

S - E - *uhOh!*
Search Engine Marketing
for Small Businesses

Part I

By

Farhad Divecha (B.E. MBA)

Director, AccuraCast Limited

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S – E – uhOh!

Search Engine Marketing for Small Businesses

A beginner's guide for small businesses to effectively market their products and services on the Internet without spending monstrous amounts of money.

Getting your first customer can be a very daunting task if you have just started up in business. This is no different online than it is in the bricks-and-mortar world. Just having a website is not good enough. You need to actively market your products and services on the Internet just like you would in the real world.

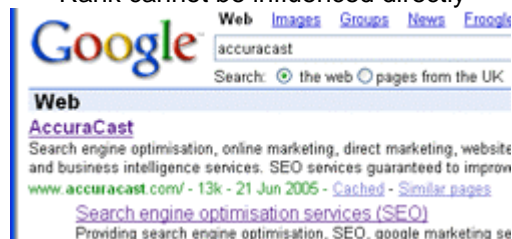
Fortunately, companies like Google, Yahoo! and MSN make marketing online a lot easier, and cheaper, than it is offline. In this article we will examine the best way to market your products on these search engines without the need for big-business-type marketing budgets. We will also look at some neat tricks and tips that tend to elude most first-time online marketers.

Advertise Or Optimise?

Before diving in to answer one of the basic questions that all businesses should consider when launching a search engine marketing campaign, let's ensure that we understand the difference between natural and sponsored results on the search engines.

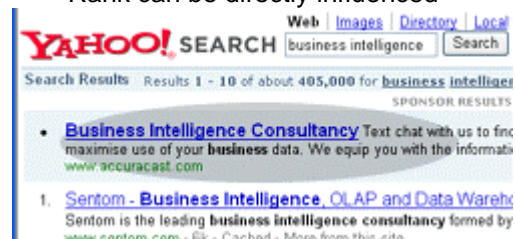
Natural Results

- Are the results most of us view on the left hand side of the search results pages
- Rank is determined by the algorithm
- Rank cannot be influenced directly



Sponsored Results

- Are usually placed on the right hand side, top or bottom and are coloured
- Rank is determined by your bid amount
- Rank can be directly influenced



Natural search engine results can only be influenced through search engine optimisation. Sponsored results, on the other hand, are similar to traditional forms of advertising – you pay to get listed and the amount you pay per click determines your placement. Continuing the table above, let us investigate which is the best route for your business to follow:

Natural Results :: Optimisation

- Are free
- You will never get de-listed unless you spam the search engines
- Take at least 3-6 months to appear on the search engine results
- Usually involves a set up cost
- There is no ongoing cost but requires a lot of time to maintain your position
- Is worldwide

Sponsored Results :: Pay Per Click

- You have to pay to be listed
- The moment you stop paying, you disappear
- Results are immediate. With Google you can start getting listed in a few minutes
- There is a very small set-up cost
- You can determine your daily budget and how much you want to pay per click
- You can specifically target a region







Optimisation therefore turns out more often than not to be a long-term strategy that is more cost effective, but requires expertise, lots of work and a lot of patience. Most small businesses opt to start with advertising on Google, Yahoo! and MSN via their pay per click programs. That way you can start driving visitors to your site and converting them into customers quickly. Once you have established a steady flow of business through your pay per click advertising campaign, you should start considering search engine optimisation as a longer-term strategy.

Google AdWords

Google AdWords is Google's advertising programme. Ads from AdWords can appear on:

- On the right hand side of your Google search results
- Occasionally up to 2 results will show on the top of your search results
- On Google's search partner sites such as Ask Jeeves, AOL, Lycos and Hotbot
- On Google's content network, which is a wide variety of websites who have agreed to display ads on their website and get paid by Google to do so.

Signing up for a Google AdWords account is really simple, and in most cases will take hardly any time. It's simplicity, though, masks some very powerful features that elude most unseasoned users. We cover some neat tips and tricks here to help small businesses save money and get a higher return on their AdWords marketing spend. You should have the Google AdWords sign-up window open alongside in order to understand the following points perfectly.

-  When you sign up for an AdWords account, choose a geographic area near you to start with. Locals are more likely to buy your services than visitors from other states and countries. Google even lets you pinpoint a circular area in an 'x' miles radius around you. This can be especially useful if your services are highly localised, e.g. pizza delivery or cleaning services.
-  Be very specific with your ad text. Use a headline that closely matches your site content and the keywords you are bidding on. Sensationalising to draw visitors to your site only means you will pay more for traffic that doesn't convert into sales.
-  Dynamic Keyword Insertion (DKI) is a very powerful tool if used smartly. It allows you to dynamically insert the keyword your visitor searched for into your ad text. So for example, if you are bidding on "Buy Music" and "Buy CDs", and used DKI in your title, visitors who searched for "Buy Music" would automatically see 'Buy Music' as your ad title.
-  When choosing the keywords you would like to bid on, always remember: More traffic does not always mean more sales. You are better off choosing relatively popular keyphrases with 3 to 4 words than extremely popular 1 or 2 word phrases. The reason being that searches who type in 3 or 4 keywords have narrowed down what they are looking for and will be more likely to convert into sales or leads.
-  Number 1 isn't always best. Larger companies with bigger budgets often take the top two or three positions for popular keyphrases. Small businesses would often find it hard to justify the cost of out-bidding them. You are better off narrowing the keywords you bid on, and bidding at lower positions where your conversion rates justify the price per click. Remember, users always shop and just cause you're at number 1 will not mean they will buy from you without looking at number 2, 3, 4 etc.
-  When you start your campaign, try to just use Google and the Search Network. The Content Network is a great way to reach out to a wider audience, and can cost less than Google search results, but requires a much better handle on your campaign parameters and effectiveness measures if you want it to be successful. You're better off disabling it at first and then enabling the content network only once you've got a good understanding of your numbers.

In addition to the tips listed above, you can improve your existing campaign effectiveness through some easy measures listed below:

- Landing pages targeted at your individual ad groups can be a highly effective way of boosting your conversion numbers rapidly.
- Make sure you maintain high click through rates (CTR) initially. Google judges your campaign effectiveness and accordingly serves your ads and allows / disallows marginally popular keywords based on your historical performance.
- Try using Dynamic Keyword Insertion to increase CTR on low-performing keywords
- Play with multiple text ads to see what sort of ad copy garners most click throughs. Google measures CTR for each text ad and then serves the higher performing one more often.
- If you are happy with your CTR, conversion rate and cost per conversion, you could use the Google suggestion tools and the content network to expand your reach.

...Part II...

In part 2 of this article we will discuss Overture / Yahoo! Search Marketing and other popular search marketing options such as Miva / Espotting, and in the 3rd and final part we will discuss search engine optimisation (SEO)

About AccuraCast



AccuraCast is an integrated marketing agency, providing small and medium sized companies in the UK search engine optimisation, search engine advertising, online marketing, direct marketing and website development services.

AccuraCast helps companies market their products and services more effectively. We deliver customer specific marketing solutions and information based on tailor-made analysis of your business and the market, allowing you to gain the necessary edge over the competition. Our search engine optimisation services are guaranteed to produce results for you. You pay no campaign management fee unless we get your website listed in a top 20 position on targeted search engines.

For more information contact:

AccuraCast Limited
Suite F, 94 Hornsey Lane
London N6 5LT
United Kingdom
Tel: +(44) 870 240 7847
Fax: +(44) 871 277 1371
Email: info@accuracast.com