

SEO Speedway – Getting Ahead and Staying in Front of the Pack

By [Bill Stroll](#), StepForth Sales and Marketing Manager, [StepForth Search Engine Placement Inc.](#)

A large part of my sales cycle is educating and sensitizing clients and StepForth resellers to the ever changing nature of search marketing trends and techniques. The recent proliferation of search engine optimization sites and their range of offerings are staggering; those providing or selling tips, quick fixes, placement guarantees, search friendly website template “specials” or shopping carts and their mandatory custom hosting services, to name a few. Unfortunately, an inappropriate majority of these sites offer misinformation, unethical and compromising information. Much of this stuff on the internet can make my work more challenging and even eventful at times. I am amazed constantly at the inaccuracies of information posted out there and the false impression some folks have about getting website visibility and high keyword phrase rankings.

In the world of non paid placement, organic or natural search marketing for websites is so much more than putting up a website and expecting the search engines to place your website in its rightful place; high up on the first page of the search engine result pages (SERPs). It would appear many site owners perceive that once their site is launched – THAT’S IT! - the search engines are waiting in eager anticipation for it and immediately place it on the first page of the SERPs. (Curiously, many people really have such expectations.) And, after much time without any sort of exposure or success on the internet, the bewildered (and sometimes SEO-tarnished) site owner calls us for help.

In explaining the search marketing landscape to clients I am often reminded of go-karting; lots of similarly equipped go-karts (information), all having the same intention of getting ahead (research and SEO campaign) and staying ahead of the pack (on-going maintenance and website analytics). There always seems to be an initial traffic jam (waiting to be indexed), jostling (re-tweaking the site, adding new textual content and link building) and bouncing about without any clear sense of actual forward motion. This article is about running the gauntlet, getting free of the pack, and staying ahead of them.

The ideal campaign

To achieve success on the internet the business owner and/or webmaster have need of the following: practical goals, a clear focus on the site’s overall message, a realistic timetable, patience, and a call to action for each page. Often I present an overall strategy based on an *ideal* campaign. Many clients have expressed appreciation at learning about and understanding the range of services they can choose from and then make an informed decision on how to proceed. This process requires the site owner to invest additional thought and focus on what really needs to be done in order to achieve the results they want.

