

## **SES San Jose, an SEO Recap**

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Search marketing conferences are serious fun, especially when the conference is held in the Silicone Valley. Being at [SES San Jose](#) is hard work comprised of a week in an advanced search marketing university that offers field trips to various techno-Disneylands including the Google and Yahoo campuses.

This is the largest annual search related gathering anywhere. An estimated 7500 participants sat through over 70 in-depth sessions covering virtually every aspect of search engine marketing from the basic tips to the most advanced campaign strategies. Having organized and run the world's most comprehensive series of search related conferences for several years now, [Search Engine Watch](#) editors Danny Sullivan and Chris Sherman (aided by a team of dozens of professional conventioners), plan their events to suit all skill levels and experience. At any given minute, there is something new to learn, regardless of how long one has been interested in search marketing.

The search marketing industry is enormous. Today it is much larger than anyone involved (at any level) fully understands. From the emerging worlds of social search and networking to the SEM start-up firms establishing themselves by the dozen per day, it often appears the online universe revolves around search.

The growth of the search sector is occurring faster than people in the industry can keep track of, partially because so many other IT sectors rely on search as a function of their applications. To make a long paragraph short, virtually every new online communications technology has a search component and everyone, regardless of their business or industry appears to want to develop a strong search marketing strategy.

While the SES conferences are about search marketing, SEOs and SEMs are not the only people in the building. Search is obviously gaining prominence in mainstream marketing circles. The proportion of representatives from brand name Ad Agencies continues to increase every SES conference I attend. Similarly, a larger number of small to medium businesses have sent staff to learn as much as they can.

There are four basic types of people who attend SES conferences, and several sub-groupings of each type. The first and most obvious are professional search marketers from both sides of the black-hat/white-hat divide. One can easily spot the pros gathered together in excited gaggles of geeks. It's not often search marketers get to meet their peers face to face, speaking a common language that makes most other people's eyes glaze over quickly.

The second type of attendee is the newly minted In-House SEO, the person given the terrifying job of figuring out everything there is to know about search marketing in four days. They are the ones typing frantically on their laptops, desperately trying to retain every word their employer has paid for them to hear. These poor souls are doomed to a long and difficult meeting the day they return to their workplace and, by the second day of the conference, they know it. There is no way they are going to be able to explain to their bosses exactly what happened, much less what was said and by whom.

A third type is the tradeshow exhibitors and the booth staff. Many of these people make their living on the conference circuit. They are easily spotted by the colour of their admittance badges, which is different

from that of presenters and attendees, generally limiting their movement to the main hall and tradeshow floor. Most people staffing the tradeshow booths are extremely well informed and able to explain the topic or focus of their business however their knowledge of other exhibitors tends to be limited. At night, the tradeshow staff can be depended on to bolster the numbers at the dozens of gatherings and parties SES conferences are infamous for.

The fourth group of people found at SES conferences is made up of speakers, presenters and personalities. These are the ones who are either talking non-stop to small groups gathered around them or are hiding in the private Speakers' and Media lounges. For this group, SES conferences are hard work, the type others think is fun if you can get it. By the end of the second day of the conference, you can spot these people by their exhaustion.

Exhaustion is an issue for everyone attending such an intense show.

There is a lot to learn and a limited amount of time to cover everything one might be interested in. One of the drawbacks to such a large event is that up to five unique learning sessions run concurrently and a body can only be in one place at any given time. No matter how well one plans their days, information sacrifices are going to happen. Before attending an SES conference, a prioritization session is in order to ensure one knows exactly where they wish to be at any moment.

Being an SEO who has spent the better part of his career working for small to medium sized businesses, I spent much of my in-session time at Organic and PPC marketing seminars. Here's a small sample of some of the most relevant information for smaller SEO/SEM companies and their clients. Links attached to each session name are directed to the live-time coverage provided by Search Engine Watch editor Barry Schwartz and his team of reporters. Other links might point to blog entries or images posted by attendees or presenters.

Introduction to Search Engine Marketing (no coverage) This general session is hosted by conference organizer Danny Sullivan and is a "must-see" for beginners or those not fully familiar with the changing search landscape. Giving attendees a brief overview of the industry, Sullivan separates organic or natural search and paid-search advertising options, explaining the parameters and permutations of both search marketing approaches.

Running at the same time down the hall, Greg Stirling moderated [the Searcher Behavior Research Update](#) session covering how search users interact with the various search engines. Armed with years of industry research, the panel members discuss and dissect the way typical searchers use the various search tools focusing on predicting and taking advantage of common behaviours.

Meanwhile, just down the hall, SEW Executive Editor Chris Sherman is moderating a survey session called [Social Search Overview](#). Joining Sherman onstage is Grant Ryan from Eureka, Tim Meyers from Yahoo, and Nils Pohlmann from MSN.

While Danny talks about the overall search scene, Greg examines how we behave while using search and Chris demystifies social search, another important session is unfolding down the hall covering paid search options. [Compare & Contrast: Ad Program Strategies](#) covered how each of the paid advertising programs and networks run by the major search engines operate. Knowing the differences between each is essential for small businesses and SEMs running multiple paid advertising campaigns.

Please keep in mind; these are the first sessions of a very busy four days. We've just completed the first 90- minutes of SES San Jose's schedule.

After a short coffee break, the late-morning sessions start and the huge conference hall empties again.

Search Engine Guide editor Jennifer Laycock moderated the [Search Term Research and Targeting](#) seminar with Christine Churchill and Dan Thies sitting on the panel. Unfortunately, there was no coverage of this session and my time was occupied attending another session down the hall.

