optimization is about optimizing your website (i.e. each page on the site) - known as "on-page optimization" - as well as undertaking a range of "off-page" activities designed to achieve a high ranking in the SERPs. Getting a high ranking in the SERPs of a given search engine is a function of how that search engine's mathematical algorithm (i.e. for determining rankings) works. Often this takes a degree of study, trial and error, and hard work. Alternatively, to achieve a high place in the paid search results, it's largely a matter of how much you're willing to pay. Depending on the search engine, you can pay per click - known literally as pay-per-click (PPC) advertising - or pay based on the number of impressions or views the ad receives. Having said that, the priority of your placing may also be impacted by how effective your ad is, based on the number of clicks it receives or click through rate (CTR). Google, in particular, takes the CTR into account, as well as the bid price per click, when determining the order of the paid results. It can be a good idea to dip your toe into search marketing by starting with paid advertising - particularly PPC. Not only can you begin promoting your offer to your target market without delay, but you can also test keywords. You might decide that particularly high performing keywords should be incorporated into your webpages for SEO purposes. So there you have a quick run-down of search engine marketing. It's definitely worth delving into further if you like the idea of building a consistent traffic stream to your web business.

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