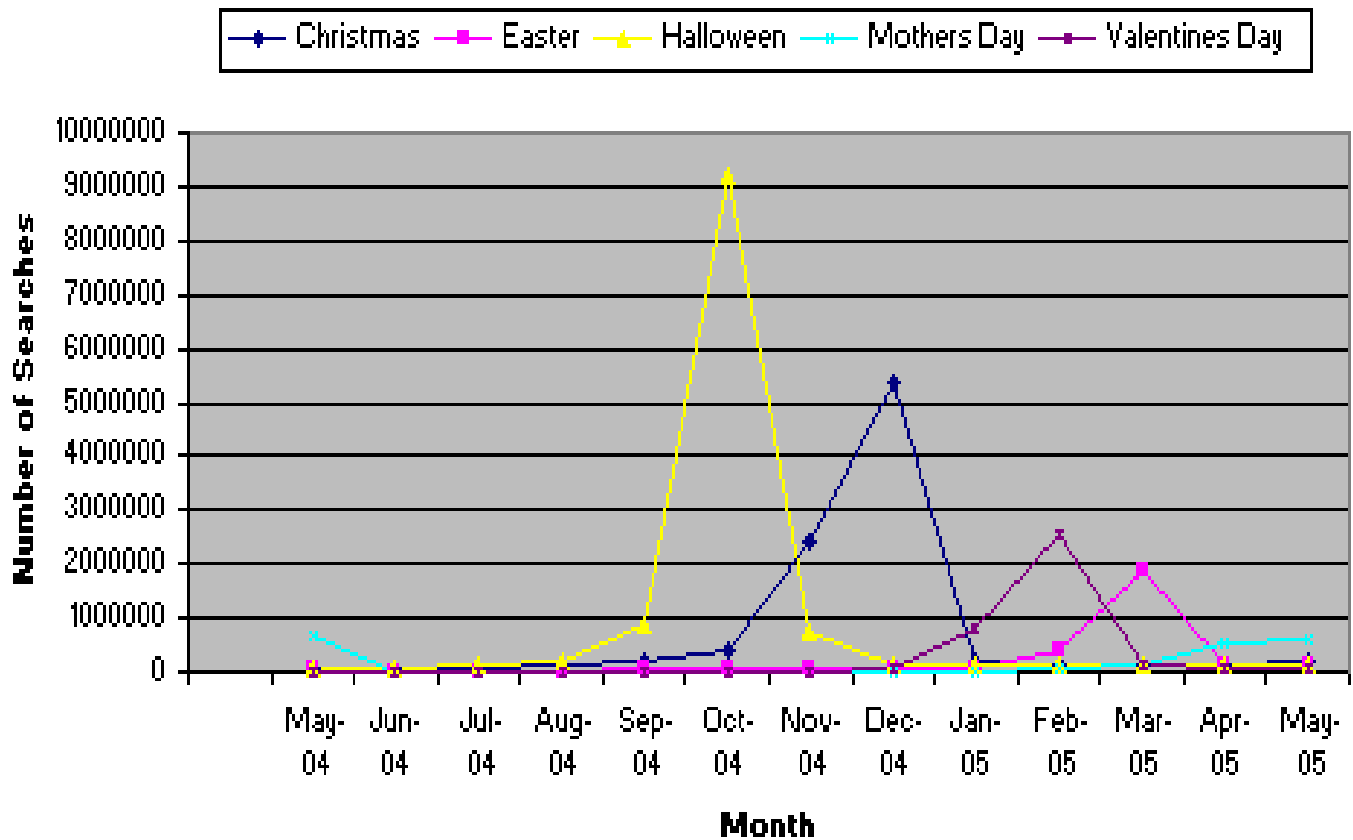
The timetable

I know it may be difficult to imagine at this moment but websites are starting to gear up for their Christmas, New Years and even Valentines Day campaigns.

Last year Jim Hedger and I in an article titled, [“Christmas Time for Search Marketing”](#) discussed the need for careful advance planning for holidays. Generally keyword search for a specific holiday escalates about 3 months prior to that holiday. Also, the minimum requirement for running an organic search marketing campaign is 3 months. In total then, business owners should plan their organic SEO campaign about 6 months in advance.

Knowing the trends and how to harness the power of search engine marketing is only part of the battle. Making effective use of that knowledge is the other. The chart below illustrates holiday search by month.

Holiday Search by Month



In logical progression the services for successful organic placement may comprise several (if not all) of the following: keyword analysis, competitor research, website design/redesign, creation of textual content, usability, consultation, SEO campaign, on-going maintenance, website analytics, and link building.

Competitor Analysis HOT TREND

This is a cornerstone to everything one plans to do on the net. Objectively understanding the data-mining of results from top competitor visibility under specific keyword targets we learn how they were able to achieve such successful rankings. As well, their marketing strategies are revealed. This analysis will ultimately determine the universe of keyword targets for your site; it sets the site up for any number of services from which to run successful campaigns.

Keyword Research

At a minimum all sites should undergo keyword research to determine best fits for placement. In conversation with callers, many website owners are unable to identify their site's primary goal and/or keyword phrase. Focusing on these two factors will ensure a much higher probability for a great ROI.

Copywriting

"Just because something is common sense doesn't mean it's common practice" – (unknown). Once a set of primary and secondary keywords have been established it is time to review existing textual content or create new text. Often times, site owners are surprised to learn that the textual content on their home page does not once mention their primary keyword phrase!

Website Design or Redesign

How old is the site, how was the site made, who wrote the site and where is it hosted? When was the last time it had a checkup or a redesign? Frequently I inspect and come across a website that has 0 backlinks pointing to the site, and 0 pages spidered and/or indexed by Google. This is problematic of course and although the client may wish to talk about website optimization I first need to recommend we take a step back; we need to determine the site architecture and to what extent the design is search engine friendly. If the site utilizes a [frames](#) design is the owner willing to consider a site redesign or come to terms with the site being compromised without a hope of attaining exceptional placements. Similarly how much of the site is in Flash? Is there a splash page?

