



Search Marketing

A 10-step B2B Conversion Experience

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Search Engine Marketing: A Growing B2B Reality

Search engine marketing, once the exclusive domain of online retailers, plays a major and increasing role in today's B2B marketing landscape.

Search engine marketing of all types (pay-per-click and organic search) continue to grow as a share of total marketing spending. On the pay-per-click side alone, spending now tops \$5 billion a year.

Yes, decision cycles are longer and involve more players in a B2B buying decision. But underlying those decisions is a sorting process that can be heavily influenced by search marketing.

A study by eye-tracking specialist Enquiro found that 93.2 percent of B2B buyers began their purchasing decisions with online research. Slightly more than 95 percent indicated that the research would use a search engine to develop short lists of vendors that eventually get invited to compete for the business

As purchase budgets increased, survey respondents shifted their starting point to manufacturer's sites and industry portals. Still, 86.9 percent of respondents said they would complement that with search engine research. Typically, search engine research takes place at least one to two months before the buying decision.

Step One: Search Basics

In a web 2.0 world, marketers such as yourself must plan for and solve complex challenges. But all emarketing begins with the same question: will your company and its products or services be quickly, easily found by potential customers on a major search engine?

Search marketing covers everything you do before a web site is launched (coding, presentation, and structure), and the many on-page and off-page factors that influence search results.

For those new to search, here's a one sentence primer. Marketers influence visitor traffic via two search marketing approaches: natural/organic search results and pay-per-click advertising.

Studies confirm that organic search results attract more clicks and are given more credibility. As web users, we assign importance to a page one, organic search result in much the same way that we give credibility to a page one, above the fold story in a daily newspaper.

But the same studies also suggest that the best results may come from the combined strengths of organic and pay-per-click. Why? Because we are well trained as consumers to gather brand impressions.

Solid, reliable organic search results provide the foundation for all strategic decisions about what pages to optimize what landing pages to build, and when to apply PPC. Organic results require more time and ongoing investment. In return, you get a position on Google and other major engines that will support every aspect of your brand and its online and off-line marketing. Consider these stats:

- Organic results attract over 70 percent of all clicks.
- Position is key, with over 60 percent of users clicking on the top 3 organic listings.
- Most users decide which listing to click on in seconds upon scanning the page.
- Less than half of all users search onto page two and almost never go as deep as page three.

Elliance believes organic search results are important enough to post live results on our search home page, so that our clients can monitor their keywords are performing in an instant.

Studies show that the combination of top five organic search results, and targeted pay-per-click placement, yields a powerful one-two combination of credibility and brand clout.

Step Two: Optimize

First, analyze to what extent your current web site is optimized for search engines, at the programming, content and link level. The first step could be re-engineering at one or more of these levels, which can be done as part of a total redesign and re-launch, or done under the hood without changing the site's architecture and design. Another approach is to build a separate campaign, or product specific microsite that is linked to a specific information page.

Here's a must-do list for improving organic search results:

- Make your site 'spiderable', so it can be indexed by search engines
- Add more relevant and compelling content
- Ensure that your content management system is search engine friendly
- Create more keyword-rich links to, from and within the site
- Use deep linking strategies to link search engine results straight through to the relevant web content.

Remember that organic results can take months to appear. Search engine optimization campaigns are planned and executed over a period of three-to-six months, and must be

maintained monthly. Set your horizon accordingly, well in advance of future new technology, service or product launches.

Step Three: Search Marketing Goals

All search marketing evaluations and decisions are situational. For a new product launch, or inventory overstock, targeted pay-per-click offers timeliness and precision that can't be matched. Similarly, if you're trying to ward off a new competitor and maintain brand dominance, pairing organic search results and pay-per-click may make the most sense.

It sounds incredibly simple, but know what you're trying to accomplish.

Black Box: An Elliance Case Study

Elliance worked closely with Black Box, the world's largest electronic components supplier, to solve a fundamental search marketing challenge. Black Box customers had relied for years on phone contact and sales support. Growing revenue and profits hinged, in part, on shifting customer base from phone to web sales.

Black Box turned to Elliance, knowing that it could not achieve its number one business objective without first improving its rankings on major search engines.

Solution

Elliance information architects did a thorough site analysis and redesign. Our SEO team optimized every aspect of Black Box's eCommerce functionality, with particular attention paid to the company's 3,000-page online catalog. The SEO team went a step further, optimizing for a 100-keyword SEO campaign that dramatically improved Black Box's rankings.

