



Five Tips for Using Search Engine Marketing to Grow Your Business

“Search engine marketing”, or *SEM*, is a marketing discipline that is focused on helping you grow your business online by improving the search engine ranking of your firm's website. This is important because more of your customers are searching online for the products and services you offer than ever before. In fact, ignoring the business-building potential of SEM can potentially cripple the long-term survival of your business as your competitors leverage the tremendous marketing power of “keywords” in their online marketing strategy.

If your business sells “portable widgets”, for example, then you want to be sure that your firm's website is displayed on the *first page* of a search results listing when someone searches for “portable widgets”. And if your site *doesn't* appear on the first page – or even the second page – then you'd be well advised to find out why and do something about it. Otherwise, having a website at all becomes a waste of money – even if you're only paying a few dollars a month for hosting fees. Even worse, a competitor who's getting a first page search ranking is likely getting the new customers that *you* should be getting.

So, how does a business go about getting a first page search engine ranking? Here are five tips on how you can improve your chances of getting a first page ranking when a potential customer is looking for the products or services you're offering.

1. Include relevant and valuable content on your firm's website. Keep in mind that search engine software agents, or “bots”, periodically visit your website to determine the **relevancy** and **value** of your site to its intended topic. Your site, or even just a single page on your site, that is devoted to the topic of, say, “waterproof blue widgets” should contain plenty of useful content on that subject (and *only* that subject). Avoid including content on any other subject not directly related to the main topic of a site or page. Keep your information pithy and concise. And whatever you do NEVER, EVER borrow content from another company's website. Stealing content from other sites reduces the value of the information on your site and, more importantly, risks getting your site permanently banned from being ranked at all.

If your business handles a variety of products or services it's a good idea to create separate web pages for each type of case. In addition, you should research keywords (discussed in the next tip) specific to each product or service and incorporate them into the content for each page. Meta tags for each page should include Descriptions, Titles, and Keywords

specific to the topic of each page as well.

2. Use keywords in your content that your clients are likely to use to find your website. Avoid the temptation to simply *brainstorm* possible keywords without any evidence that your keywords are what potential clients are actually using. Google offers an extremely handy *Keyword Tool* that can tell you what keywords are being used to find the products or services that you provide. The Keyword Tool can also give you reliable clues about other related keywords that may never have occurred to you otherwise. Plus, the Google Keyword Tool is free for anyone to use.

Here's an example of a clue I found recently when researching the keyword "dui attorney". It turned out that another keyword, "drunk driving attorney", was being used frequently enough to justify rewriting a page for a client that used that new keyword in addition to the original keyword. Now, the client will start getting results on *two* keywords instead of just one – a difference of thousands of actual searches.

Once you have a list of keywords that you know are being used in actual searches you should use those keywords strategically in your website content. "Keyword stuffing", or overloading your content with keywords, only triggers warning flags among the search engine bots and should be avoided at all costs. Your content should sound natural when read out loud and be free of any misspellings or improper grammar which can also jeopardize your search ranking.

3. Use Pay-per-Click advertising to get a first page ranking in less than five minutes! Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising allows you to "bid" on one or more keywords in order to promote your website on a first page search listing immediately. *Google Adwords*, the most popular PPC ad program, costs nothing to set up and is chock full of helpful tools to help you launch your PPC ad campaign.

Basically, here's how *Google Adwords* works:

First, you decide what keywords you want to use in your *Adwords* campaign using the *Keyword Tool*. Google sets a minimum bid price of .05 cents for each keyword that you select. However, other *Adwords* advertisers may have already bid the price up (beyond the minimum bid price) for one or more of the keywords you've selected. In those cases you would have to meet or exceed the current bid price to be assured of a first page ranking.

Here's an example of a keyword I researched for a lawyer in Florida. The keyword was "fort lauderdale criminal attorney" and the current bid price was \$20.80. I would then bid \$20.85 to have my small Google ad (that includes a link to the lawyer's website) appear on the first page when anyone performed a Google search using the keyword I bid on.

It's important to understand that the client in Florida doesn't pay for the privilege of appearing on the first page listing. The client only pays the bid price for the keyword (\$20.85) to Google if someone actually **clicks on his PPC ad and lands on his website**. This is like having an ad in the Yellow Pages of the phone book, but only paying a few dollars every time someone calls the office in response to the ad. In fact, it should be no surprise that Yellow Page print advertising is on a downward spiral while PPC ad sales are rocketing upward – even during a down economy.

It's critical to understand that a PPC campaign must produce “conversions”. That is, once the online visitor clicks on your PPC ad (and you pay for the “click-thru” to your website) your site **MUST** be designed to move the online visitor to a sale – or at least in that direction. If you decide that a “conversion” is an email or phone call for more information then you have to make it as easy as possible for the visitor to take such an action. If you have an ecommerce site then an easy way to make an online purchase would be necessary for achieving a conversion.

4. Use a website address that includes your keyword. There has been a lot of debate in recent years about the effectiveness that a domain name such as “alabama-dui-lawyer.com” has on search engine ranking. But if the keyword “alabama dui lawyer” is used strategically in the content of the website then such a domain name would definitely improve the site's search engine ranking. At the end of the day, domain names are very cheap to register and it makes sense to leverage a domain name strategy that incorporates keywords that are also used in the site's content. Keyword-rich domain names can be used very effectively for “landing pages” when incorporated into a *Google Adwords* or other PPC advertising strategy.
5. Leverage keyword-rich blogs and directories to improve your site's search ranking. Starting a blog on *Wordpress*, *Blogger*, or any number of other blogging sites costs nothing, but can have a very positive impact on your website's search ranking. With a little discipline, you can write a keyword-rich blog each month that always contains a link back to your website. This link becomes a valuable “inbound link” that naturally increases the popularity of your site. Most of the free blogging sites are considered “trusted” sites, meaning they automatically get Google's attention whenever any new content is added. Instead of waiting months for a search bot to visit a site, the blogging sites are crawled much more frequently – sometimes within hours of adding new content.

Business directories offer another great opportunity for you to include your website address in your business or professional listing which, in turn, becomes an inbound link back to your website. Anytime you have an opportunity to include the URL of your website in an online directory of any kind it can have a very positive effect on the search engine visibility of your firm's website.

Conclusion

While the concepts behind search engine marketing are relatively easy for most business owners to understand, it's worth restating that SEM is still a *discipline*. Effective SEM requires time and skill to master. Knowing how to write compelling headlines, create effective PPC ads, research the best keywords (with the *least* competition), and design landing pages that lead to conversions can be a daunting task for any novice. *CGM Search Marketing* can provide these services – and more – so that business owners and managers can do what they do best: Fill orders, sell products, and provide essential services to their customers while watching their businesses grow.



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