

Is Search Engine Marketing Right For You?



A special report
from
**First Step
Communications**

www.firststep.com.au

Copyright

This report is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the publisher.

Liability disclaimer

The material contained in this report is general and is not intended as advice on any particular matter. First Step Communications and the author expressly disclaim all and any liability to any persons whatsoever in respect of anything done by any such person in reliance, whether in whole or in part, on this report. Please take appropriate legal advice before acting on any information in this report.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
What's in this report?.....	4
Where do new customers come from?	5
Search engine marketing is "stranger marketing"	5
Tough questions to ask yourself	6
What are they looking for?	7
Look for key words and phrases	7
Don't get too broad.....	8
Don't give up.....	8
Tough questions to ask yourself	8
How well does your Web site sell?.....	9
Step into their shoes	9
The three key questions.....	10
Which search engine marketing method is the best?.....	11
How do you get started?	13
Improving your Web site.....	13
Paid listings	13
Free listings.....	14
Be prepared to put in some work.....	14

Introduction

Search engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN get millions of people using their sites every day, looking for everything from aardvarks to zygotes, and everything in between.

Because of this, people often ask me, "How do I get to the top of the search engines?" And that's a natural question. But more often than not it's the *wrong* question.

Getting a prime position in a search engine can bring you thousands of new visitors every day. **But** ... Is search engine marketing the best option for you?

This special report will help you answer that question.

To give you an analogy, suppose you went to a business consultant and asked something like, "How do I get my business featured on *60 Minutes* (the TV current affairs show)?" Now, any business consultant worth her salt wouldn't answer that question directly. Instead, she would ask you these sorts of questions instead:

- Do your potential clients watch *60 Minutes*?
- Are they the right sort of clients for your business?
- Are they likely to contact you if they see you on *60 Minutes*?
- When they do contact you, can you convince them to buy?

You see, before you start considering any particular marketing campaign – whether it's exposure on *60 Minutes*, newspaper advertising, signage, sponsorship, or anything else – it's important to understand *why* you're doing that marketing. Most people wouldn't just pick one of these at random and plough down that path without giving it a second thought.

And yet, you'd be surprised at the number of people who do exactly that when they think about search engine marketing! They think that after they get a Web site, the *automatic* next step is to get it listed in search engines.

It's not! If you can make just that one distinction in your mind, you will know more about Internet marketing than most Web site owners. Even if you stop reading now, if you understand that one concept – that search engine marketing *might* not be the best option for you – this report will have served its purpose.

What's in this report?

This report considers five broad questions:

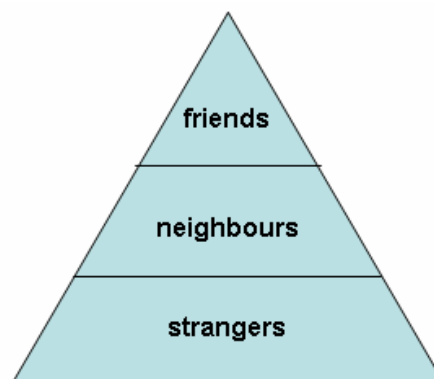
- Where do new customers come from?
- What are they looking for?
- How well does your Web site sell?
- Which search engine marketing method is the best?
- How do you get started?

I've deliberately kept this report brief, so that it gives you an overview of search engine marketing. The purpose of this report is to help you make a *decision*, not to teach you all the nitty-gritty details.

Where do new customers come from?

Before you consider anything else about search engine marketing, consider the way that you *currently* get new leads and new clients.

First understand the relationship that you have with your Web site visitors. Broadly, they fall into three categories:



The top group, whom I call “friends”, are your customers – that is, people who have paid you in the past for your products and services.

The “neighbours” are those who have heard about you but are yet to become customers. They might be, for example, the people on your free e-mail newsletter mailing list.

At the bottom are “strangers” – those who have never heard of you before. They may have found you through a search engine, by reading an article on another Web site, by finding your Web address in a newspaper, or by some other means.

Search engine marketing is “stranger marketing”

People who visit your site from search engines are almost always strangers. They’re looking for information on a particular topic, so they visit Google, type in that topic, and do a search. Your goal is to make your site appear near the top of the list so that they click on it.

You have to understand three things about stranger marketing.

First (the good news), of the three groups above (friends, neighbours and strangers), strangers are the biggest. So if you’re looking to reach as many people as possible, market to strangers.

Second (the not so good news), the catch is that they are also the most difficult market to convert into customers. They don't know you, like you or trust you – yet. So it takes a much more concerted sales effort to convince them to buy from you.

Third (also not so good news), some businesses just don't lend themselves to stranger marketing. And even if stranger marketing *can* work in your business, you might not know how to do it properly. For example, if you're a professional speaker, you *probably* get most of your new business through referrals (neighbour marketing) or repeat business (friend marketing). That's very different from getting new business from cold calling, newspaper advertising, or media exposure (stranger marketing). I know professional speakers who do get business in those ways, but they also know *how* to do so. If that's new to you, then you probably don't have the mind-set yet for stranger marketing.