The seminar I needed to see at this hour was the on titled, [Social Search: Up Close With Yahoo](#). This session covered the multiple social search platforms Yahoo has introduced over the past year giving specific tips on using tools such as Flickr, Yahoo Answers and Yahoo 360. Hosted by Chris Sherman, the panel consisted of several Yahoo Senior Product Managers and Yahoo's Director of Project Management, Tim Meyer. The panel also featured Joshua Schachter, Director of Engineering from del.icio.us.

Unfortunately, since I was intent on learning more about Social Search, I missed most of the session titled; [Does Demographic Targeting Matter?](#) Knowing the search marketing industry knows a lot about specific user habits, I was curious to find out how, or if, they used this information. While I heard too little to fully grasp the nuances, the part I saw suggested that the collection of user-specific information is very advanced but still has a long way to go before demographic targeting accurately delivers tailored advertising packets to unique users.

Lunch on mid-Monday was interesting. Danny Sullivan hosted a working-group lunch (attended by more than 3000 people) with the [Google Sitemaps Team](#). At the lunch session, the Google representatives spoke about the changes to the sitemaps system from its new name (Google Webmaster Central) to [improved functionalities](#) in the system.

After lunch, I began the process of collecting those 2 full notepads of interview notes and was unable to attend any of the afternoon sessions. Here is a short run-down of sessions that would have been of interest to SEO shops and their clients.

Anne Kennedy moderated Shari Thurow's session on Search Engine Friendly Design. The foundation of your search marketing campaign rests on the way your website is designed.

Down the hall, Detlev Johnson moderated a session called [Searchonomics: Serious and Fun Stats](#).

Search Advertising 101 is another survey course but an essential one for new comers or those who don't feel they fully understand how PPC advertising works. Moderated by Dana Todd, [Search Advertising 101](#) is, "... especially geared toward beginners, with details on programs from major providers and advice on how to succeed."

Other sessions addressed [SEM via Communities, Wikipedia and Tagging](#), Domain and Address Bar- Driven Traffic, and measuring Multichannel Metrics.

So ended the first day of SES San Jose. After the hard working learning sessions, dinner gatherings and an evening full of private parties is in store. I'm not going to try to explain the [parties](#) except to suggest anyone interested should read "[Surviving SES San Jose](#)" for a bleary eyed bird's view of SES San Jose nightlife.

On Tuesday, an Advanced Organic Track promised a strong series of SEO focused sessions. Again, there were five types of sessions, known as "tracks" running concurrently so a number of information sacrifices need to be made.

The first seminar called, "[Can You Please Them All?](#)" had three well known SEOs, Aaron Wall, Michael Murray, Dave Davies joining Ask.Com VP Rahul Lahiri and moderator Detlev Johnson in a free flowing session covering optimization techniques for the Big4 search engines, Google, Yahoo, MSN and Ask.

Following that came a period with five essential SEO sessions running at the same time.

Heather Lloyd Martin and Jill Whalen shared the stage for their staple, "[Writing for Search Engines](#)" session. Next door, a session, "[Landing Pages Testing and Tuning](#)" outlined how to best create, test and tweak paid-ad landing pages to increase sales or click conversions. In the next room, a panel addressed [Search Arbitrage Issues](#), while in yet another room, a session explained how to best establish [Blogs and Feeds for SEO](#) purposes.

For more experienced SEOs and content heavy sites however, the must-see presentation was [Duplicate Content and Multiple Site Issues](#) session. There is a great deal of concern about duplicate content. This session outlined what to and not to worry about and how search engines recognize "ownership" of content.

The next essential session, [The Bot Obedience Course](#) was hosted by Danny Sullivan and featured, Jon Glick from Become.com, Vanessa Fox from Google, Rajat Mukherjee from Yahoo and SEOs Dan Theis and Bill Atchison. Understanding and effecting bot behavior is one of the most powerful tools for SEOs.

The feature SEO session for small businesses and boutique SEO shops, "[Big Ideas for Small Sites](#)" presented common sense wisdom to a crowd of nearly 1500. Adopting a Small is Beautiful attitude, moderator Anne Kennedy and panelists Jennifer Laycock, Matt McGee and John Carcutt outlined SEO and PPC strategies designed to help the smallest business or single-person SEO shop compete with established competitors.

Each presenter in the Big Ideas session referred to common sense marketing with Jennifer Laycock noting, "Common sense is our greatest equalizer". From where Jennifer, Matt and John stand, planning, prioritization and diligence mark the difference between success and failure when competing against bigger businesses with larger marketing budgets.

Using a variety of search mediums ranging from the general SERPS to Local search, Vertical search tools, and news releases, the presenters offered the best of their strategies and success stories in a highly successful session. For SEOs and small business marketers, this was one of the highlight seminars.

The next session of important interest was the [Usability and SEO](#) session featuring Matt Bailey and Shari Thurow. Website usability is one of the keys to effective SEO. This session was a must-see for SEOs, small businesses, site designers and webmasters.

The final, do-not-miss, sessions for SEOs covered [Website Analytics and Measuring Success](#) and [Local Search Marketing Tactics](#).

View the innumerable images from SES San Jose on [Flickr](#). (see tags: [SES](#), [SES San Jose](#), [Search Engine Strategies](#), [SES2006](#), [GoogleDance](#), and [Search Strategies](#))

SES Conferences are important events. Held in several venues around the world, SES is a professional cultural experience that shouldn't be missed, sort of what attending a serious university located on the Las Vegas strip would feel like. The most important aspect of an SES event can't really be conveyed in words. It comes from the instant camaraderie between colleagues and the immense networking opportunities the gathering presents. I am looking forward to the next major show in April in New York. Hope to see you there too.