



The Case for Search Engine Marketing

There is a pervasive myth among website developers and marketers alike that simply submitting a site to hundreds of search engines will increase its traffic. This is simply not the case. Submission in and of itself does not guarantee that a website will be visible to search engine users. Worse yet—some developers and business owners cling to the notion that they will build a site, and people will visit. This is simply preposterous.

According to a recent Jupiter Research survey, nearly 90% of all new visitors to a website originate from major search engines. There are big dollars at stake, because a top ranking in a major search engine like Google can often translate into a steady stream of new customers for your business. Simply put, whether your site is an extension of a bricks-and-mortar business, a pure-play Internet business, or a content resource, you can hardly afford to pass up the opportunities a top ranking presents.

Attaining top visibility on the search engines is often an elusive goal. Take the phrase, “small business marketing”, for example. A Google search for that keyword phrase yields nearly a half-million results. Yet, any website ranking below the top 30 matches would only be found by the most persistent of searchers. Such rankings are, in effect, invisible. So, what’s a business to do?

As more and more web pages become available on the Internet, businesses will have to employ increasingly more aggressive search engine optimization strategies in order to remain competitive—especially if they are looking to complement the effectiveness of their traditional advertising campaigns. With this proliferation of web pages, it is imperative that businesses possess cost-effective customer acquisition costs, and search engine optimization is most often the most reasonable, and cost-effective customer acquisition strategy available.

Search Engine Optimization explained simply

Search Engine optimization is the process of structuring, or re-structuring a website for optimal indexing by search engine technology. Simply put, structuring a website’s code and visible attributes so that search engines can find, read, and index the pages so that the site is found when relevant keywords are used in a search query.

Benefits of a website optimized for search engine ranking

Lasting Results

A top search engine ranking will continue to deliver visitors to a website for as long as the ranking is maintained. A top ranking in a search engine can often mean hundreds of targeted visitors per month. Multiple rankings across multiple engines can yield a steady stream of highly targeted traffic for an extended period of time.

Shortened sales cycle

A search engine visitor typing a keyword phrase into a search box has clearly identified a problem, or is looking for a product or solution. At the very least, their search attempt reflects a clear level of interest. The individual is likely ready to buy your product or service, or at least engage in a dialog with your company. In essence, the searcher has already moved *into* the sales cycle—a huge advantage over traditional marketing and advertising.



People use search engines—big time

Search engines are by far the most important place for finding companies on the Internet. Fully nine out of ten web users visit a search engine each month (Neilson/NetRatings, May, 2003), making searching the second most popular Internet activity (behind sending email). Further, major search engines attract more distinct visitors than all other websites combined. In fact, 7 out of 10 most-visited websites are search engines (Media Metrix study).

How the search engines work

The sole task for the search engine is to return quality, relevant results to the searcher. To that end, search engines consider hundreds of factors in determining which websites are most relevant to a query, including the popularity of the site, the position and size of the search terms within the site, and the proximity of the search terms to one another on the page. More sophisticated search engines, such as Google also apply machine-learning techniques to improve performance automatically by learning relationships and associations within the data it stores on each website. This data is obtained when a search engine indexes a website during the course of its periodic "crawl" or "spider" throughout the entire web. As this can be time consuming, waiting for a search engine to index a particular site on its own is usually undesirable. Instead, a website should be manually submitted to the search engines on a periodic basis.

Because search engines such as Google closely guard the exact formulas they use to calculate relevance, and tweak them to improve quality and performance, it is, in essence, a constant battle to not only attain, but, more importantly, to *retain* a high relevant ranking for important keyword phrases.

Natural vs. Pay-Per-Click Search Results

There are two types of search results served by search engines.

Natural search results, the subject of this white paper, are generated when a search engine indexes and ranks a site based on the factors described in the preceding section. These results, often residing on the left-most three-quarters of the search results page are generally more relevant than Pay-Per-Click ranking (described below), and are preferred by searchers 85% of the time. As such, it is more desirable for a website to be ranked by this method.