Results

- Doubled web sales in one year
- Average order size up 33%
- 92% of product catalog found on first page of search engines

Step Four: Follow-Through

As we said earlier, search engine marketing in a web 2.0 world reflects the trend toward complexity. Web sites are becoming smarter, more focused on specific user needs and preferences, and increasingly driven by permission.

The B2C marketers drive to push and pull users through the permission levels, with targeted exposure to products, services, and knowledge has relevance in the B2B environment in terms of how best to drive high-quality leads to sales.

Whether organic search or a pay-per-click campaign, it's important to consider all of the post-click follow-up steps.

- Send clicks to targeted landing pages optimized for keywords and/or PPC ads.
- Gather explicit and implicit data from prospects to analyze and score leads, moving your hottest prospects more quickly to your sales force
- Monitor leads over time, with the right care and feeding to build a relationship that will bear fruit when they are sales ready
- Track leads through the revenue pipeline, so that you can measure the impact of each click on revenue, and refine your keywords and PPC campaigns.

Step Five: Landing Pages

One surefire way to outperform your competition is to combine organic search, and pay-per-click ads linked to very specific landing pages. In fact, doing anything less is more likely to backfire. If web users experience one universal complaint, it would involve pay-per-click ads that don't deliver, dumping visitors onto a home page or worse, some unrelated virtual outpost.

A good landing page boosts pay-per-click ROI in multiple ways. Search engines factor in the relevancy of a landing page, meaning a high-quality landing page gets better ranking (and more clicks). Second, a relevant and optimized landing page improves conversion rates, producing more actionable leads.

According to Forrester Research, only one fourth of B2B search advertising delivers visitors to keyword specific landing pages. Why so few? Simple, it takes effort to generate and maintain distinct landing pages, and run metrics on what works best should be seen as a long-term investment in customer knowledge.

Step Six: Credibility enhancers

Think of each optimized page as another potential "doorway" into your site. A robust and well-optimized knowledge base (white papers, shared best practices, awards and press releases) attracts prospects and sets the groundwork for a relationship, and eventually a sale.

Elliance, for example, has encouraged its advanced manufacturing clients to optimize pages that call out industry or employee recognitions, a quick way of establishing credibility.

Step Seven: Social Media

Credibility, now more than ever, rises or falls on good word-of-mouth, or as some call it, positive buzz. More forward-thinking companies have embraced the idea of a Social Media Newsroom, a full featured company information portal that leverages the latest social media elements. Various Social Media Newsroom templates have begun to

appear to help you gather all of the dynamic, two-way information and buzz about your business into a centralized location. This approach utilizes popular social sites, functions, and RSS for easy administration and great online availability.

RSS feeds, tagging on site pages and linking are all ways to "spread the word" and influence search results. Need a low-investment way to begin? Asking for a link in a resource section of a relevant industry site is an excellent way to get targeted traffic.

Step Eight: Geo-Targeting

Another way to improve ROI on any search marketing effort is to see your company, products, services and story in geo-targeted terms. In other words, think beyond who is searching to get at the question of where they're searching from, and how that might impact persuasion.

At first glance, you might define your target market in narrow geographic terms. And such targets work well, say, for example, with a geo-targeted PPC campaign on Google that will only serve your metal refurbishing ad to potential customers within a certain radius. But what if you purchase a new technology or machine? Suddenly, you have a chance to think nationally in terms of how best to optimize a page that discusses your new capabilities to a national or even international audience.

Step Nine: Conversion analysis

Search engine marketing also requires that the hand-off between marketing and sales become more well integrated. Analysis can help you cull the hottest prospects, that is, the 25% of conversions that are sales-ready. Simple metrics can provide lead source information include where the lead came from, what kind of offer created the lead, and lead age.

Demographic and behavioral data poses a bigger challenge: every additional field in a reply form lowers the conversion rate. Just as important, you may not know whether the person responding holds any decision making power. The science and art of permission marketing involves knowing what and how much to ask, at what point in the relationship. Page path studies can also yield information, based on decisions that the user makes along a given page path on a landing site.

Step Ten: Lead Nurturing

Any search marketing effort will yield large numbers of qualified, yet unproductive leads. Again, this is a case where coordination between sales and marketing is key. Sales teams typically respond to short-term incentives. It takes a patient and disciplined marketing approach to feed and care for lead as they progress through their buying process. In a web 2.0 world, all marketers, including B2B professionals, are learning ways to understand more about their customer's needs, and using communications to build your company's position as a true strategic partner.

The ROI for such patience comes not just in improved sales-marketing alignment and higher success rates. Research shows that customers led through the permission marketing levels ultimately buy more, require less discounting, and exhibit shorter sales cycles.