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## **Search Marketing Association forming in North America**

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Almost every professional industry has an association that sets best-practice standards and represents the best interests of their profession. Organizations such as the American Medical Association, the Associated Locksmiths of America, and various Law Societies work to establish legitimacy in both professional practice and public perception. About two years ago, a number of search engine marketers decided to establish an industrial association representing search engine marketers, leading to the creation of the Search Engine Marketing Professionals Organization, or [SEMPO](#).

When it was first formed, SEMPO was welcomed with great interest from a search engine marketing community desperate to establish credibility as the mainstream world began to understand the unparalleled power of search marketing. Since then, SEMPO has seen a great deal of controversy and is seen by most in the SEM industry as a somewhat dead duck. After the defections of some of the most respected names in the SEM industry such as Christine Churchill and Mike Greham, new SEM associations have formed in the UK and EU, and another is starting to take shape here in North America.

With the apparent failure of SEMPO, a new initiative has been formed by Calgary-based SEO Ian McAnerin who recently wrote, "One of the problems that I saw with SEMPO is that although they state that they have the goal of representing the industry as a whole, in reality it turned out to be only representing the big names".

McAnerin is a graduate from the University of Alberta law school and continues to be a member of SEMPO though he has resigned all official positions he held in order to avoid conflicts of interest. During a recent trip to the UK, McAnerin decided to establish the Search Marketing Association of North America or SMA-NA. Currently formed as a "working group", SMA-NA hopes to officially launch itself at the New York Search Engine Strategies Conference in early March.

SEMPO has made at least one strong contribution to the SEM sector with the December release of its [detailed survey](#) outlining trends in search marketing. The results of this survey are a must-read for anyone interested in SEM. In every other sense however, SEMPO has not captured the allegiance of the majority of SEM firms or individual practitioners. Much of the blame for their failure focuses on two important issues: communication and money.

In its early days, SEMPO failed to communicate well with its members and others in the SEM industry. There are varying levels of membership in SEMPO but promotional services seem to be reserved for SEM firms that pay the most for membership. As the vast majority of SEM practitioners are either self-employed or are small 2 – 20 person businesses, the cost of membership is too high for most of the industry. Some notable names in the SEM sector have quit the organization while many other current members are simply allowing their memberships to lapse. Compounding these problems is the continuing controversy over the extremely high fees originally charged to the organization by its first (and now outgoing) president, Barbara Coll.

McAnerin's initiative seems to have put the fear of competition into SEMPO with chairperson Coll allegedly demanding to know the names of members of the SMA-NA working group. (To make it easier for her and to disclose what might be perceived as a bias on my part, McAnerin has invited me to sit on the working group.) Coll defends SEMPO stating that they are looking at the "big picture" and cites the December release of the SEMPO marketing survey as evidence.

In her defense of SEMPO, Coll couldn't resist taking a pot-shot at the newly formed SMAs stating in a ClickZ [article](#), "The vision of SEMPO is to be involved in the industry, not in the members necessarily. The research we put out in December showed that we're thinking long-term. I don't think the regional SMA groups are going to focus on the industry, they seem to be about making sure the members are getting benefits".

McAnerin envisions two unique arms of the SMA-NA, a combination of one non-profit arm to act as a lobbying and event promoting organization with another for-profit arm offering benefits to members such as discounts, special offers, and members-only RFPs. A similar model is used by one of the world's largest industry associations, the American Marketing Association.