Pay-Per-Click results are generated by websites paying for a fixed position through a bidding system within the engine. A business only pays if the user clicks on its results link. The price for the fixed position can range from mere pennies per click to well over \$25.00 per click, depending on the competition for specific keywords. The more competitive the market and keywords, the more you will pay to have that user visit your site. These results, often residing in a small column on the search results page with a "Sponsored Links" heading, are generally less relevant than natural search results, and are preferred by only 15% of searchers.

Depending on the goals of the search engine marketing campaign, it is often desirable to target both Natural and Pay-Per-Click search results.



Relevant Ranking

It's important to realize that a high ranking, in and of itself, doesn't directly equal website traffic, and traffic doesn't directly equal sales. Rankings only mean something when they correlate to *qualified* traffic that result in *measurable* revenue. Put simply—a business does not care (nor should it) whether or not their website is attaining high rankings in the search engines if this achievement does not result in a measurable increase in revenue (regardless of whether or not the website is actually selling something, or is simply a sales and marketing site). Thus, we need to speak in terms of a *relevant* ranking—the holy grail of search engine optimization.

Importance of keyword phrase selection

The key to obtaining a high relevant ranking begins with the selection of relevant keyword phrases. The importance of this task cannot be overemphasized. Attaining a high ranking for keyword phrases that searchers are not using is senseless. Keyword phrase selection entails not only understanding the business for which the keyword phrases are being developed, but also understanding the competitors, and understanding the potential customer, or searcher. Once this research is complete, it becomes possible to develop a list of relevant keyword phrases. The emphasis here is on the word, "phrases". Rarely, if ever, is it desirable to optimize a website for a single keyword. Remember—the goal in search engine optimization is attaining *relevant* rankings likely to drive *qualified* traffic to the website (i.e. traffic that is likely to result in the acquisition of that visitor as a customer). The most efficient way to achieve that goal is to target specific keyword *phrases*.

For example, targeting the general keyword, "homebuilders" for a homebuilder who works exclusively in the Philadelphia area would not be desirable. Adding geographic modifiers (in this case "Philadelphia homebuilders" or "homebuilders in Philadelphia") makes for a better quality keyword phrase, more likely to attract much more targeted visitors, who in turn are more likely to need the services of the homebuilder.

Another example is a travel agency that specializes in vacation cruises. In this case, targeting the general keyword, "travel" is not desirable. Consider the possibilities for someone doing a search for the general keyword, "travel". They could be helping their child with a paper on some aspect of travel; looking for the Travel channel; looking for information on time travel; looking for driving directions for their travel across the country; looking for a travel club such as AAA. You get the point. In fact, most people do not search using such general keywords anyway. Experience using search engines has taught most searchers that using a general keyword is likely to result in many millions of results—none of which is what the searcher was looking for. In this example, our travel agency would be much better served by targeting the keyword phrase, "Caribbean cruises".



Search engine marketing vs. Traditional marketing

Medium	Cost	Terms	Audience Reach
Local Television	A 30-second commercial on a local station in a top 10 market ranges from \$4,000 to \$45,000+ during top rated shows.	Airtime can be purchased throughout the year but is often scheduled in flights that center on sales, and product introductions.	As a broadcast medium, television reaches a large number of consumers. It is extraordinarily expensive to use to reach smaller target audiences. Targeting is difficult.
Network Television	A 30-second commercial in prime time ranges from \$80,000 to \$600,000, depending on ratings, averaging from \$120,000 to \$140,000.	Network spots are also purchased in flights but can be much smaller than local and cable flights due to the high cost.	As a higher-cost solution, one can determine the best possible time and show for a spot to run in order to capture the most targeted audience for the product. Even so, the return on investment is still very low.
Cable Television	A 30-second spot in prime time runs between \$5,000 and \$8,000 depending on the network.	As a more affordable solution, the dynamic of cable television offers themed channels as an outlet for advertisers to approach target audiences.	With a larger number of channels to choose from, companies can more effectively target audience demographics in hopes of higher returns.
Radio	Commercials range from \$200 to \$1,000 for a 60-second spot and all depends on the time of day that it runs and each program's ratings.	Radio is also purchased in flights that center around specific events.	Many factors affect the effectiveness of radio advertising. Stronger stations charge premium rates to get your message to a large audience. While listeners are a captive audience, typically listening in their cars or at work, it is difficult for them to respond to an ad.
Magazines	Ads in regional editions of national magazines cost an average of \$50 per 1,000 issues in circulation. The average cost of an ad in a local magazine is about \$120 per 1,000.	Magazine ad sales can be sold as annuals, specific months of publication or special issues	Magazine editorial allows advertisers the ability to target audiences more effectively than broadcast and allows for delivery of more information.
Direct Mail	The most common forms include promotional info in letter-sized envelopes costing \$15 to \$20 per 1,000. Single sheet newspaper inserts cost between \$25 and \$40 per 1,000 issues circulated.	Direct mail is limitless in its development style and delivery frequency.	From postcards to free samples, direct mail can deliver anything. Unfortunately, demographic research into neighborhoods only goes so far, often delivering your message to more people who won't respond than to those who do.
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	As a custom marketing option, search engine optimization can vary in price for specific needs and goals. Typical programs can range from \$3,000 to \$6,000 per year.	Search engine optimization programs run monthly or quarterly.	As a narrowcast medium, search engine marketing services target those who are already seeking information about products or services in your industry. Return on investment numbers are exceptionally high as visitors to your website become regular customers.



