PPC vs. SEO
Friends or Foes?
PPC vs. SEO - Friends or Foes?

When it comes to which form of search engine marketing is most effective, the argument between Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising can become as passionate and heated as a political debate. If you’re new to search engine marketing, it is easy to get overwhelmed and lost in the sea of opinions on both sides.

Some experts believe that you get more out of paying for the targeted traffic that comes to your Website from a PPC advertising campaign, while others point out that SEO brings free traffic to your Website. No matter the side of the debate, there is one thing that the experts all agree on: if your company has a Website, you need a way for potential customers to find you on search engines such as Google® and Yahoo!®.

There is a place for both PPC and SEO in a robust search engine marketing plan each comes with distinct advantages. We will discuss the pros and cons of each, and help you understand the ideal relationship between the two.

Search Engine Optimization

When a Web user goes to a search engine and types in a word or phrase (or “keyword”) then clicks “enter,” he/she is served a “results page,” which shows both “paid results” (PPC advertising) and “organic results”. Paid results traditionally show up on the right hand side or top of the search results page, and have a term like “sponsor results” alongside them. Organic results appear in the center of the search results page. Search Engine Optimization refers to organic results only.

SEO is the process of developing your Website so that it can be searched and indexed by search engines such as Google and Yahoo!. Ultimately, this searching and indexing will result in higher rankings for your Website when someone types in a keyword or keyword phrases related to your industry or business. SEO is particularly important for ecommerce sites. However, SEO isn’t something that is easily picked up by newcomers to the search engine marketing scene. Due to the fact that copywriting, design and HTML skills all play a factor in SEO, there is a steep learning curve. Keep in mind that SEO isn’t a quick fix to get traffic to your Website, as it can be a long process with increased results for your Website in the search engine listings generally showing around the fifth month of optimization. Then, the benefits will be great, as, according to eMarketer, 68% of search engine users click on a result on the first page of search engine results, and only 8% were willing to click were willing to click results past the third page.¹

SEO Pros

- Time - Rankings can remain for a long time.
- Long Term Cost - You don’t pay every time someone clicks on your listing.
- Trust/Branding - People often trust “natural” listings more then they do paid listings. Credibility is built via rankings.

¹ Source: eMarketer , April 2008
SEO Cons

- Initial Cost - SEO requires larger up front costs than PPC.
- Unpredictability - Ranking can change quickly as search engine algorithms change or competition increases.
- Competition - Competition can be brutal for certain keywords. Some marketers try to resort to unethical practices to ensure they are in the top position, although the search engines will penalize these sites if they discover these practices.
- Targeting - Targeting is a little trickier, especially geographical targeting, with SEO.
- Changes - Obtaining consistent top rankings will require regular monitoring and tweaks to your site.

SEO is complex and the methods for achieving top rankings change often. So what can you do in order to increase traffic to your Website while you are waiting for your SEO campaign to bear fruit? This is where PPC advertising comes in.

Pay Per Click Advertising

Going back to the search results page, as mentioned above, Pay Per Click ads appear in the right and top part of the search results page. PPC advertising allows you to choose as many relevant search terms as you want and advertise on them. You only pay when someone clicks on your ad, and you are allowed to bid how much you would like to Pay Per Click - thus the name.

The beauty of PPC is that it can be live within minutes of setting it up. You can drive traffic to your Website in the same day that you open a PPC account. Another benefit is that you pay only when someone actually clicks on your ad - you don’t pay per view or impression as in some forms of advertising.

PPC Pros

- Calculation - PPC is easily measured. Marketers are able to get raw numbers within seconds. Return on investment (ROI) and cost per acquisition (CPA) are easy to calculate.
- Cost - You only pay when someone clicks on your ad.
- Speed - Everything about PPC is done fairly fast. The campaign can be running in less than a day.
- Control - You have total control of what the searcher sees when they view your ad or click through to your site.
- Timing - You can set up your ads to only run when you want them to.
- Targeted - You can easily hit your target audience by using the proper keywords and ad copy.

PPC Cons

- Expense - A PPC campaign can be expensive it if isn’t monitored correctly.
- Click Fraud - There is always a risk of getting unethical clicks.

However easy it seems, there are nuances to learn about PPC advertising. PPC advertising has a learning curve and it’s important not to rush into anything without learning how. A complex algorithm that takes into consideration your bid, your ad’s relevance and a number of other factors actually determines what
placement your ad will have on the page, and the better placement you have, the better chance you have at quality clicks that convert.

In addition, without the right account structure, ad copy, and landing page choice, you may pay more money per click than your competitors. Without the correct budget set daily and monthly, you could either miss out on most of your best traffic or allow your spending to go out of control while you’re not looking.

The Most Effective Marketing Strategy - Combining SEO & PPC

PPC and SEO are both fantastic ways to drive traffic to your Website, and are ideally suited for use together. Putting all of your marketing dollars in one basket is risky. Focusing entirely on organic results leads to missing out on the 25% of Web searchers who click on paid listings, and focusing entirely on PPC allows SEO-savvy competitors to land those other searchers. PPC advertising can fill in the gaps for your SEO. During the five or so months that you are optimizing and waiting for results, you can drive most of your traffic via PPC ads.

Once your optimization has taken place, you can use your PPC ads to highlight any special offers or new products that you have and to target all of the keywords that your Search Engine Optimization wasn’t focused on.

If your organic rankings suddenly take a dive due to search engine algorithm changes and you don’t have a PPC campaign you may find yourself suddenly invisible in the search engine results pages. Granted, you can start PPC at any time, but if you aren’t familiar with it, it can take some time (even for a professional) to figure out the most effective PPC strategy for your site. If you only focus on paid listings, you are missing out on the traffic that goes to organic rankings. Also, research indicates that many customers put a higher “trust” level on organic rankings since many customers are aware that sponsored ads are paid for. You may find that your conversion rate for organic rankings is higher than that of your PPC campaign. If you only focus on paid listings and suddenly a competitor enters the PPC market with a big budget that you can’t compete with, you could lose your placement and then have to wait another 3-5 months before you can counter that with strong organic rankings.

Research in 2008 from eMarketer backs up the combined strategy\(^2\). According to their study, businesses that combined PPC advertising with SEO saw conversion rates 51.5% higher than clients who only used PPC.

Network Solutions® online marketing experts have been professionally trained to navigate small businesses through the world of online marketing in both the SEO and PPC realms.

To speak to a Network Solutions search consultant, call 1-877-438-8599.

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\(^2\) Source: eMarketer, December 2008
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