



## The Seven Secrets of Search Marketing Success

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**Publishing date:** Mar 05, 2007

Small businesses are at a severe disadvantage if they don't use this tool, which quickly is moving to the center of many companies' marketing and advertising efforts. Here are tips from an insider.

### THE SEVEN SECRETS OF SEARCH MARKETING SUCCESS

In the past few years, search marketing has evolved from a tactical exercise about finding search engine keywords to the center of the marketing universe.

Because of search marketing's unique ability to test, adjust and pinpoint customer preferences rapidly, it is becoming the organizing principal for marketing and advertising budgets. Equally important is that the knowledge gained online is fundamentally improving the return on investment of offline advertising, direct marketing, telemarketing and other marketing initiatives.

As search marketing moves front and center, organizations both big and small can maximize their marketing programs by adhering to the Seven Secrets of Search marketing:

*One: Never Pay More Than Necessary:* The golden rule in purchasing keywords is to never pay a single penny more than necessary to appear in the top positions in a paid search. That's easier said than done because market prices for keywords fluctuate widely. Prices are set by a continuous online auction operating 24/7, 365 days a year. The only way to succeed is to have a strategy that executes keyword purchases based on actual performance. That intelligence from monitoring and adjusting is critical for determining when keywords are on sale and when the market is overheated. Without a clear discipline and process, it's easy to overpay.

*Two: The Right Search Engine Mix is Critical:* Identical keywords sell for different prices on different search engines – and produce different results. Just like each television network offers advertisers slightly different demographics, each search engine offers a slightly different product. The challenge for marketers is finding the right mix to achieve the highest return on investment. Should the money go to Google, Yahoo or MSN – which account for eight in 10 searches? Or, should the money be spent by combining one of the Big Three, plus second-tier firms such as Ask, Miva or Kanoodle? Or should it be invested in specialized search engines by industry or topic? Or all of the above? The answer requires continuous testing and adjusting until the optimal mix is reached.

*Three: There's No Substitute For Search Engine Savvy:* Understanding the subtleties of each search engine is essential for success. For example, Yahoo approaches organic and paid searches differently than most others. On Google, paid searches are shaded in blue at the top, and also appear in a narrow column on the right margin. Organic results fill the rest of the page. However, Yahoo's paid searches appear at the top of the search results and in the body of the search on the first page in the form of "Paid Inclusion." There's no way for the average user – or unsophisticated buyer – to know that's how the game works.

*Four: When to Buy: Time of Day, Day and Season?* With keywords, timing is everything. Time of day, day of the week, season – all of these factors determine the keyword price, and number and quality of the leads. For example, keywords purchased from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. during the week may produce far more qualified buyers than the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Research shows that people tend to do more research than actual buying during the work day. However, that pattern can vary significantly by gender, income level, race, as well as season, geography and other factors.

*Five: From Clicks to Call Centers: Turbocharging Results*

The algorithms powering paid search are so sophisticated that it is easy to spot the difference between tire-kickers and buyers, between a low-value sale and a high-value sale. It's now possible to instantly engage a high-value prospect in a conversation with a call center by providing a phone number that appears right in the search result. As important, the call center option can be turned off when the behavior demonstrates that the calls will be mostly tire-kickers.

*Six: Seeing the Big Picture is Key.* Operating without a complete picture of all campaigns across all channels guarantees sub-optimal performance. Search marketing analytics – which includes integrated website analytics, website tracking and call-center tracking – are indispensable. They provide both the big picture and allow companies to drill down to individual campaigns, media buys or keywords. The intelligence gained from dozens of search engines and other sources is critical to performing analysis of Paid Search, online display advertising, re-marketing, contextual, and product information feeds. Robust analytics is often the difference between success and failure.

*Seven: Diligence Pays.* Keeping the Nightmare Scenario at Bay

What if a disaster prompted consumers to learn more about the incident by clicking on your paid search? Answer: The keyword purchase would be effectively hijacked for something other than generating sales. Or, what if an unscrupulous competitor hired someone to continually click on your Sponsored search? This practice, known as Click Fraud, is on the rise and demands constant vigilance to minimize the mischief. Successful Search marketing is not only in the buy, but also in making sure it's working as planned.

To succeed in search marketing, organizations must be aggressive in managing their program. The good news is that those that continually test and adjust will realize the collateral benefit of optimizing all of their offline marketing programs.