How netStride can help

netStride's search engine marketing service is designed to achieve the single goal of dramatically increasing the amount of *targeted* website traffic through highly *relevant* search engine rankings.

We begin our optimization by learning about our client's business, competitors, and customers. We develop the most relevant and searchable keyword phrases by collaborating with our clients, and through extensive analysis of search engine trends and data available to us through our relationships with leading search engine companies. Using our own contextual marketing technology, we can determine the highest converting keywords for your competitors and make sure that your website ranks for those vital keyword phrases. In short, we ensure your website is ranked for the keyword phrases searchers are most likely to use to find your website.

We use proprietary software capable of assessing search engine algorithms, allowing us to stay current on ranking formulas. We then apply this data to physically optimize your website for relevant keyword phrases. And though search engines constantly tweak their ranking formulas, we are able to easily adjust through our ongoing optimization, ensuring your website remains visible on the search engines.

How long does it take?

Proper Search engine optimization is a never-ending process. As alluded to previously, search engines are always changing the way they index pages, so it is important to be vigilant in keeping a website compliant with the current ranking technology and factors. The initial search engine optimization process will take about two months to start producing results.

We provide monthly search engine analysis reports and ranking statistics allowing you to analyze the progress of the campaign against baseline reports providing you with hard data to substantiate your investment.

The future of search engines

It's no secret that the Internet is growing exponentially. This means that search engines are constantly evolving—finding more efficient ways to store more pages, and more importantly, using technology to sort through the growing number of pages in order to return relevant results to web searchers.

Next generation search engine technology, being beta-tested now, is being dubbed, "theme technology" because it is geared heavily toward labeling website pages in terms of "themes", or "topics". This technology uses a number of factors in order to identify a website's theme, including word stemming, where not only the actual keywords that appear on a website are tagged, but different variations of those keywords as well, and vectoring, where page keyword density is weighed in order to calculate the page vector, which helps the search engine graph link relevancy. Once a theme or topic is identified a search engine can then use its own thesaurus to further associate relevant keywords with a particular website. This technology also includes the use of "keyword profiling", where ranking priority is determined, in part, by tracking what takes place during a particular search of each keyword phrase. The search engine can determine whether or not the searcher returned back to the search engine to view another website in the result list, indicating that the original website selected was not relevant, or perhaps less relevant.



A final word on Search Engine Marketing

Statistical data makes it clear that as the web continues to mature and evolve, search engine use will continue to increase if only out of sheer necessity in order to efficiently process and serve the expanding number of website pages. Likewise, search engine technology will continue to evolve in response to this exponential expansion of the Internet.

Because we intimately understand this ever-changing environment, and because we make it our life's mission to track this technological evolution, our search engine marketing methodology is agile. We can turn on a dime when new search engine formulas come to light, and when new search technology is introduced. The result? You are able to spend your valuable time managing your business while we focus on driving relevant prospects to your website. We fully understand that your investment in our search engine optimization service must produce tangible results, and we are confident in our long track record of doing just that.