

How to make the most of search engine marketing

Abstract

Get in on SEM, the hottest trend in online marketing. Find out how to slash your marketing outlays by delivering qualified prospects at a reasonable cost.

Learn how to fine tune your product messages. And do it all from within Salesforce CRM, using Salesforce for Google AdWords or other applications from the AppExchange directory.

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If you build it, will they come? When it comes to your Web site, being able to answer that question with a resounding “yes” is fast becoming a key requirement for success.

That’s where search engine marketing (SEM) comes in. Traffic from search engines has become more effective in converting leads to customers than other advertising media. Why? Mostly because you’re not looking for customers, they are looking for you. Because customers that find you are already interested in your products or services, they are likely to respond to a persuasive message. Another reason why SEM is so compelling is that it’s possible to measure exactly what works, what doesn’t, and to change course accordingly. You always know whether you’re getting your advertising money’s worth.

A recent survey by Forrester Research confirmed the popularity of online media when it found that half of the surveyed advertisers were cutting spending on traditional channels, such as TV and print, to pay for online ads. SEM, in particular, has more than tripled in the last few years.

With SEM booming, achieving a good search engine ranking has become highly competitive. Of course, getting surfers to your site is just the first step in a process that includes converting prospects to customers, tracking SEM campaigns, calculating ROI, and improving your campaigns.

This article provides best practices for SEM in general and gives you an overview of how Salesforce CRM for Google AdWords can make you a winner in the SEM game.

- :: Overview of SEM strategies
- :: Optimize your site to improve organic rankings
- :: Create successful “pay for click” campaigns
- :: Leverage SEM with Salesforce CRM for Google AdWords

An overview of SEM strategies

Most search engines respond to user searches with two types of results—paid-for, sponsored listings that usually appear on top or to the side of the results page, and organic listings that are found, ranked, and listed according to the algorithms used by the engine. Some search engines also provide “paid inclusion” listings that display sponsored sites high within the organic listings, but without visually identifying them in any way. A notable exception to this practice is Google, which believes that such listings would conflict with its relevance rankings.

Move up the ranks in the organic rankings

Optimization is the key to getting high organic rankings. Optimization includes a number of specific techniques, all geared towards making sure various search engines find and index your content in a way that results in a high ranking. Page 1 is best—research shows that if you’re not on the first two pages, your chances of being found are slim. To get a good spot in the organic search results, it’s imperative that you optimize your Web site.

One advantage of this approach, of course, is that it’s free. And if you can pull off, a high ranking gets better results since customers seem to click on organic links more often. Also, according to a Jupiter Media research study, most commercial purchases came from organic search results. The major disadvantage of the optimization approach is that it may take months to rise in the rankings so that potential customers will find you.

Bid your way to the top with pay per click

By choosing a pay-per-click (PPC) strategy, you can make sure that your listing will be highly visible almost overnight. Just how much that will cost you depends on how many other people are bidding for the keyword(s) that, when clicked, will display your ad. To set up your campaign, you create an account with your search engines of choice and bid on your keywords. The key advantage of a PPC strategy is that you’re guaranteed a top spot. And a key advantage of Salesforce CRM is that it can help you to design, deploy, and measure a PPC campaign.

Most businesses use some combination of both strategies to profit from the tremendous lead generation potential of SEM. By tracking and fine tuning your SEM campaigns you can vastly increase the ROI associated with them. For example, since you can track which keywords or ads get the best response, you can easily eliminate those that don’t deliver and focus your efforts elsewhere. As your rankings improve as a result of optimization efforts, you may want to cut back on paid ads.

Best practice

Optimize your site to improve organic rankings

Optimization is a methodology for using the way search engines work to work in your favor. Although most people use the term “search engine” generically, three different types of technologies—search engines, directories, and portals—all deliver results based on keywords that a user enters. Each technology uses a different approach to finding sites and determining the order in which they will be displayed. For example, most of Google’s ranking algorithm is based on link analysis, where the number and quality of the hyperlinks that link to your site are hugely important. Yahoo! is more focused on page copy, but also uses link analysis in its algorithm. Optimization includes techniques that cover all the bases.

Designing, creating content, and launching a Web site is a major undertaking for any company. Still, many organizations optimize their sites only when they find that they are outranked by their competitors. Of course, it’s always possible to “fix” the problems that are responsible for poor rankings. But by making optimization part of the design, architecture, content creation, and testing processes whenever possible, you can save much duplicated work and accelerate your rise in the rankings.