In my experience, most Web site owners make the mistake of too much "stranger marketing" and not enough "friend marketing". Focus on your customers, and you might discover a gold mine of profits waiting for you.

Tough questions to ask yourself ...

Do you know how to market to strangers? Really? How do you know? Is it because you're already doing stranger marketing in your business? If not, you probably don't know.

If you know – or think you know – how to market to strangers, then keep reading ...

What are they looking for?

OK, you've decided to market to these strangers. So what exactly are they looking for?

Look for key words and phrases

To find out whether there's a market on the Internet for your product, start with the free Search Term Suggestion Tool at the search engine Overture. You'll find the tool at inventory.overture.com.

You type in any word or phrase and it will tell you how many people have searched Overture for those words in the last 30 days. Because Overture reaches a significant percentage of Web users, you can assume that its results are representative of the Web as a whole.

This tells you what people are *actually* searching for, not just what you *think* they're using. Once you know these words, you'll know how to market more effectively to those people.

For example, Candy Tymson is an expert on gender differences. When she searched Overture for that phrase, she saw these results:

Get suggestions for: (may take up to 30 seconds)

gender differences 

Note: All suggested search terms are subject to our standard editorial review process.

Searches done in July 2005

Count Search Term

1274	gender difference
240	gender communication difference
217	gender difference in communication
141	gender difference in education
103	gender difference in the workplace
91	anxiety difference gender math
84	difference between sex and gender
75	gender difference mathematics
66	gender difference in learning
64	between difference empowerment gender intervention woman
61	gender difference in intelligence

You can see that about 1,200 people searched for that phrase in the past month. That's quite good. But she also found that over 25,000 people searched for "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus"! If she incorporates that phrase in her site, it's more likely to appear in search engines.

Don't get too broad

Be careful not to fall into the trap of being too broad. For example, if you work in the area of health and nutrition, you might be excited that over a million people search for "health" every month. But that word is way too general. Even if you did manage to get one of the top search engine listings, it's very unlikely that most of the people who find your site will be in the right market for you.

Similarly, if you do sales training, it would be a *bad* idea to aim for a top listing for the word "sales". Searchers are looking for home sales, car sales, car boot sales, and many other things related to the word "sales". You're far better looking at the phrase "sales training".

Don't give up

What if the Overture search doesn't show many people searching for your topic area? Does that mean that it's a dud? Not necessarily. But it should serve as a caution for you.

Tough questions to ask yourself ...

Have you done the Overture search? Does it show that there's enough of a demand for your topic? If not, are you willing to forge ahead anyway, knowing that there's a risk?

How well does your Web site sell?

OK, let's assume that stranger marketing will work for you, and you know that there's enough of a demand for your topic. And let's assume that your search engine marketing campaign will be a roaring success and will bring thousands of new leads to your Web site.

But ... *What happens when they reach your site?*

Is your site good enough to convert them from a mere visitor into a committed customer? In other words, how good are you at *selling*?

Step into their shoes

If you're smart (and brave!), try this little experiment ...

Pretend you're a searcher who's interested in your topic area, and stumbles across your site from a search engine search.

What's my first impression? Does it load quickly? Does it look professional? Is it immediately obvious that it's got what I'm looking for? Does it talk about me and my problems, not the site owner and their products and services? Is it obvious what I should click next?

Then click through to a relevant product/service page and keep asking questions ... Does this talk about the benefits to me? Is there enough information for me to make a decision? Why is this better than what else is out there in the market? How do I know their claims are true? Why should I take action *now* rather than waiting?

Then assume you've decided to go ahead and take action ... What's the next step? Is it immediately obvious? If I have questions, how easy is it to contact them? Does the shopping cart / enquiry form / e-mail link / phone number work?

OK, so how did you go? Would *you* buy from yourself? This little experiment will help you discover the most obvious weaknesses on your site. Fix them *before* you even consider anything to do with search engine marketing.

The three key questions

If you're not sure where to start when improving your Web site, this next section will help.

When people visit your Web site, they're asking three questions in their mind – and you've got to answer all three questions. If you miss any of them, chances are that you won't get the sale.

These are the questions:

- "Why this?"
- "Why you?"
- "Why now?"

Why this?

The question "Why this?" is really asking, "What's it going to do for *me*?" Focus on the benefits of your products and services, not just their features. Instead of telling your potential clients what your product can do (features), tell them what it can do *for them* (benefits). In other words, describe the product in terms of the result it offers rather than the product itself.

Why you?

The second question "Why you?" means, "Why should I buy this from your Web site? Are you credible and trustworthy?"

For example, if you provide sales training, visitors will ask, "Why should I buy from you instead of buying from Zig Ziglar or Brian Tracey?" It's a natural question, since they are among the world's leading experts on the subject.

You have to answer that question – and you *can*. It may be that you're based in Australia, or you work in sales training for financial planners, or because you provide a unique level of service that others don't. There are a number of answers to the question, but you must make sure that you *do* provide these answers.

