

Holistic Search Marketing – Organic and PPC

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What was that about eggs in one basket?

It has been just over ten years since the public release of the first modern search engine, AltaVista. Infoseek, Lycos, HotBot, Northern Lights, and dozens of others quickly followed AV. In previous years search marketing was much simpler. Since then we've seen the rise and fall of several search firms. Almost as many ideas on how the business of search should be conducted have come and gone in the same period of time. While search has grown far more sophisticated in its first decade, the free (or Organic) listings have been a constant common factor for every search engine.

Organic listings are not generating the column space they once did. Now that an apparently solid business model has been found in paid contextual advertising, search engines and search marketing firms are devoting a lot of attention to purchased placements. Free listings are seen as the loss-leader offered by search engines to attract user attention, much as discounted items at a department store are used to attract buyers to more expensive purchases. Like their counterparts in the corporate world, many new SEMs see their road to profit paved with paid-listings. Nevertheless, the Top10 Organic placements continue to be the most effective area to appear on the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) as evidenced by Lisa Wehr's recent [Organic placements survey](#). Organic results are extremely important for a number of reasons, all of which amount to higher conversions.

In using the word "corporate", I am referring to the medium to large-scale businesses. Most smaller firms can quickly incorporate search marketing and website design. Larger organizations tend to have unique IT and Marketing departments with a lesser degree of crossover in communication or responsibility. In this type of environment, developing a coherent search engine strategy can become complicated. Organic SEO is often difficult for the corporate sector for many reasons. Successful Organic campaigns often require new levels of coordination with the involvement of multiple departments beyond Marketing and IT.

Recently the search-related and mainstream media have focused on the dominant profit model, contextually delivered pay-per-click ads such as Overture or AdWords. In most circumstances, both have virtually ignored the Organic listings. The current PPC regime is extremely interesting for the media as it not only provides the profit necessary for the sector to grow, it enables marketers to target their audiences with increasing precision and control. It is also the driving force behind almost everything the various search firms have been up to in recent weeks from the wave of innovation to the rash of acquisitions.

Many corporate marketing departments have only recently realized the importance of search marketing. It is only in the last 2-years that search was placed on the radar screen of corporate marketers. They are learning as they go along and we the media are their main source of information. PPC is the most interesting development in years but in our rush to press, we may be creating a new paradigm in corporate search advertising, one that does not necessarily take a holistic view of the sector.

While there is great interest in being involved in the search-advertising revolution, many corporate websites continue to ignore Organic optimization assuming their size, brand name and longevity guarantees front-page Organic placements. That works for some but there are several Fortune 500 firms that still don't appear in the Top10 Organic listings under keywords relating to their products or services. This results in lost potential. They are basically giving visitors to the competition. A wiser approach for larger organizations is to continually strive for Top10 (preferably #1) placements while taking full advantage of the expansive world of PPC. Managers of corporate websites that do not place in the Top10 under keywords directly relating to their business (such as their name or major product names), really should think about organizing a marketing/IT meeting and hire an SEO consultant to develop a strategy. The process might involve as much education as it does long-term planning.

One of the main reasons for a lack of interest in the Organic listings is that large-scale advertisers are unable to base their yearly advertising plans on expenditures that cannot produce quantifiable numbers. Organic search engine optimization is about trying to achieve Top10 placements against thousands or possibly millions of competing websites. As a common point of ethical behaviour, most SEO firms will not guarantee Top10 placements to their clients. Paid-advertising offers solid numbers for corporate advertisers with cost factors controlled by the advertisers (or their third parties) directly. Organic SEO and the process of organizing an Organic campaign seems complicated and unquantifiable to many marketers.

Both AdWords and Overture can guarantee front-page SERP placement under specific keyword phrases, and both can also guarantee the ad will be seen in dozens of other venues. In some cases, PPC represents the least expensive method of placing an ad in the electronic versions of papers such as the New York Times or Toronto Star. The complex common sense inherent to a global contextually driven advertising campaign is simple for marketers to understand, plan around, and sell. If managed well, a PPC campaign works amazingly well, often bringing unexpected benefits. One of our clients in the tourism business was found, interviewed and popularized by a travel-writer for the NYTimes because of a PPC listing. She is now a travel and hospitality "expert" in her region and finds herself routinely quoted in travel sections around the world. Needless to say her business has increased dramatically. She also continues to rank in the Top5 in Organic listings, adding both credibility and a higher number of visitors to her website.

PPC advertising is not without risks. Many savvy web surfers know the difference between paid advertising and Organic results, tending to favour the Organic listings over the paid. There is also the very real and growing threat of click fraud. Regardless of risk, contextual delivery of search driven advertising is expected to grow into an 11 – 20 billion-dollar industry over the next five years. For many large organizations, especially ones in highly competitive industries, costs relating to PPC advertising are expected to increase rapidly over the coming years.

Adopting a strategy which combines Organic placements with PPC advertising, large websites receive more visitors, gain increased credibility through multiple references on a SERP, and generally make more sales. Focusing on Organic SEO can also help produce stronger Local search results as a focus on keywords in a title or description can place a business higher than another (within fixed parameters such as distance from epicenter of search radius). It also makes for a better, more focused website.

Further reading: Late this afternoon we noticed very similar thinking in an [article](#) by Jennifer Laycock who is editor of Search Engine Guide.