Be cautious of those low monthly all-in-one templates sites; they are challenging to optimize due to their inflexible architecture. If you are unsure ask the following: is there the capability to alter unique pages elements such as title tags, H1 (main) headers, description and other meta tags. Can one edit menu positioning, text navigation, image alt tags, layout of text, headers and footers? Does the site have a cms (content management system)? Is access to its back end available? As regards e-comm templates we need to know where the shopping cart is located; is it part of the site or 3rd party?

Usability

Many callers say their website receives a large volume of visitors but the exit rate is very high and the conversion rate is extremely low. Good questions to ask: Are you targeting your traffic (audience) properly? What is the significance for each and every page of your website? How do you want to direct your visitor? Does each page carry a message or a call to action?

Consultation

So many people say they know enough information to hurt their sites. We can help them. Or we can validate if what they have done is proper and effective. Owners can move forward with confidence on how to expand the site, what coding to use, finding a suitable shopping cart, etc.

SEO Campaign

The logical combination of optimization services from keyword research, developing efficient navigation for the spiders, keyword enriched text, source code, site map creation and optimization, xml site maps, etc. The minimum campaign to consider is 3 months.

Ongoing Maintenance

Each website is not static; it is like an organism – it needs to morph and respond to search engine indexing, keyword placement competitiveness or traffic conversion rate. A properly monitored website will stabilize and perhaps enhance the positioning of the website. SEOs are always working to understand the latest search engine updates and make website adjustments as necessary.

Website Analytics NEW and HOT TREND

Increasingly sophisticated analytic programs are surfacing and provide pinpoint data and accuracy. In a game of inches for high up on page 1 in the SERPs website dynamics, customer behaviour and tracking just about anything you can think of are now making the critical difference that is needed. Data mining and statistics can be complex and intimidating. They are not for everyone to try to figure out on their own. Contact [Ross Dunn](#) to find out more about this extraordinary wealth of information service.

Link Building A NEW SPIN

Everyone is in agreement that a critical and necessary element for organic search engine success is a link building campaign. [Scott Van Achte](#), StepForth's Senior SEO takes this up a notch in revisiting quality and authoritative links. He recently advised a client,

"Links are difficult to achieve without question. There are a number of ways to work towards the increase. One way is to have a blog and post industry specific news to it on a regular basis. This blog can then be distributed around to other news sites, which will republish your articles and provide you with a link back to your site. This can also be achieved with a weekly newsletter that is also posted to a section of your site which welcomes republication of your articles. This is primarily how StepForth has achieved our 1600+ incoming links and growing. Find an online publication that prints industry specific news. In the case of StepForth we send our articles to places like WebProNews, SiteProNews, and others."

If you are not familiar with the above services please contact us. We will be happy to try and answer your questions. Below is a valued (generally non-technical) resource list that I reference on a frequent basis. For those trying to stay up to date these sites have invaluable and timely information.

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now." -Goethe

RESOURCES

Blogs:

- [StepForth Blog](#) Ross Dunn
- [Search Engine Marketing Blog](#) Jim Hedger **NEW**
- [Matt Cutts: Gadgets, Google, and SEO](#)
- The [Google Blog](#) offers frequent updates and insights about technology and products

Video:

- [Google Video](#) **NEW**
- Matt Cutts **NEW** - [videos](#) – start with session 1

FREE Newsletters:

- [Step Forth Weekly Newsletter](#) SEO tips and search engine news resource
- [SEO News Search](#) Search engine strategies for webmasters
- [MarketingSherpa](#) Practical case studies and know how
- [Internet Search Engine Database](#)
- [Web Marketing Today](#) Ralph Wilson
- Danny Sullivan [Search Engine Watch](#) The source for search engine marketing
- [Search Engine Guide](#) Jennifer Laycock
- [Google Friends Newsletter](#)
- [WebProNews](#) Breaking eBusiness and Search News

Of course there are other avenues one can pursue.

Paid Subscription:

- [Yahoo! Directory](#) Subscription is \$299 USD per year

Audio–Video:

- Podcast **HOT TREND**
Podcasting is the method of distributing multimedia files, such as audio or video programs, over the Internet using syndication formats, for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. – (Wikipedia)
- The [Podcast Directory](#)