To optimize your site, follow these steps:

1. If you already have a site, measure and compare your ranking. Are you on page 1? How do you compare to your competitors? What keywords and organizational strategies do they use? Use this information as a benchmark for your optimization efforts.
2. Define the keywords that will bring up your listing when entered. One reason to define keywords *before* you start writing copy is that it’s important to use these words often in your titles, headers, and body text.
 - Test keywords you’re considering to see what results they bring up. Explore competitors’ sites to identify their keywords. Experiment to narrow the field to those words that both return good results and strongly position your product, including words for which there is less competition. But also remember that too many keywords will reduce your site’s relevance.
 - Take advantage of the tools available to help you find good keywords, such as the Google tool that suggests words based on a scan of your copy, or check out tools such as Keyword Tracker or Word Tracker.
3. Optimize each page, using the keywords you defined. This step is all about giving spiders—the part of the search engine that “crawls” the Web looking for keywords—lots of opportunities to find and index your site.
 - Since spiders only recognize text, don’t design pages that consist only of images or flash animations. Also, don’t ever make a log-in page the first page a user encounters; spiders won’t go any further. If your copy includes many tables, check with your web master to find out how “deep” they are—anything deeper than three levels is typically ignored.
 - Create meta tags for each page. The Title tag is probably the most important—make sure that this tag captures the essence of your product or service. The Description tag is also used by all search engines. Create a unique Description tag for each page—if you use the same tag across all pages, the search engine will ignore those pages.
 - Using headers liberally is good design practice because it helps to orient users and move them through text quickly. It’s also good for optimizing pages, since spiders consider header text more important than other text. The same is true of the anchor text that’s used as hyperlinks.

When creating body text, be sure that each page has a narrow focus and strong message. Never use underlines to avoid confusion with hyperlinks. Make sure that the content of the page maps closely to the Description tag and that the page focus is reinforced by the headers and hyperlinks.

4. Create a link campaign to solicit links from high-quality sites. Because search engines like Google factor the number, quality, and type of pages that include links to your site to determine relevance, **this is the single most effective technique for improving your ranking!**

Identify sites that are highly relevant to your site and approach them with a personal request to link to you. Don’t make general “dear webmaster” requests and be clear about why you think their site is valuable. Also, be specific about which pages you want them to link to and the keywords you prefer.

5. Optimize the technical aspects of your site. Make sure your technical staff knows how search engines work. If you outsource your development, consider such expertise a key criterion in selecting a vendor.
 - Get a unique IP address to improve your results. Find out how your server reacts to page requests—make sure it does not return redirects. And make sure you don't have multiple domain names pointing to the same web site, since search engines penalize duplicate content.
 - If you want to exclude some directories from indexing, use the robots.txt file. Alternatively, make sure you don't inadvertently exclude content from being indexed.
 - To find out exactly what a spider sees, run a simulator and use the results to fine tune your optimization. Several tools are available for free.
6. Submit your site to search engines. Although your site will be indexed most quickly when an engine finds many high-quality links to your site, it's still a good idea to submit your site.

Submit your site manually—it's more likely to get listed than sites submitted by search engine submission services that use automated software. And don't just submit to the "major" search engines. Smaller engines and directories can still get you good traffic, and some of them are free. This traffic also counts as incoming links to your website—the magic bullet for improving your ranking.
7. Analyze and fine tune your site. URL rankings change from week to week, so use one of the available tools to frequently monitor keywords and determine when additional optimization when necessary.

Create successful PPC campaigns

When you use paid ads, the head start you get in the race for visibility means you can focus on the best way to move the customers through the sales process. There are several techniques for getting a good response and for using the campaign to fine tune your product messages. The following tasks are key to successful PPC campaigns:

- :: Create one or more ads and the associated landing pages. Think of the ad as your bait and the landing page as the line you use to reel them in.
 - In the ad, you typically have just a title and about two lines of copy to work with. The goal is to get customers' attention and to get them to your landing page. Make the title brief but specific and include a benefit and a call for action. For example, if you sell athletic shoes, don't use "Athletic Shoes" as your title. Instead, create several ads titled "Tennis Shoes," "Walking Shoes," "Running Shoes," and so on. Be brief and specific in the copy as well; for example, "Run Faster, Longer" and "Find Your Fit."
 - On the landing page, your goal is to make the sale—however you define that. Make sure the landing page supports the message in the ad and delivers what you promised; for example, information about how to run faster and tools to determine a good fit. Keep out distractions—it's not a good idea to include links to other pages (other than those that move the customer towards the sale). Finally, include a clear call to action and an incentive to act now.
- :: Analyze and fine tune your campaign. As with an optimization campaign, you want to measure results—however, instead of measuring ranking you want to measure conversions.
 - Which ads and landing pages are the best performers? It's easy to see from the search engine statistics. Use this information to target your efforts and resources.
 - Besides shifting resources to the best performers, consider testing new design ideas or text phrases. One way to test performance is to use the current page as a control and create pages with different designs and text. After some time, you can evaluate which designs and phrases work best, thus constantly improving the return on your campaign.
- :: Manage the bidding process to ensure that you get and maintain a good ROI.
 - The key to effectively managing your process is to assign a value to each conversion and then calculate the maximum cost per click that results in a profit. This is the highest number you would want to bid. If that number is too low to get a good ranking, consider alternative keywords. (Hint: Salesforce CRM can help you determine cost per click.)
 - When you set up your account, you segment the total funds for various keywords. When you deplete a segment, the ads stop, so keep close track of your balances. A faster-than-usual depletion of your account may be a tip-off to possible click fraud.

“Salesforce for Google AdWords is like having x-ray vision into the sales process. At Avideon, the majority of our leads are generated by our online presence. With Salesforce for Google AdWords we have streamlined the process for placing and tracking ads and correlating which of those result in leads and revenue.”

— Rich Wiklund
CEO, Avideon

Get the most from SEM with Salesforce CRM

For SEM campaigns using Google AdWords—which currently account for more than two thirds of all SEM PPC campaigns—Salesforce CRM for Google AdWords helps you bridge the gap between CRM, the wealth of information available from Salesforce CRM, and the statistics available from Google. This tool takes you through the entire process of creating a Google AdWords campaign, from keyword selection to closed deal, all from within Salesforce CRM.

You'll know exactly which keywords and ads generate leads—without having to paste back and forth to Excel sheets or juggling multiple reports. In addition, knowing which keywords and ads caused individual prospects to respond gives sales representatives valuable insight into those prospects before making the sales call.

Since Salesforce CRM for Google AdWords shows the details of every lead or opportunity generated from your Web site, you also get details about organic search results from Google. You can then drill into the Salesforce CRM activity history to view all the details. What's more, the available information goes beyond clicks and conversions; by attaching conversions to opportunities in Salesforce CRM you can follow them through the sales funnel and use the resulting information to justify campaign spending and analyze ROI. You can also see how individual campaign elements—such as keywords, emails, and banners—flow through the funnel.

Working with Salesforce CRM for Google AdWords typically involves the following tasks:

- :: If you already use Google AdWords, link your existing account to start tracking your ad campaigns, ad groups, and keyword buys in Salesforce CRM. You can also correlate your SEM efforts with leads and opportunities.
- :: Create, place, and optimize ads. Set up a campaign in Salesforce CRM, write your ad header and text, and choose your keywords. Your ads will be live within minutes. By seeing the response to particular keywords and ads, you can experiment to see which get the best results.
- :: Sit back and watch in real time as your ads generate leads, deals, and revenue.
- :: Correlate search efforts with inbound leads and opportunities. You can see the exact leads generated by your campaigns and follow any campaign all the way through the sales process.
- :: Measure ROI by measuring the return on particular campaigns and tying revenues back to specific campaigns. For even more insight, use Salesforce CRM to build or customize reports and dashboards to continuously monitor your SEM campaigns.

Also, check out how various partner applications in the AppExchange can complement your SEM campaigns.

Summary

Get in on SEM, the hottest trend in online marketing. It has the potential of slashing your marketing outlays by delivering qualified prospects at a reasonable cost. It can help you fine tune your product messages. And you can do it all from within Salesforce CRM, using Salesforce CRM for Google AdWords, or other applications from the AppExchange directory.

Additional resources

- :: [Salesforce.com Consulting](#)
- :: If you use Google AdWords, check out the wealth of information available at Google's Conversion University at <http://www.google.com/analytics>.
- :: Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization (SEMPO) at www.sempo.org.

For More Information

Contact your account executive to learn how we can help you accelerate your CRM success.

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