Why now?

The last question you have to answer is, "Why now?" Your goal is to help people understand *why* they should act *now* rather than leaving your site to possibly return some day ... which normally won't happen.

Which search engine marketing method is the best?

OK, if you've been following along with me and you've got this far, then you would have the following things in place:

- You know that you're marketing to strangers, and you're confident that you know how to do so.
- You know that there's a demand for your topic.
- You know that your Web site does a good job of converting site visitors into customers.

Now (finally!) let's look at search engine marketing itself ...

Broadly, search engines like Google and Yahoo have two types of listings: Free listings and paid listings.

For example, when you search Google, you see the free results on the left, and the paid advertisements on the right.



Which is better? Free listings, right? Not so fast, kiddo! The correct answer is ... it depends.

Free listings have the obvious advantage that they are, well ... free! But here are some reasons for favouring the paid advertisements:

- Google puts the ads in the most commonly clicked area, which is on the right hand side of the page.
- Many customers know that ads are paid listings, so if they click an ad, you know they are a motivated and qualified customer.
- You control the exact wording of your ads. It's much harder to control the exact wording of a free listing.

- You decide exactly what page people will see when they click an ad (It's almost always not the home page).
- Your ads appear immediately on Google, whereas free listings can take weeks or months to appear.
- Google provides tools to measure the effectiveness of your advertising campaigns.
- It's easy to get listed near the top of the results (provided you're willing to pay for it).
- If you've got a competitive topic, it's almost impossible to get top position with free listings unless you pay consulting fees to an Internet marketing company anyway.

Most serious Internet marketers don't rely solely on either free or paid listings; they do both (along with a variety of other marketing methods). For you, if you'd like to get traffic *fast*, the best option is to pay for it.

The good news is that paid advertising in Google is surprisingly cost-effective, even for small businesses. You can get started for as little as 10 cents per click. Even if you run some unsuccessful advertising campaigns for a few weeks, it's worth "burning" some money just to experiment with various marketing techniques.

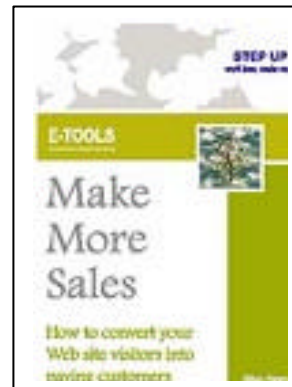
How do you get started?

I hope that I've given you enough information now to help you make a decision about (a) whether search engine marketing is right for you, and (b) if so, how to make it work.

Improving your Web site

If you've identified some weaknesses in your Web site, *please* fix them before launching *any* search engine campaign. If you can't convert your visitors into customers, all your marketing efforts will be a waste of time.

For more about improving your Web site, listen to the CD program ***Make More Sales***, available from www.GihanPerera.com/make-more-sales.

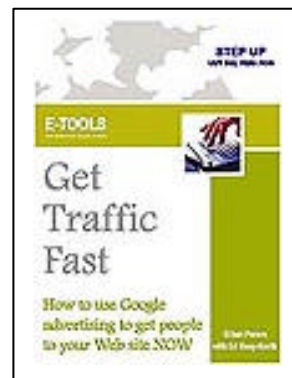


Even if you've decided that search engine marketing is *not* right for you right now, it's still worth improving your Web site conversion rate, because it will improve your other marketing efforts.

Paid listings

If you've decided to use Google advertising for your search engine marketing, listen to the two CDs and read the book ***Get Traffic Fast***, available from www.GihanPerera.com/get-traffic-fast. In this program, I interview Ed Keay-Smith, Australia's leading expert on Google advertising, about how to get started with a Google advertising campaign.

If you decide to take this further, I also recommend the e-book ***The Definitive Guide to Google AdWords***, by Perry Marshall (the *world's* leading expert on Google advertising), available from www.GihanToldMe.com.



Free listings

For more about promoting your Web site yourself in the free listings in Google, get **Get Free Traffic**, a set of on-line video tutorials about what to do on your Web site to get a higher ranking in search engines.

Be aware that this is the most technical of the products I've recommended here, because it does require some knowledge of how Web pages work.



Be prepared to put in some work

Whatever method you choose for search engine marketing, please understand that it does take some time and effort to make it work effectively. Some Internet marketers make out that you can easily run an Internet business on auto-pilot. And the fact is, some of them *do* run their businesses that way. But they didn't *start* that way. When you start your business, if you're serious about making it work on-line, there's a *lot* of work involved.

I hope you've learned something from this special report. But more importantly, I'd like it to spur you into action – because, of course, what matters is not knowledge itself, but **applied knowledge**. If you read this report and do nothing, that's just as bad as not reading it at all. In fact, it's **worse**, because you've wasted your time!

So please **take action**, and start **now**.

If you'd like to know more about what else we do, feel free to visit our Web site at www.firststep.com.au and get in touch with me.

Good luck with your marketing!

Gihan Perera